

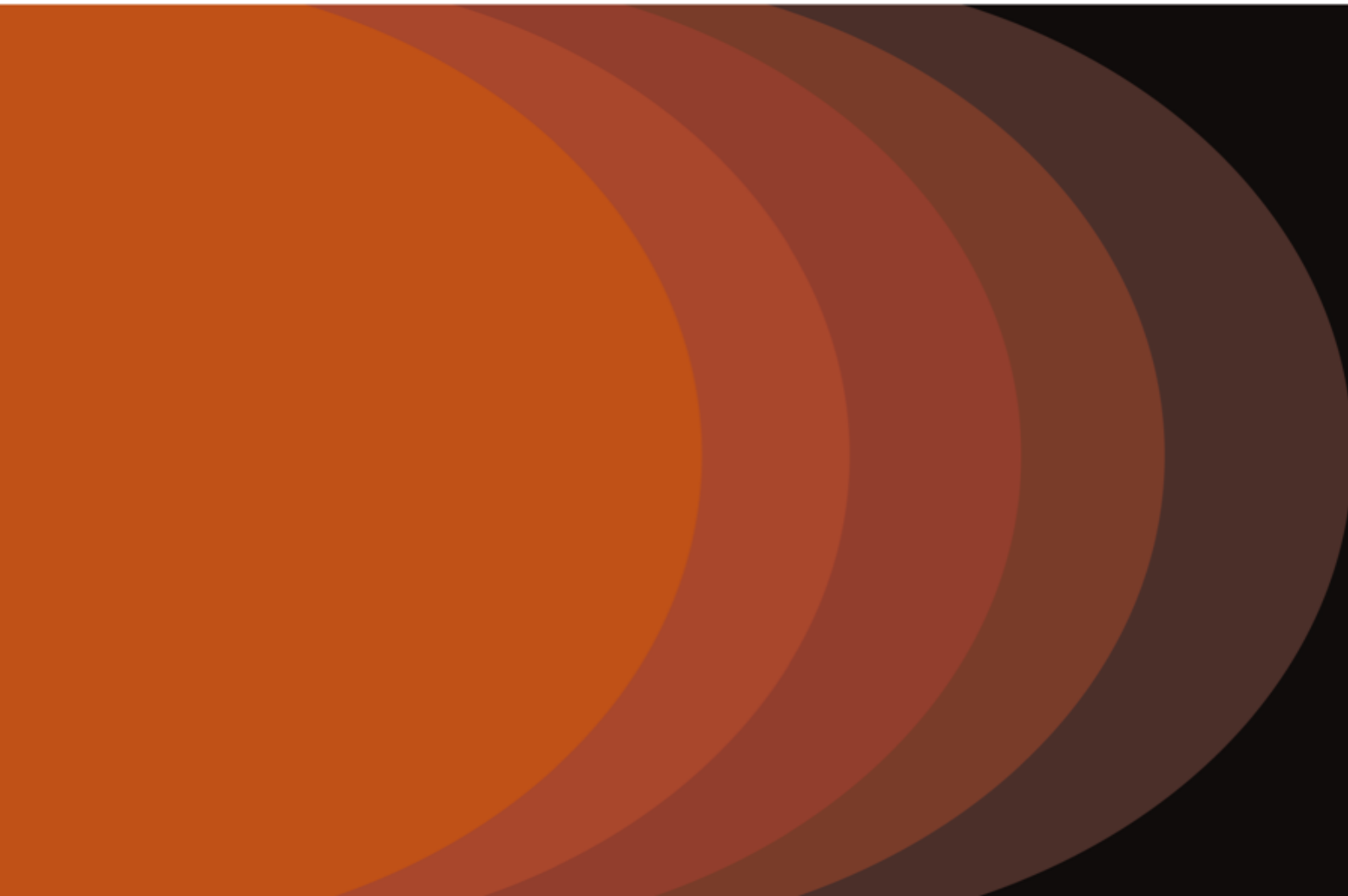


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

East Sussex

HM Inspectorate of Probation, September 2024



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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated East Sussex YJS across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Overall, East Sussex YJS was rated as 'Good'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Requires improvement'.

Partnership working that provides tangible, individualised services for children with different lived experiences is a notable strength. Activity to tackle disproportionality is clear at both a strategic and operational level, and action plans are leading to better outcomes for children with complex needs. For example, the new 'girl code' is an effective approach to working with girls, and there are good arrangements to support children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or exploring their sexual orientation. The Seeds of Hope project is an exciting innovation that is intended to be inclusive and available to all children.

