



## **Children in custody 2023–24**

An analysis of 12–18-year-olds' perceptions of their experiences in secure training centres and young offender institutions

November 2024

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# Introduction

Since 2001 HM Inspectorate of Prisons has carried out a survey of all children living in young offender institutions (YOIs) and secure training centres (STCs) across England and Wales. In 2023–24 81% of children responded, providing a unique insight into their views on life in custody.

Their perceptions are stark; compared to the previous year more children felt unsafe and fewer said they were currently attending education. This reflects inspection reports that describe institutions dominated by violence and disorder and weak education provision at every YOI. Most sites were unable to break out of a vicious cycle of conflict leading to children being locked in their cells for long periods of time. This led to frustration and ultimately higher levels of violence when they were unlocked. In this unpredictable environment it is perhaps unsurprising that just 51% of children felt cared for by staff and only 31% would tell staff if they were being victimised by other children.

Just 52% of children thought their experiences of custody made them less likely to offend in the future. Custody should be an opportunity for children, many of whom have lived chaotic lives in the community, to make up for lost time by gaining qualifications and addressing the underlying causes of their offending. None of this is possible while a child is locked behind a cell door which is where most children spent the majority of every day.

This is the latest in a long line of reports highlighting the scale of the problems in this sector. Improvement after several years of decline will take time. Leaders in the youth custody service will need to focus on getting the basics right, prioritising a consistent and motivational approach to behaviour management and giving staff enough time and support to build effective relationships with children in their care.

**Charlie Taylor**

Chief Inspector of Prisons

November 2024

## Background

In 2023–24 children in custody were held in one of three settings: Oakhill secure training centre (STC), young offender institutions (YOIs) or secure children's homes (SCHs). Oakhill STC holds children aged between 12 and 18 years. YOIs hold children aged between 15 and 18 years old. SCHs can hold children aged between 10 and 17. As well as those held on youth justice grounds, SCHs can also house those detained for welfare reasons under Section 25 of the Children Act. Girls can be held in SCHs, Wetherby YOI or Oakhill STC.

This report draws from surveys of children and staff and inspections carried out by HMI Prisons in five YOIs and Oakhill STC in England and Wales in 2023–24, along with published statistics.

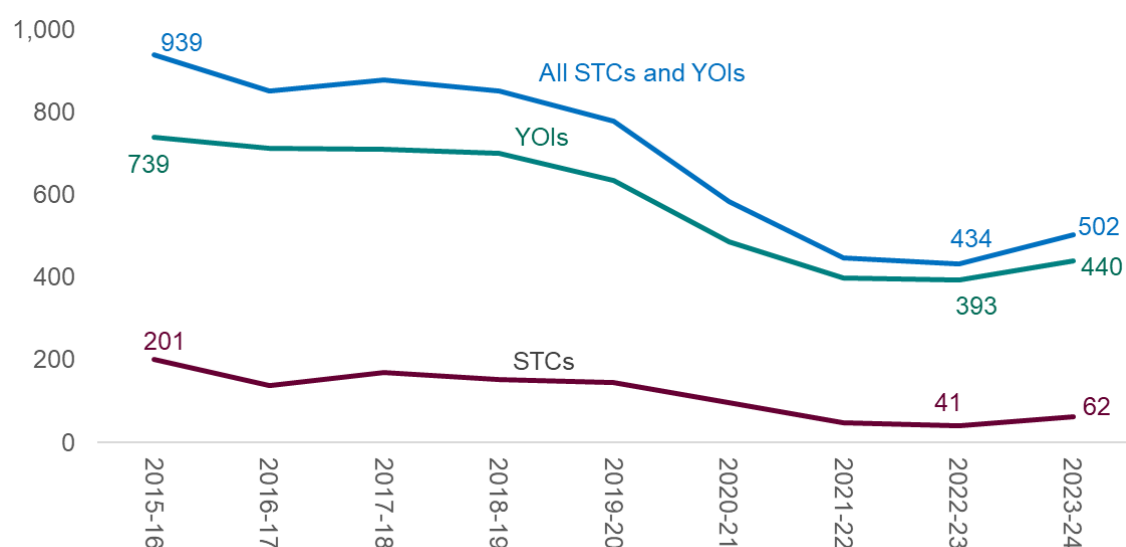
HMI Prisons has no remit to inspect SCHs; this statutory responsibility rests with Ofsted in England and, in Wales, with Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn. However, many of the Youth Custody Service-published statistics quoted in this report include children held in SCHs, who make up 13% of the children in custody.

The number of children held in STCs and YOIs has started to increase, although not to past levels. The average population of children and young people held in both types of establishment (which includes some who are over 18) was 502 in 2023–24, compared with 939 in 2015–16.

This meant that all sites were continuing to operate at well below capacity. The low population had the effect of improving staff-to-child ratios in all settings.

**Figure 1: 2023–24 showed the first rise in the average number of children and young people in youth custody since 2017–18**

England and Wales, includes 18-year-olds



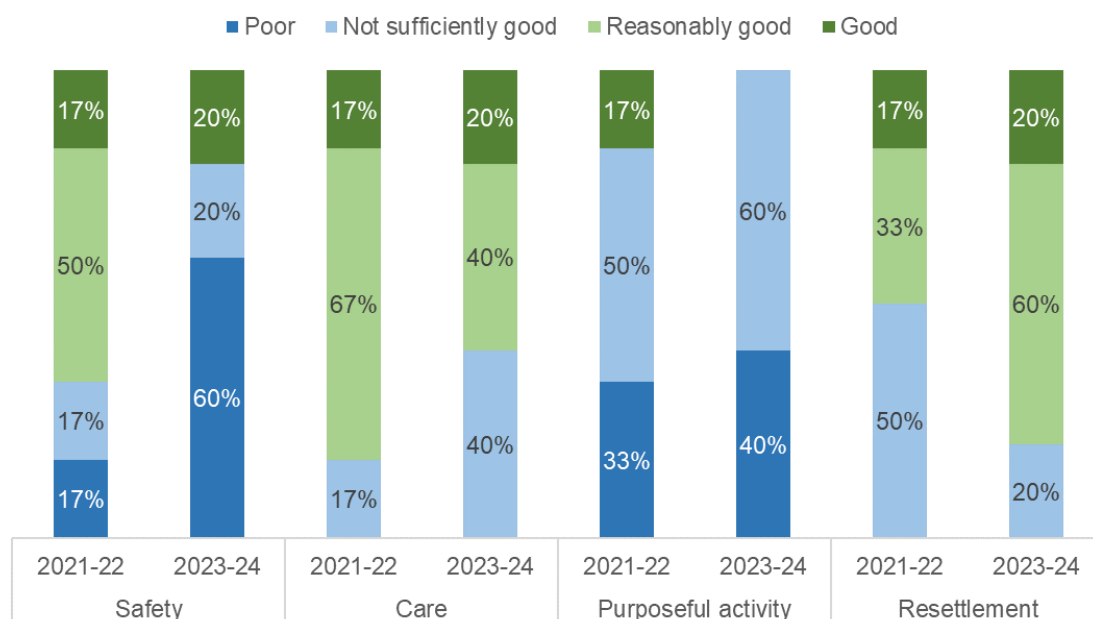
Source: Youth Custody Report, May 2024

## Overview of inspection findings

Outcomes for children across the YOI estate declined in 2023–24. Just one YOI, Parc, was judged to be ‘safe’ and no YOIs had good enough education provision for the children they held. While the decline in ‘care’ was not as marked and the sector was performing better in the test of ‘resettlement’, this was a concerning inspection year. Most institutions were characterised by high levels of violence and disorder with children spending most of their time locked up alone in their cells.

**Figure 2: Improvements in inspection scores for resettlement, but declines in all other healthy prison areas**

HMI Prisons’ inspections of YOIs in England and Wales in 2023–24 compared with 2021–22



Source: HMI Prisons’ inspection reports

Cookham Wood, in particular, was so concerning that we issued an Urgent Notification to the Secretary of State outlining a complete breakdown in behaviour management and a failure by leaders to maintain basic standards on residential units. In 2024 the Ministry of Justice announced the site would be rerolled to hold adult prisoners because:

*‘... it had become clear the further improvements needed cannot be delivered at the scale required in an acceptable time frame.’*

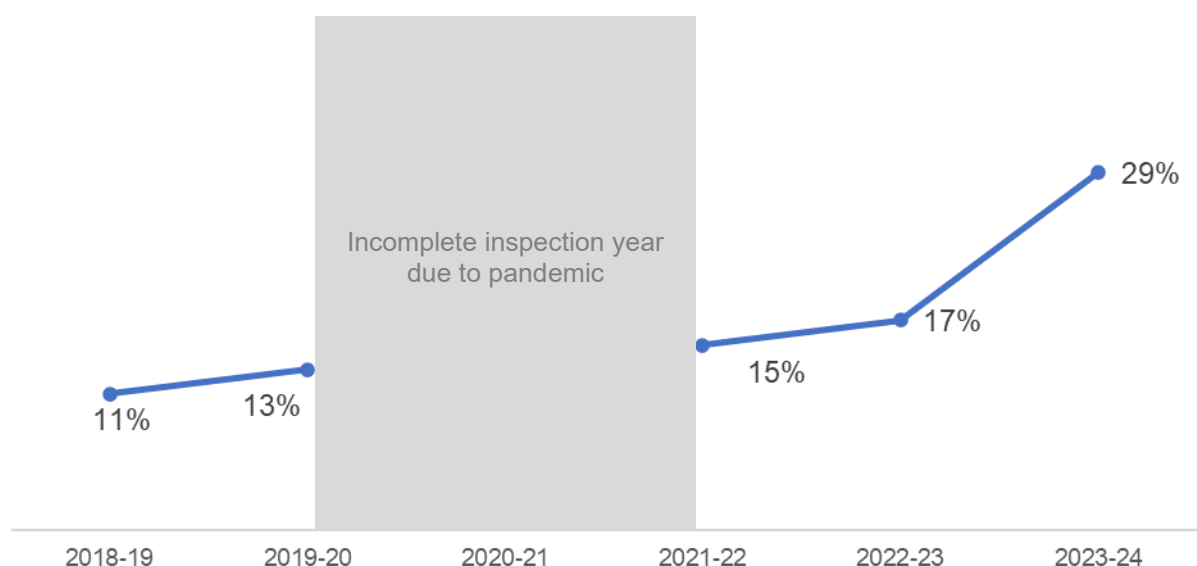
(See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-offenders-institution-to-be-repurposed>)

In the two smallest sites we inspect, there were some improvements at Oakhill STC, and outcomes at Parc remained good in three out of our four healthy prison tests. However, overall we remain concerned about the lack of meaningful progress in the YOIs in England.

## Section 1 Who are the children in custody?

- 1.1 Children in custody tend to be male, are more likely than children in the general population to be from ethnic groups other than white, and are more likely to have been in local authority care. A large proportion report that they have health problems and 9% report having children of their own. Of the children who responded to our survey, 40% had either not been convicted or were waiting to be sentenced.
- 1.2 The key difference in the population in 2023–24 was the number of 18-year-olds in children's establishments. The failure to plan adequately for predicted population increases in adult prisons led to the decision to delay the transfer of young adults to the adult estate. As a consequence, 18-year-olds made up 29% of those responding to our survey, compared to just 17% in 2022–23 and 11% five years ago. This has created additional pressure for institutions that do not have education or work provision for adults and were already struggling with high levels of violence and disorder.