Leaders and partners have worked positively to build a clear vision and carve out a road map to help children live their best lives and thrive. The Chief Officers Group (COG) management board is led well by a dedicated chair, who provides robust leadership, drills into detail, has a sharp mind, and is progressive in her thinking. There are effective relationships in place, leading to positive outcomes for children. Partners take their responsibilities seriously and work collectively to overcome any structural barriers experienced by children.

YJS staff are highly motivated and focused on helping each child to thrive. They are led well by an experienced, passionate and forward-thinking strategic lead for specialist adolescent services. Senior leaders, managers, stakeholders and operational staff across the partnership seek feedback from children and their parents and carers, and actively use it to improve service delivery. The partnership has access to a wide range of reports and management information about the profile of children, covering first-time entrants, the use of out-of-court disposals and understanding children's reoffending. This is helping the service to direct its resources towards identified need.

However, the quality of work specifically linked to planning for children's safety and wellbeing and the potential to cause harm to others is variable. This needs to improve. Our inspection found that, across court and out-of-court work, not all staff consistently understood and followed the systems and processes to keep children safe and prevent them from causing harm to others. Furthermore, better contingency planning and more effective management oversight are needed.

The YJS partnership can rightly be satisfied with many aspects of its work and celebrate the effective way that it carries this out. However, it must also ensure that its work to protect children and others is consistent.

















Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

East Sussex Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started June 2024

Score 25/36

Overall rating	Good	
1. Organisational delivery		
1.1 Governance and leadership	Good	
1.2 Staff	Good	
1.3 Partnerships and services	Outstanding	
1.4 Information and facilities	Outstanding	
2. Court disposals		
2.1 Assessment	Good	
2.2 Planning	Inadequate	
2.3 Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
2.4 Reviewing	Outstanding	
3. Out-of-court disposals		
3.1 Assessment	Requires improvement	
3.2 Planning	Requires improvement	
3.3 Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Good	
4. Resettlement¹		
4.1 Resettlement policy and provision	Requires improvement	

¹ The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YJS rating.

Recommendations

As a result of our inspection findings, we have made four recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the quality of youth justice services in East Sussex. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth justice services, and better protect the public.

The East Sussex Youth Justice Service should:

1. improve the quality of assessment and planning work to keep children safe and manage the risk of harm they present to others
2. ensure that management oversight is consistently effective in reviewing Asset Plus activity, so that practitioners are clear about what they need to improve
3. ensure that all children have robust contingency plans in place that address their safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others.

The East Sussex Police should:

4. review the police YJS referral form so that it pays more explicit attention to diversity and trauma.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in East Sussex YJS over a period of a week, beginning on 10 June 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between Monday 12 June 2023 and Friday 05 April 2024; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between Monday 12 June 2023 and Friday 05 April 2024 and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between Monday 12 June 2023 and Friday 05 April 2024. We also conducted 37 interviews with case managers/managers.

East Sussex is a county of contrasts: coastal and rural; large towns and small villages; natural beauty and significant deprivation. When compared to other parts of the south-east it is defined by its differences. Most of the population lives along the coastal strip, particularly the seaside towns of Hastings and Eastbourne, and in the market towns inland, with the rest of the county comprising relatively sparsely populated countryside. Pockets of significant deprivation affect demand for services. For example, geographically isolated Hastings is in the top 10 per cent most deprived local authority areas nationally. There are almost 112,000 children and young people aged 0 to 19 years in the county, and over 68,000 children in school. Of these, 18.6 per cent are in low-income families, compared with 16.2 of the county's statistical neighbours. Children from a minority ethnic background make up 15.4 per cent of the school population compared with 36 per cent in England (January 2023). Girls make up 21 per cent of the current caseload in the YJS, 11.5 per cent of children are from a minority ethnic background, 67 per cent have an assessed substance misuse need, and 37 per cent have emotional wellbeing needs.

The YJS is part of East Sussex County Council's children's services department, within the portfolio of the assistant director for early help and social care (under the head of specialist services). The post of strategic lead for specialist adolescent services was created in 2019 to support the integration of youth justice within service structures that can respond effectively to adolescent risk and behaviour. The strategic lead for specialist adolescent services also has the operational lead for child exploitation and manages a county-wide child exploitation team.