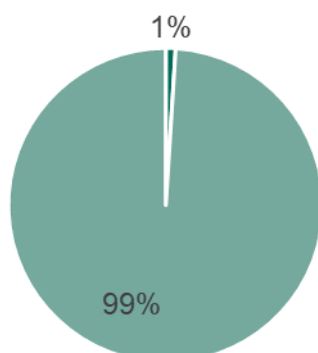
**Figure 2: There was a sharp rise in the proportion of children and young people in youth custody who were aged 18 or over in 2023–24**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales



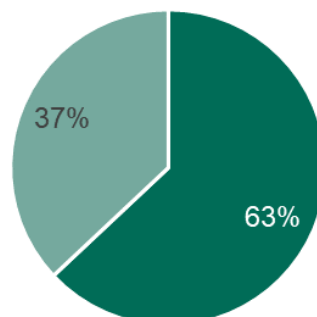
Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

1.3 Of the children we surveyed in STCs and YOIs in 2023–24:

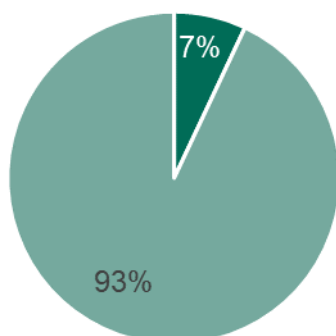
- 1% were girls.



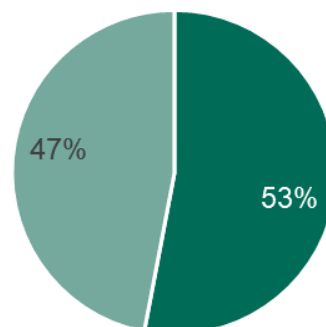
- 63% reported having been in local authority care.



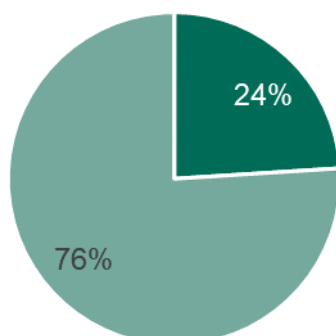
- 7% identified as being from a Traveller community.



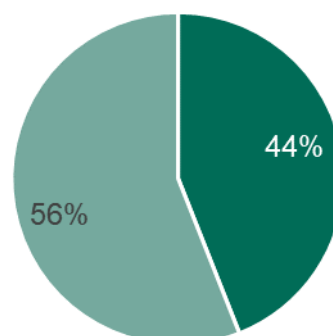
- 53% reported being from a minority ethnic group.



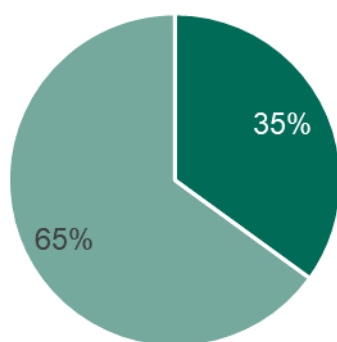
- 24% of the children reported being Muslim.



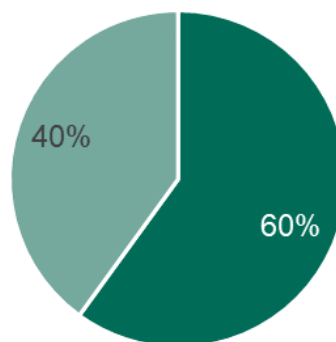
- 44% reported having health problems.



- 35% said they had a disability.



- 60% were sentenced.



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

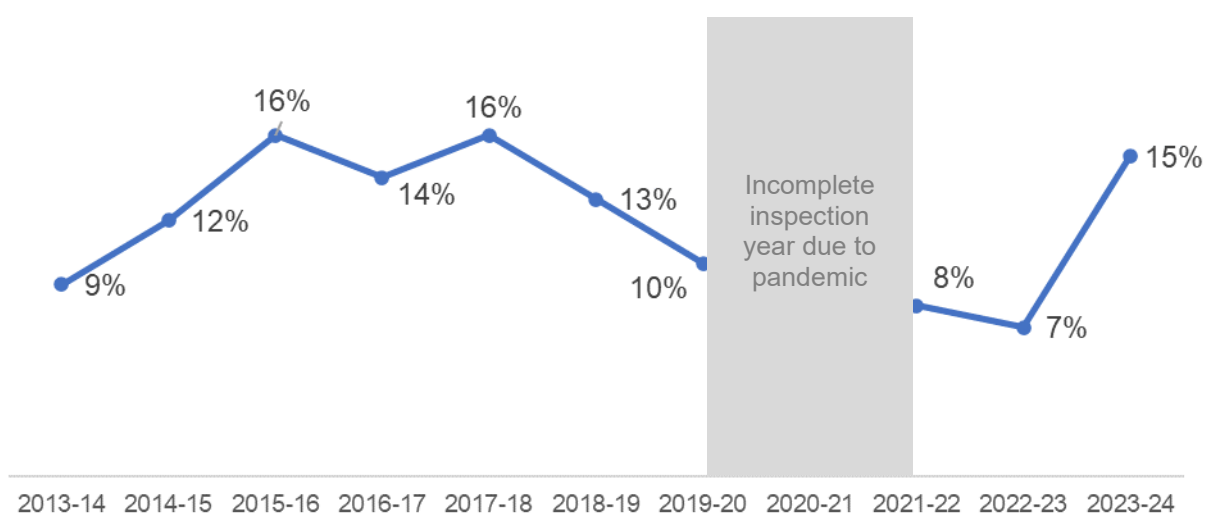


## Section 2 Children are less safe

- 2.1 At the time of our survey, 15% of children reported feeling unsafe. This compares to 7% last year and is the highest percentage we have seen since 2017–18.

**Figure 3: There was a sharp rise in the percentage of children who have felt unsafe in custody in 2023–24**

STCs and YOIs in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.2 This is consistent with our inspection findings for 2023–24, where only one of the six establishments, Parc in South Wales, was judged to be sufficiently safe and outcomes in three YOIs were assessed as poor, our lowest grade. Our inspection reports of establishments holding children described behaviour management systems that were overwhelmed by very high levels of violence. At all four English YOIs we found a combination of staffing shortfalls and high levels of staff who could not be deployed because they were sick, on temporary promotion or in training. This meant that leaders were unable to deliver the consistent approach that should underpin effective behaviour management. Incentives, such as more time out of cell in the evening or being able to eat together as a group, were rarely delivered and punishments for poor behaviour were often not implemented.

'Behaviour management systems were ineffective, incentives for good behaviour were not delivered, and there were very few consequences for poor behaviour, even when it was serious in nature. As a result, we saw poor behaviour going unchallenged.' **Werrington YOI**

- 2.3 In particular, we were concerned about the increasing levels of disorder, including children climbing and remaining at height and acts of concerted indiscipline, many caused by conflict with their peers and frustration over the long periods they spent locked in their cells. The high number of incidents further reduced the time children spent unlocked and able to attend education or other productive activities.

‘There had been a substantial rise in incidents of disorder over the past year to 320, an increase of more than 300% since the last inspection. The frequency of these incidents was higher than at any other establishment in England and Wales.’ **Feltham YOI**

- 2.4 This vicious cycle of regular violence and disorder reduced the time children could spend out of their cells and fuelled frustration and further disorder. This lay at the heart of the problems in the children’s estate.
- 2.5 In this volatile and violent environment it was unsurprising that the proportion of children who felt unsafe had increased to levels not seen since before the COVID-19 pandemic. There was clear evidence that this was also impacting on the morale of frontline operational staff. In our staff survey 51% reported that their morale was low or very low, compared with just 28% who said it was high or very high. Many comments from staff highlighted fears for their own safety.

‘Cookham Wood is a really volatile place, there are several weapons found near enough each day. Staff assaults happen often as well. The staff morale is so low and it makes it hard to engage with each other and the boys. It is not a safe place. Understandably it is a prison but we shouldn’t fear coming into work.’ **Cookham Wood YOI staff survey**

‘Many staff do not feel confident in challenging behaviour due to the threat of assault. Behaviour policies are inconsistently followed. It does not feel like a safe environment to work in.’ **Werrington YOI staff survey**

- 2.6 The key outlier was Parc, which we judged to be safe for children. Here 80% of frontline operational staff reported having high or very high morale and their comments were much more positive.
- 2.7 Perhaps surprisingly frontline operational staff also had negative perceptions regarding the praise they received or the challenging of poor behaviour: 49% of children reported that staff usually let them know if their behaviour was good while just 31% of frontline staff reported that senior managers always or often celebrated good work. Similarly, 64% of children reported that staff explained what they had done wrong while just 39% of frontline staff reported that senior managers challenged poor behaviour by staff. In this environment it is unsurprising that many YOIs were experiencing high levels of staff

sickness and that turnover of frontline staff was high at both Cookham Wood and Feltham A.

### **Girls' self-harm – a crisis in custody**

The current approach of placing girls in establishments designed to manage the risks and meet the needs of boys is not working. Poor planning and lack of a specific model of custody for girls which takes account of their specific needs has led to some poor outcomes for this group.

There are very few girls in custody: in March 2024 there were just 11 girls compared with 519 boys (see [Youth Custody Population Report - May-24.ods \(live.com\)](#)). Yet in 2023–24 the Youth Custody Service (YCS) recorded more self-harm incidents carried out by girls than boys (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-the-children-and-young-people-secure-estate-update-to-march-2024>).

Our inspections have highlighted that despite the best efforts of frontline staff the current provision in YOIs does not meet the needs of this group. At Wetherby we found a lack of flexibility in the daily routine meant that very vulnerable girls spent long periods locked up alone in their cells despite data showing this was where most harm was occurring.

In our staff survey frontline operational staff voiced their frustrations that Wetherby was ill-suited to holding girls.

- 'This establishment isn't fit for female young people to be placed at and shouldn't be used as a dumping ground for vulnerable young people.'
- 'There's not enough training on the female young prisoners, and they should not be in HMYOI Wetherby, as their needs are not catered to; they require a lot more support which many staff are unable to provide, and management do not have the answers.'

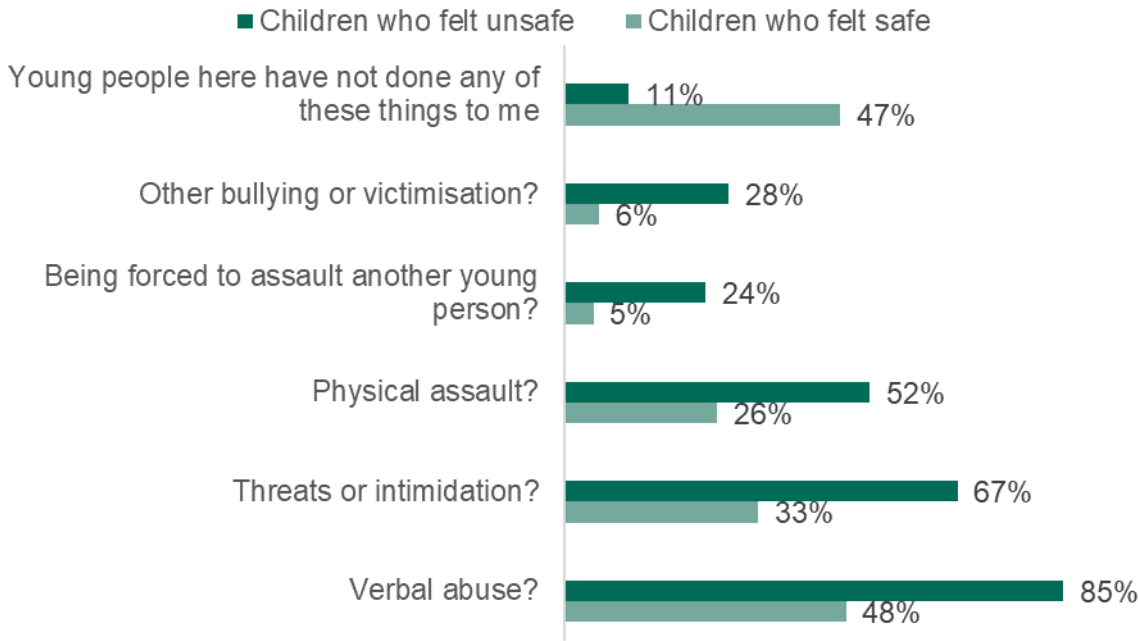
In the absence of other options staff were restraining girls very frequently, sometimes multiple times in a single night. Staff often removed possessions, including bedding and clothing, to try to stop girls from harming themselves. In this chaotic environment we were very concerned to find that all-male teams had been deployed at Wetherby to remove girls' clothes under restraint, which was clearly traumatic for the girls involved. While the frontline staff were doing their best in impossible circumstances, leaders should never have put them or the girls they were caring for in this position.