YJS practice follows the East Sussex 'Connected Practice' model, which prioritises the development of a trusting relationship between the worker and the child. The service is organised into three teams: two locality-based teams (east and west) and a county-wide prevention and diversion team. Case managers hold generic caseloads, including court, out of court, and resettlement cases. In the past 18 months data shows that the overall rate of reoffending has reduced among the cohort of children that East Sussex YJS has worked with. This ranges from 19 per cent at pre-court level through to 26 per cent for first tier referral orders. The Youth Justice Board measure of reoffending among the statutory cohort shows that the binary reoffending rate for the most recent cohort has fallen to 32.4 per cent. The YJS has developed effective, strengths-based interventions to support their needs.²

² All statistical information in this section has been provided by East Sussex YJS.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 12 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

1.1. Governance and leadership



The governance and leadership of the YJS supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Good

Strengths:

- The COG board has set the YJS's direction and strategy through meaningful engagement with the service and its partners and stakeholders. This has been articulated well in the YJS strategic plan (2023/2024).
- The YJS focuses explicitly on diversity and addressing disproportionate outcomes for children; for example, it has a comprehensive disproportionality and diversity action plan.
- The board includes partners at the appropriate level of seniority. Partners engage well at board meetings and are excellent ambassadors for YJS children. The board is led well by a passionate chair who holds members to account. Her leadership is robust: she drills into detail, has a sharp mind, and is progressive in her thinking, approachable and committed to supporting vulnerable children to live their best lives.
- The chair sends a 'key messages' communication to all staff at the end of each meeting. This keeps the partnership updated with critical current and emerging issues.
- Effective induction arrangements for board members ensure that partners understand their roles and responsibilities.
- The Collaboration Against Child Exploitation (CACE) group gives parents a voice. It brings them together with other parents to share their experiences, helping them to feel valued and less alone.
- The integration of the voices of children and their parents and carers into service development is impressive and has led to service improvements.
- Partnership arrangements support the delivery of effective work with children.
- Local strategic partnerships (community safety, reducing reoffending, serious youth violence) understand the needs of YJS children and direct resources appropriately to meet their needs. For example, they have secured additional resources to support substance misuse needs and health outcomes.
- The strategic lead for specialist adolescent services is well respected by the COG board and produces regular reports to help members understand the operational

performance and needs of the YJS. The operating model (Connected Practice) is understood and applied well across the partnership.

- There is an effective link and effective dialogue between the YJS leadership team and the COG board. This contributes to a 'support and challenge' organisational culture. The YJS leadership team promotes openness, constructive challenge and innovation.
- Business risks are understood well by leaders and there are appropriate controls in place to mitigate risk.

Areas for improvement:

- Not all YJS staff are fully aware of the board's work.
- The board could be more ethnically diverse.
- Board members need to be more forensically focussed on their assurance of the quality of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm work.
- The continued professional development of new managers needs to be enhanced so that their oversight of practice is more consistent.
- Attendance from some board members, such as the police, health and the Police and Crime Commissioner, has been inconsistent.

1.2. Staff



Staff within the YJS are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Good

Strengths:

- Staffing resources are used well, planned and suitably reviewed to respond to the changing demands and profile of the children being supervised by the YJS.
- The workloads of practitioners, business administrators and managers are reasonable, and managers take appropriate care to ensure that staff are not overstretched.
- Staff are sent an inspiring and motivational Friday email by a YJS manager. Staff in the partnership appreciate this.
- There is an effective strategy that ensures the quality of work is not compromised during planned and unplanned absences.
- Cases are suitably allocated to youth justice workers with suitable skills and qualifications. Co-working of cases offers additional accountability, learning and development.
- Staff receive regular supervision and speak positively about the quality of their pastoral and professional support.
- Staff are assisted well in their professional development and progression into other roles. Notably, the volunteer strategy includes the development and progression of volunteers.
- The training offer is comprehensive.
- All staff have access to in-service learning opportunities. In the past 12 months, staff have completed training in harmful sexual behaviour and AIM3; trauma-informed practice and case formulation; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in custody; child to parent violence and abuse; depression and self-harm; county lines; domestic abuse; gangs; allyship and race equality; anti-racism practice; Black history; safeguarding; substance misuse and safety wellbeing/risk management.
- The partnership collectively promotes and embraces a culture of learning and continuous improvement.
- Employment opportunities are advertised fairly.
- Staff are highly committed to delivering positive outcomes for children.
- Attention to staff safety and wellbeing is robust. This builds staff resilience.

Areas for improvement:

- Management oversight is not consistent across all areas of casework, particularly in relation to planning around safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others.
- Learning, development and training are not yet leading to effective and consistent casework to address safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others.

1.3. Partnerships and services



A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children.

Outstanding

Strengths:

- There is up-to-date scrutiny of children's desistance needs. The analysis considers safety and wellbeing and risk of harm factors, as well as diversity needs. This is informed by management information extracted from Asset Plus, audits, thematic reviews and quality assurance processes.
- There are well-established, embedded and effective links and relationships with a range of statutory partners, providers and agencies that provide desistance, safeguarding and public protection interventions.
- The YJS provides impressive access to mainstream and specialist services that help children to desist from offending and keep them and others safe. These include interventions by the SWIFT specialist family service, the Safeguarding Adolescents from Exploitation and Risk (SAFER) process, the substance misuse service, consultations with psychologists, consultant child psychiatry, Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (FCAMHS), I-ROC (emotional wellbeing), the liaison and diversion service, the sexual health team, the connected families team, the Brightpath project, the youth employability service, the child discovery exploitation team, CACE, REBOOT (the referral route through Sussex Police to the YJS prevention and diversion team), youth work/clubs, mentoring, and Aspens (autism support). Of particular note is the habitual knife carrier programme, links with Allsorts (support for LGBT+ children and their families) and the innovative Seeds of Hope project.
- The YJS has effective connections with local sentencers, and this ensures that courts are aware of the services available to support sentencing.
- All partners take a child-first, trauma-informed approach to service delivery. They have a strong commitment to helping children transition from a pro-offending to a pro-social identity.
- Education workers are proactive in supporting children's education, training and employment (ETE) needs, both before and after children turn 16 years old.
- The YJS has recently secured a speech and language therapist resource as a result of the partnership's persistence. Before this, the alternative provision available was strong and children were receiving the appropriate level of support.
- The quality of delivery and implementation of all aspects of casework was sufficient in a large majority of inspected cases.

1.4. Information and facilities



Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children.

Outstanding

Strengths:

- The YJS has a collection of policies, procedures and guidance in place that enable staff to carry out their responsibilities. All staff who responded to the HMI Probation staff survey (18/18) reported that they understood 'quite well, or very well' the policies and procedures that applied to their roles.
- Policies are regularly reviewed operationally, and changes communicated well within the partnership. Action planning to address disproportionality is robust, with clear milestones for measuring success.
- Learning is facilitated through self-evaluation, scrutiny by independent organisations and applying the findings from reviews. This leads to innovation (such as the Seeds of Hope project) and changes in practice.
- Information-sharing, service level agreements, memoranda of understanding and governance arrangements are robust.
- Services for children are provided in welcoming, safe and accessible places.
- ICT access works well, enabling staff to carry out planning, service delivery and reviewing. Staff can work effectively both from the office and remotely.
- There are a range of quality-assurance processes, which include random and scheduled auditing, deep dives and thematic activity.
- There are effective processes in place to ensure that the YJS learns from things that go wrong. These include critical learning reviews and audits. Learning is disseminated well across the partnership.
- Views of children and their parent/carers are sought formally, at key stages of the supervisory process, on completion of interventions and at the COG board. The participation strategy is a robust document.

Areas for improvement:

- Despite a clear audit framework, quality assurance of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm work needs to be more consistent across some aspects of casework.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

East Sussex YJS has an effective approach to participation, which it uses to collect the views of children and their parents or carers. This is articulated well in its 2024 participation strategy. There is evidence that it listens to children and parents/carers at various stages of the supervisory process and makes changes in response to feedback. The YJS and its partners are keen to help children develop confidence in contributing to improvements. For example, it displays their feedback in offices. The YJS has improved engagement by holding listening events, getting direct feedback about the quality of services received, and taking opportunities to adjust resources to make them more child friendly. This has produced an environment that champions the voices of children and their parents or carers.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to gain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the 23 children who consented, and 11 replied. We also spoke to six children and held a focus group with a group of parents and carers (CACE). Almost respondents to our text survey gave the YJS's work a score of nine or 10 out of 10. One child wrote:

“My worker helped me with my school, my friends, my family. They were nice, down to earth and just fantastic. Really kind, helped me with everything and made me stop carrying knives – now I don't carry a knife when I go out”.

In our telephone and face-to-face interviews, six out of the six children who responded reported that they understood what the YJS is trying to achieve. When asked if they thought the staff had the right skills, all six responded 'yes'. One child said of her YJS officer:

Comments from parent and carers included:

“They go the extra mile to help introduce extra agencies and people who can join and add something to our struggle.”

“Brilliant support from the service.”

“My son is a much better person since working with them.”

When asked 'what do you most like about the YJS', one child replied:

“Having someone to talk to that isn't family or a partner.”