### **Far worse outcomes for those who felt unsafe**

- 2.8      Feeling unsafe affected many areas of children's lives. We compared outcomes for children in YOIs and STCs who said they had ever felt unsafe with those that did not. The findings are stark, with this group reporting bleak experiences in almost every part of our survey.

2.9 It is clear many of the children had good reason to be scared: 89% reported experiencing victimisation from other children while 74% said they had been victimised by staff; 85% said they had experienced verbal abuse from other children; around half (52%) had been physically assaulted by other children; and nearly a quarter (24%) reported being forced to assault other young people.

**Figure 4: Children who had felt unsafe were more likely to experience bullying or victimisation from other children**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24

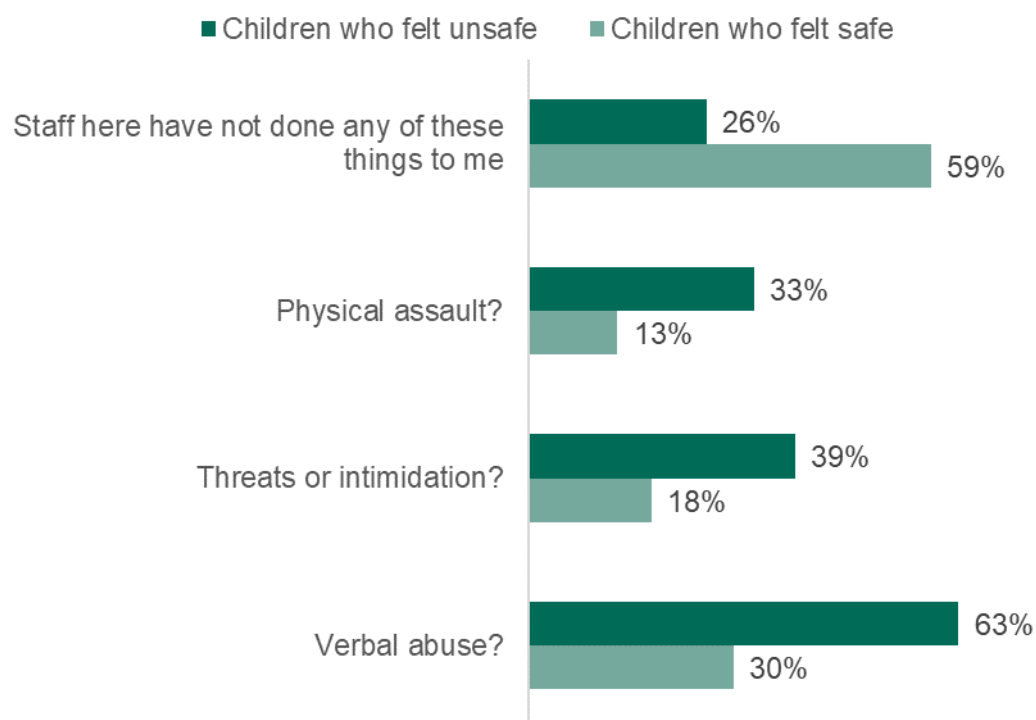


Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

2.10 It was concerning that 63% of this group reported experiencing verbal abuse by staff and a third (33%) said that staff had physically assaulted them.

**Figure 5: Children who had felt unsafe were more likely to experience bullying or victimisation from staff**

STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24

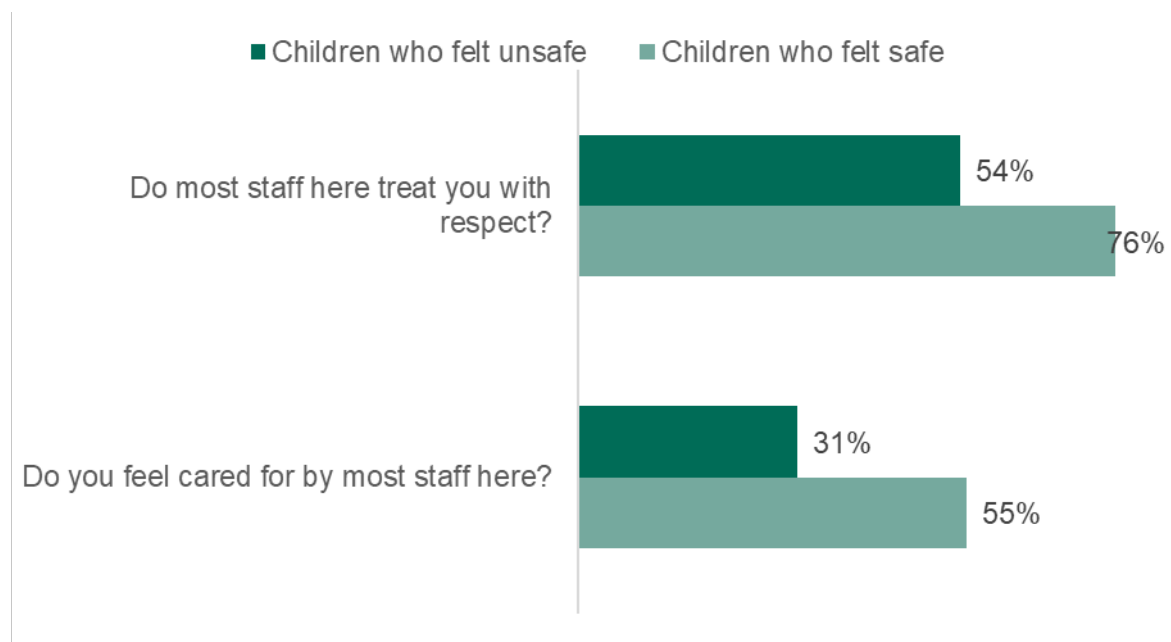


Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

## Support from staff

- 2.11 Children who felt unsafe should have received additional support, but their survey responses were particularly negative about staff. Just 31% of them felt cared for by staff and 54% reported that most staff treated them with respect.