Some of the other feedback from children included:

“We would normally go out in the car and go for a walk. This was helpful because I don't really like people and I get distracted easily. I felt safe during contacts with my worker.”

“They (YJS) have given me a laptop, but I must keep it here. I have also been given two phones previously. I have meetings every weekday and I am given a timetable. They mix up what I am doing so it does not get boring.”

“They (YJS) have helped me access school, no one else was able to help me with this. I have been going to an online school.”

Diversity

- The COG takes a deliberate approach to meeting the diverse needs of YJS children and leads from the front. There is a strong partnership responsibility focusing on disproportionality and services delivered. The YJS cross-references youth justice disproportionality issues with other relevant outcomes for children, such as school exclusion, experience of exploitation and the lived experience of discrimination and its impact on children's identity. Disproportionality is covered extensively in the Youth Justice Plan and Service Development Plan 2023-2024. This is supported by a Disproportionality Strategy to strengthen the YJS's drive to improve services for children from different lived and cultural backgrounds. The YJS is represented strategically and operationally within the East Sussex County Council equality and diversity forums and has played an active role in a race equality pilot. The practice manager who leads on diversity attends the wider council race equality staff group. The diversity working group also highlights and shares resources aimed at challenging discrimination. These can be either external, for example 'Show Racism the Red Card', or internal council procedures, such as support for staff who experience racism when working with families.
- Services are personalised and this was evidenced in the casework that inspectors reviewed. Inspectors found some excellent examples of where children's learning needs (such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder and neurodiversity) had been managed sensitively and effectively. Notably, the work with children who had a dual diagnosis was impressive. Staff are confident in having conversations with children about their lived experiences. Their understanding, awareness and confidence in dealing with diversity issues is noteworthy. Where possible, practitioners are encouraged to offer children from minority ethnic backgrounds the opportunity to speak with a member of staff from a minority ethnic background if the child feels that they would be more comfortable talking about their experiences of discrimination with someone who has had similar experiences. Not only is the YJS committed to addressing diversity and disproportionate outcomes for children, but there is also evidence that it tackles structural barriers. Children can access a range of mentors and LGBT+ children can get support through the Allsorts youth project. Staff who identify a diversity need have their needs met well. For staff who need reasonable adjustments (such as adapted furniture or software on laptops), these are provided in a timely way.
- Inspectors found several examples where there were effective arrangements to support children with their personal circumstances and diversity needs. In December 2022, the YJS produced a service user feedback report that focused on the experience of children from minority ethnic backgrounds in the YJS and the wider criminal justice system. The information gathered helped the service to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement. The YJS is currently piloting a programme to help improve its relationships with children and parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. The Coffee with a Copper project is a joint venture between the YJS and Sussex police and will focus on encouraging and facilitating informal conversations between minority ethnic children and police officers.
- Management information is strong and attention to broader protected characteristics is developing well.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 13 community sentences managed by the YJS.

2.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Good

Our rating³ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	62%
how to keep the child safe?	77%
how to keep other people safe?	69%

Overall, assessment work to support children to not reoffend requires further development. Practitioners did not consistently explore in detail all the reasons contributing to a child's offending. They did not take enough account of historical and current information. Youth justice practitioners understood diversity needs well. We found that they had generally made good use of information held by partner agencies in their assessments. Additionally, they sought to understand the child's level of maturity and level of motivation in most of the inspected cases. Assessment mostly focused on the child's strengths. In most cases, practitioners considered the needs of victims, where they had identified these, at the start of the assessment process. They also consistently welcomed and included the voices of children and their parents and carers. This informed their understanding of the causes of the child's offending behaviour.

Practitioners sought to identify any risks to the child's safety and wellbeing in most cases. They appropriately gathered and included relevant information from other agencies and largely used it well to better understand the risks to the child's safety.

Assessments to identify all relevant factors linked to keeping other people safe were variable. We found that practitioners had not effectively identified all the individuals who were potentially at risk from the child, as well as the nature of that risk, in all cases where this was relevant. Information held by other agencies about children's previous and current behaviours was mostly used well. This included information on previous use of violence in the home, carrying weapons, broader anti-social behaviours, police arrests, lifestyle, gang affiliation and peer associations. Practitioners needed to pay more attention to the impact of potential controls and interventions to mitigate risk of harm to others.

³ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

2.2. Planning



Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Inadequate

Our rating⁴ for planning is based on the following key questions:

Does planning focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	92%
keeping the child safe?	46%
keeping other people safe?	46%

Planning to address desistance was individualised and completed jointly with children. In every case, planning was proportionate to the disposal and targets agreed were achievable within the timeframes in almost every case. Plans were aligned with those completed by other agencies to prevent repetition and help the child and their family to understand the roles of each service. There was a suitable balance of attention to both strengths and areas of concern, and practitioners explored the child's motivation and maturity well. In some cases, practitioners had helped the child to access mainstream services, such as working with the Allsorts youth project (mentoring), joining a gym and accessing local youth provision in the community. Planning to meet the child's diversity needs could have been stronger in some cases. Planning activity consistently took the child's views into account, and those of their parents/carers. This supported effective engagement.

Planning to address children's safety and wellbeing needs to improve. Where required, it was not always evident that practitioners had liaised well with other agencies. There was insufficient evidence that roles of different professionals were consistently coordinated in planning activity and some planning lacked specificity and cohesion in how a child's safety and wellbeing would be supported, by whom, and when. Inspectors found that practitioners' analysis of the child's lived experiences, as well as ETE and health needs, including any history of emotional wellbeing, was mostly completed well. However, contingency planning was inconsistent.

Planning to keep other people safe was variable and requires further attention. Practitioners' understanding of the specific concerns of actual victims and needs of potential victims was weak. In too many of the inspected cases, practitioners did not seek information from public protection partners. Additionally, where relevant, planning did not set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people in five out of the 11 cases inspected. Again, contingency arrangements were poor. Practitioners made appropriate use of the risk management panel and/or taking enforcement action as the primary courses of action. Broader and more comprehensive arrangements were needed to support potential changes in circumstances.

⁴ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

2.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

Outstanding

Our rating⁵ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

Does the implementation and delivery of services:	% 'Yes'
effectively support the child's desistance?	100%
effectively support the safety of the child?	100%
effectively support the safety of other people?	85%

Practitioners are confident in developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with children and families that lead to positive outcomes. Children accessed a number of services that addressed areas of need and concern, including pro-offending identities, education, substance misuse, propensity for violence in the home, and emotional wellbeing. They were also signposted to various opportunities to build on their strengths, and were encouraged to access mainstream services, including positive activities in the community and mentoring. In every inspected case, sequencing of interventions and the delivery of services were proportionate and achievable within the timescales. Accounting for the diversity needs of children was excellent. In one case, the practitioner showed considerable resilience in supporting a child with complex learning needs. They accessed funding to secure some boxing sessions, and this helped to improve the child's confidence and emotional wellbeing.

Practitioners delivered high-quality and effective work to keep children safe in every case reviewed by inspectors. They delivered planned work, which focused on keeping the child safe. This included the risks of carrying weapons, exploitation, experience of prejudice, and emotional regulation. Partnership working and transition work between agencies were robust. In one case, the practitioner used the SAFER multi-agency meetings to work collaboratively to monitor the child's risk of exploitation. They also attended contextualised safeguarding meetings to ensure they maintained a focus on the child and their peers who were also at risk. The practitioner was proactive in their relationship with the social worker, and this contributed to several joint meetings and effective information-sharing.

Work to keep other people safe was done well overall, but not enough services were delivered in all the inspected cases. Where relevant, practitioners had not consistently paid sufficient attention to keeping actual and potential victims safe. The involvement of public protection partners was strong. Intelligence from the police was used well and practitioners accessed the appropriate risk, safety and wellbeing panel arrangements.

⁵ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Outstanding

Our rating⁶ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	85%
keeping the child safe?	92%
keeping other people safe?	85%

The reviewing of work to assess the impact of interventions on reducing reoffending is a strength. Practitioners complete formal, informal and dynamic reviews as the child's personal circumstances change. They consider the child's strengths; their diversity needs and analyse personal and familial circumstances.

Practitioners mostly reviewed children's motivation and considered any barriers that they identified whether individual or structural. Discussions with children and their parents and carers during reviewing (and direct feedback from parents/carers to inspectors) were evidenced well in almost all the inspected cases. This helped practitioners to gain a fuller understanding of the children's broader day-to-day lived experiences and empowered parents and carers to become actively involved in their children's supervision.

Reviewing activity to keep children safe was done very well in the cases inspected. Where required, reviews responded appropriately to changes linked to safety and wellbeing, in particular new intelligence from the police, non-compliance with curfew requirements and domestic abuse in the home. Practitioners gathered information from other agencies that were involved, and adjusted plans to support ongoing work. This methodical approach was helping children to recognise their changing vulnerabilities. Additionally, this awareness was helping children to build on the progress they were making.