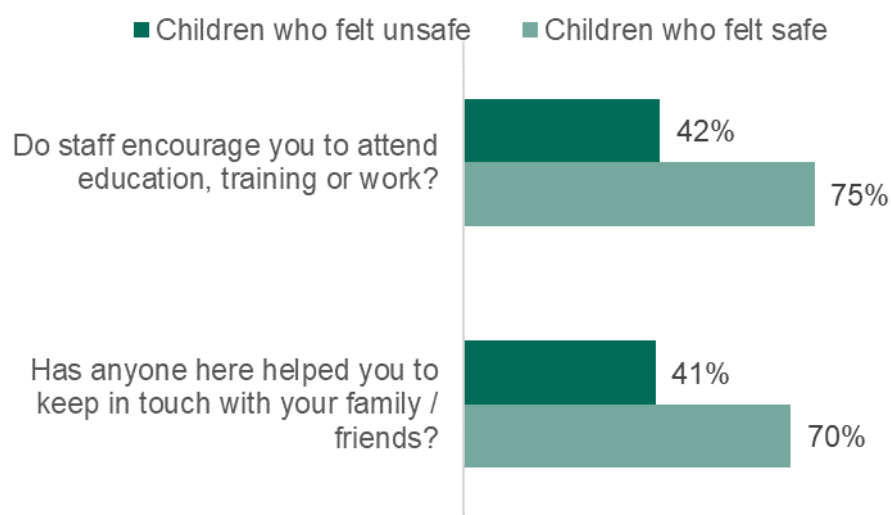
**Figure 6: Children who felt safe were more likely to feel respected and cared for by staff**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.12 Children who felt unsafe were less likely than those who felt safe to report that staff encouraged them to attend education, training or work activities or that anyone had helped them to keep in touch with family and friends.

**Figure 7: Children who felt safe were more likely to be encouraged to attend activities and keep in touch with loved ones**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24

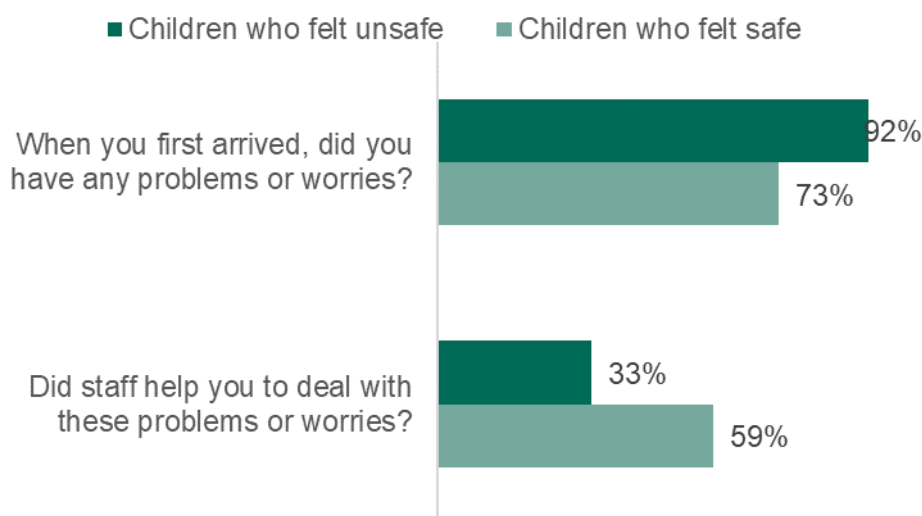


Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.13 They were less likely to report that staff had helped them to deal with problems when they first arrived at the YOI or STC, despite being more likely to have these problems.

**Figure 8: Children who felt safe were less likely to have problems when they first arrived in the establishment**

STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24



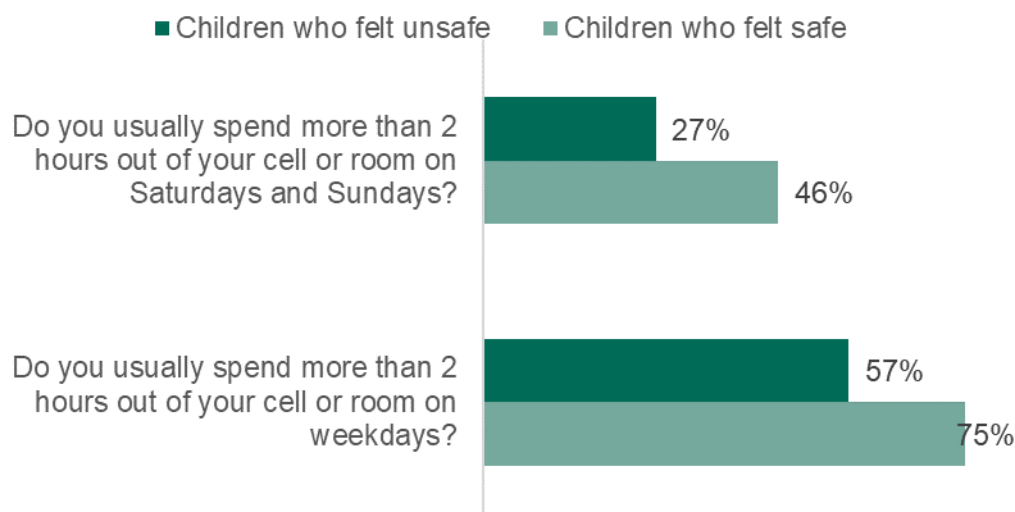
Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

## Daily life

- 2.14 Children who felt unsafe were less likely to report being able to spend more than two hours out of their cell: 57% reported spending two hours out on weekdays and just 27% reported that this happened during the weekend.