Practitioners did not always respond effectively to changes in factors related to risk of harm. This meant that they sometimes failed to amend plans to protect others from harm when required. When necessary, information from other agencies involved with the child was used well. Written reviews were completed in a timely manner in all the inspected cases, as required. This ensured that other practitioners involved in work to manage risk of harm had access to up-to-date information. Of note was the timely attention that practitioners gave to securing alternative accommodation in instances where there had been violence in the home.

⁶ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 20 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of four youth conditional cautions, four youth cautions and 12 community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 17 cases.

3.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Requires improvement

Our rating⁷ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	90%
how to keep the child safe?	60%
how to keep other people safe?	70%

In most of the inspected cases, the practitioner had sought to understand how much responsibility the child took for their behaviour, their attitude towards their offending and their explanation for becoming involved in offending. This approach allowed practitioners to search deeper into the child's identity and how adverse lived experiences may have contributed to their offending. Practitioners analysed diversity issues very well, and inspectors found a robust analysis of strengths and areas of concern. They examined the child's familial and social circumstances well, and understood the impact of early traumatic experiences on children's presenting behaviours. Assessments were well supported by multi-agency case discussions at the YJS out-of-court disposal panel and consultations from specialist service providers, for example substance misuse and education.

In most cases practitioners had accessed a wide range of information from other agencies to support their assessments of children's safety. In most of the cases reviewed, there was a clear written assessment of the child's safety and wellbeing. Practitioners recognised any issues around violence in the home, separation and the impact of poor educational experiences. However, the risks to others were not consistently understood and the reviews required more detail about the broad range of risks. Most practitioners used information from available sources correctly. Intelligence-gathering from the police was a strength. Information provided by the victim worker at the panel ensured that victims' needs were understood more fully. Furthermore, safety and wellbeing panels were used well to support assessments and suitable attention was paid to potential triggers that could lead to harm being caused to others.

⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

3.2. Planning



Planning is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Requires improvement

Our rating⁸ for planning is based on the following key questions:

Does planning focus on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	95%
keeping the child safe?	80%
keeping other people safe?	55%

Planning to address desistance took a child-first, trauma-informed and whole-family approach. In all of the inspected cases, planning was appropriate to the disposal imposed and targets agreed were realistic and achievable within the timeframes. The strengths in the partnership ensured that YJS plans were aligned with those completed by other agencies. There was a proportionate focus on strengths, protective factors and areas of concern, and practitioners considered the child's motivation and maturity well. In many cases, services had been identified to support the child's access to mainstream services, such as boxing sessions and anger management. Parents and carers were also signposted to services to support them. In almost all cases, the child's diversity needs had been considered well. For example, practitioners liaised with the education worker and the psychologist for advice on developing a plan that comprehensively met the child's desistance needs.

Planning to address children's safety and wellbeing was done well overall. However, when required, practitioners did not consistently liaise with other agencies to ensure that plans fitted together well, or fully understand the role of each service provider. The latter finding was reinforced by some practitioners reporting, in the staff survey, that they did not always know how to access services. Inspectors observed good partnership work with health (for example in managing anxiety) and education. Practitioners liaised with schools and carried out joint home visits. Contingency planning was too broad in far too many cases and not always linked to identified risks.

Planning to keep others safe was variable and needs to improve. Some practitioners did not sufficiently consider the needs of actual and potential victims. Too often, information obtained from public protection agencies was not used well to inform plans and keep others safe from harm. There were opportunities to introduce external controls, but this did not always happen. Contingency planning to keep others safe was weak. In this work not all risks were fully considered and there was no methodical approach to identifying broader risks to others, for example family members.

⁸ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

Outstanding

Our rating⁹ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

Does service delivery effectively support:	% 'Yes'
the child's desistance?	90%
the safety of the child?	80%
the safety of other people?	95%

The quality of services to help children to not commit further offences was impressive. We found examples where educational support, reparation projects and health interventions were provided, and these had encouraged the child to build a pro-social identity and desist from offending. Many of the letters of apology reviewed by inspectors were suitable and demonstrated empathy and good reflection from children. Practitioners had regular contact with children and their parents and carers, with high levels of engagement. We found strong advocacy from practitioners to actively support positive desistance outcomes.

When required, service delivery to keep children safe was mostly done well. However, responses from some partners were delayed and some practitioners did not follow up queries in a timely manner. On the other hand, the quality of work and liaison with the substance misuse workers, the psychologist and education workers was good. Practitioners within the partnership engaged well with schools to maximise children's attendance and attainment. Inspectors also found some innovative examples of children being provided with safe spaces to complete examinations outside of school, with oversight being arranged by an invigilator who had been sourced by the YJS. Collaboration with parents and carers was notable, as evidenced by the feedback given in a focus group that inspectors held with family members.

In two of inspected cases, not enough services were delivered to keep other people safe, when required. Overall, there was evidence of risk meetings taking place and information from these meetings leading to activity to keep others safe. Generally, practitioners paid sufficient attention to the needs of potential and actual victims. In one case, inspectors found that the practitioner had made excellent use of the SAFER panel. It was clear that the network had been monitoring the child's risk thoroughly. Work had also been supported by the child undertaking a knife crime awareness programme through the use of a VR headset.

⁹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



There is a high-quality, evidence-based out-of-court disposal service in place that promotes diversion and supports sustainable desistance.

Good

We also inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for out-of-court disposals, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. Our key findings were as follows:

Strengths:

- There is a clear protocol in place with East Sussex Police. This sets out a locally agreed out-of-court disposal policy that incorporates joint and defensible decision-making. The YJS has an out-of-court multi-agency disposal panel with the appropriate level of representation. This includes the police (including police early intervention team), YJS managers, who chair the meetings, a restorative justice/victim liaison practitioner, a substance misuse practitioner, a CAMHS worker and children's social care (early help services).
- The out-of-court policy (the YJS out of court panel – policy and procedures) is comprehensive. It effectively covers pre-panel, at-panel and post-panel information-gathering, eligibility criteria, enforcement, escalation arrangements, decision-making in cases where children have previous offending histories, liaison arrangements with partners and other agencies and diversion. Children who do not fully admit their offending are given access to a range of diversionary pathways.
- Outcome 22 is used well as a deferred prosecution measure to support diversion and prevention.
- Arrangements are in place to ensure that the voice of victims, children and their parents and carers are central to the decision-making process.
- Enforcement arrangements are clear and YJS practitioners can return to the panel when children are not engaging.
- The disposal panel has access to the same range of interventions that are available for post-court cases. These include harmful sexual behaviour consultations with CAMHS; parenting support; the habitual knife carriers programme; parenting support; police early help intervention; liaison and diversion; CAMHS In-reach; substance misuse (Connect); contextual safeguarding; education welfare, ETE workers, and mentoring.
- The YJS uses several comprehensive methods of reviewing its out-of-court disposal provision to ensure that the work is effective.

Areas for improvement:

- The additional scrutiny panel focusing on YJS children, which is about to be introduced, needs time to embed.
- The police YJS referral form needs to pay more explicit attention to diversity and trauma.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



There is a high-quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody.

Requires improvement

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. To illustrate that work, we inspected four cases managed by the YJS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- The 'Youth Justice Service Custody and Resettlement Policy' is supported by a comprehensive guidance document. Pathways such as suitable accommodation, health and ETE all feature well in the policy. The policy identifies the importance of the principles of constructive resettlement, including well-coordinated, personalised services with network partners. It explicitly sets out the need for timely communication and effective information exchange with partners, providers and other key stakeholders. The cases reviewed evidenced this being undertaken in practice. There is a comprehensive 'Release Preparation Meeting, Record and Plan' process to ensure a seamless transition of services once the child is released.
- An emphasis on developing a pro-social identity is evident, and this was demonstrated well in the cases reviewed. The YJS forensically reviews resettlement work.
- The YJS approach to resettlement ensures that the three domains of risk are discussed and managed appropriately. There are referrals to the risk, safety and wellbeing panels, including multi-agency public protection arrangements screening where necessary.
- The policy on resettlement is reviewed regularly and adjusted in line with changes to the service's operating model.
- There is evidence that victims' needs are identified in resettlement work.
- Practitioners seek to overcome structural barriers faced by children's resettlement needs.

Areas for improvement:

- More consistent attention should be given to resettlement work at the COG.
- The narrative from cases show that the 'Release Preparation Meeting, Record and Plan' is not always effectively drawn up or implemented.
- Information-sharing in regard to keeping people safe was effective in only two of the four cases reviewed.
- Arrangements for the ETE needs of children should be planned for before release so that children have suitable provision on release. There was insufficient planning for ETE in three out of four cases. All behaviours in custody should be included in pre-release assessments, so that there is an accurate understanding of the safety of the child and the other people.
- Staff need to have more access to specific resettlement training.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

- [inspection data, including methodology and contextual facts about the YJS](#)
- [a glossary of terms used in this report.](#)