**Figure 9: Children who felt safe were more likely to have more than two hours out of their cell or room per day**

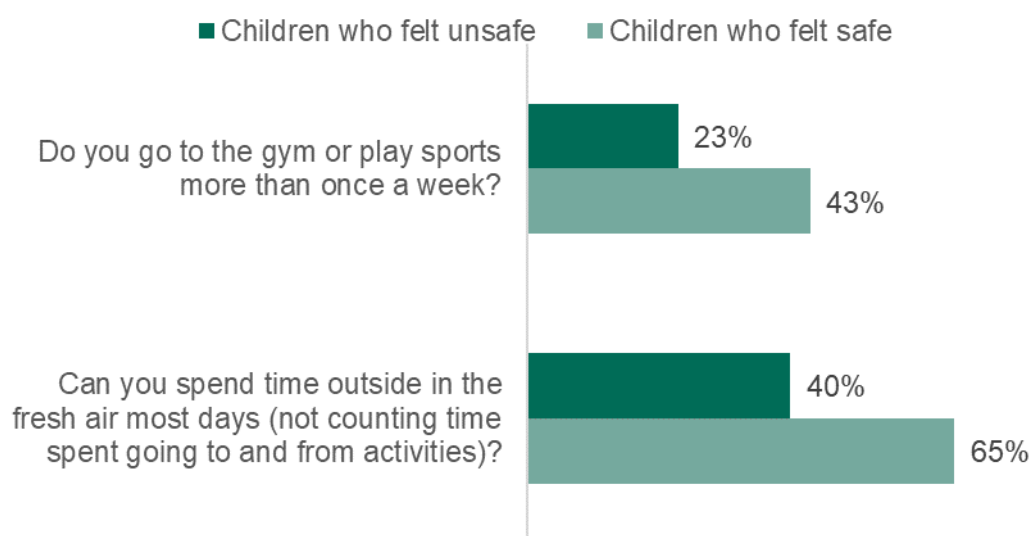
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.15 Only 40% of children who felt unsafe said they could spend time outside in the fresh air on most days and less than a quarter (23%) reported they could go to the gym or play sports once a week or more.

**Figure 10: Children who felt safe were more likely to spend time at the gym or outside STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24**



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.16 These perceptions are supported by our inspection findings, where we often found children self-isolating in their cells, separated from their peers, because they were scared. These children had very limited daily routines which did not always include education, exercise or other sources of meaningful human interaction. Too often they were separated for longer than children who had perpetrated acts of violence and disorder. At Cookham Wood, Werrington and Wetherby we found examples of separated children who, on some days, did not come out of their cells for any reason. At Cookham Wood self-isolating children made up a third of all of those separated from their peers and many of them were subject to conditions that met the definition of solitary confinement, spending more than 22 hours a day locked up without any meaningful human interaction.

'For the 17 children held in separate accommodation for their own safety, leaders offered very few opportunities to participate in education, skills and work activities.' **Cookham Wood YOI**

- 2.17 At Feltham the closure of enhanced support unit meant that children who needed additional support to access time out of cell with their peers were now separated. This put additional pressure on the separation unit and prevented staff from providing a consistent daily routine for this group.

## Stagnation in time out of cell and education

- 2.18 Perhaps unsurprisingly in institutions that were so volatile, education was not good enough in every YOI we visited. Ofsted judged the education provision to be inadequate at Feltham, Werrington and Cookham Wood. Only Oakhill STC had education provision that was

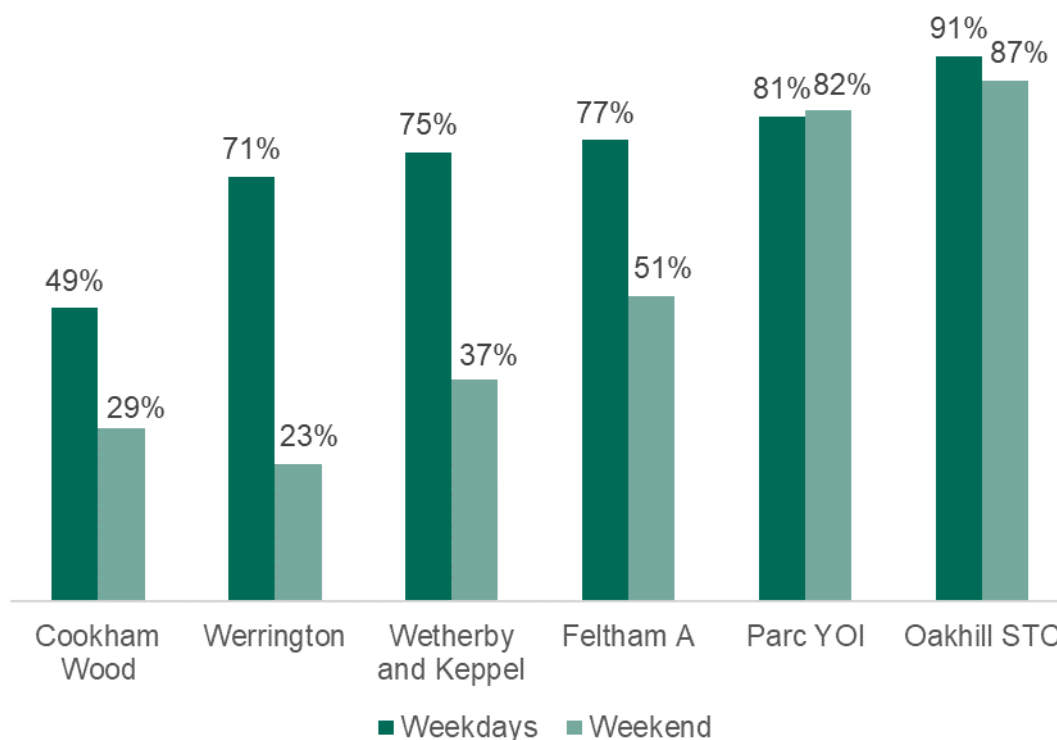


judged to be good; this was largely due to their success in managing conflict in their population:

‘Senior leaders continue to prioritise children’s access to high-quality education. Leaders manage relationships between children carefully and sensitively, ensuring that no child’s attendance at education is limited because of whom they can or cannot mix with. Consequently, almost all children receive 25 hours of education a week.’ **Oakhill STC**

- 2.19 The number of children who reported currently engaging with education had fallen to 78% from 88% last year, and 16% reported that they were not doing any education, training, work or interventions, for example offending behaviour programmes offending behaviour interventions.
- 2.20 We consistently found that the response to high levels of conflict was the key barrier to children being out of their cells and engaging with activity. In the absence of effective behaviour management systems many managers resorted to keeping children apart from one another to minimise violence.
- 2.21 While this strategy was sensible initially, keep apart lists were often now unmanageable and were preventing almost anything positive from happening in YOIs. At Cookham Wood we found 90% of children were subject to keep aparts, with staff managing 583 individual conflicts in a population of 77 children. At Werrington there were 388 keep aparts in a population of 89, and at Feltham A we found 266 in a population of 84.
- 2.22 In most YOIs children were not allocated to activities based on their needs or aspirations but on who they could mix with. This meant they were often allocated to courses they did not need or had already done. Predictably children lacked enthusiasm for these courses, which led to poor attendance and behaviour.
- 2.23 The high levels of conflict limited the time children could spend out of their cells, particularly at the weekend where, with the exception of Feltham, there was no education provision. In our survey only 72% of children reported spending more than two hours out of their cell during the week and less than half (43%) reported this happened at the weekend. However, this varied dramatically between sites, with children at Oakhill STC and Parc reporting far more time out of cell than at the other sites, particularly at the weekend.

**Figure 11: Children were more likely to spend more than two hours out of their cell or room per day on weekdays than weekends, with variations between establishments**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.24 At the other YOIs we found that staff had to share out the time available between several groups on each wing or unit, reducing the average amount each child received to between three and five hours during the week and less at weekends.
- 2.25 Concerningly the number of children who reported receiving the basic entitlement of exercise in the fresh air each day had fallen to 61% from 71% last year. Just 40% of children reported going to the gym or playing sports once a week or more, compared with 52% last year.
- 2.26 At Cookham Wood we found that:

'Prison leaders had presided over a largely impoverished regime that did not offer children the education, skills and work opportunities to which they were entitled. Chronic staff shortages of both prison officers and college teachers had resulted in children too often being confined to their cells because there were not enough officers to escort them to activities or a lack of qualified teachers to teach them, especially in English and mathematics.'

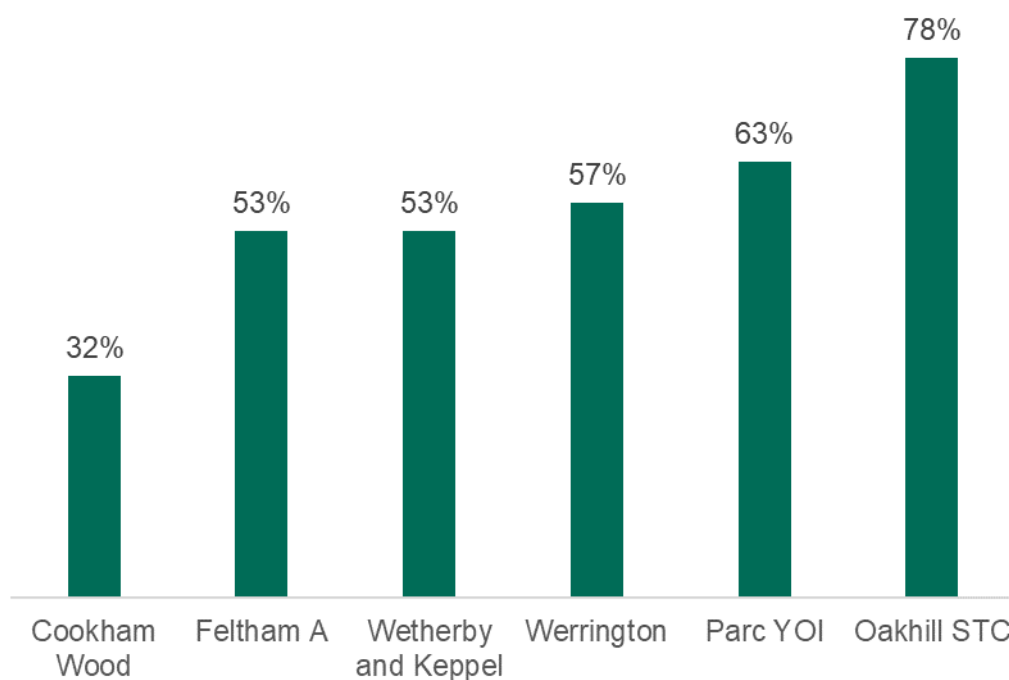
**Cookham Wood YOI**

- 2.27 Across the YOIs there were key weaknesses in the crucial subjects of English and mathematics. At Feltham poor attendance meant children took too long to achieve qualifications, at Wetherby we found many children studying at a level they had already achieved, and at

Werrington we found too many sessions taught by unqualified teachers.

- 2.28 Given these weaknesses it is unsurprising that only 53% of children overall told us they had learned anything that would help them when they were released, though this varied by establishment.

**Figure 12: The percentage of children who said they had learnt something that would help them on release varied by establishment**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24



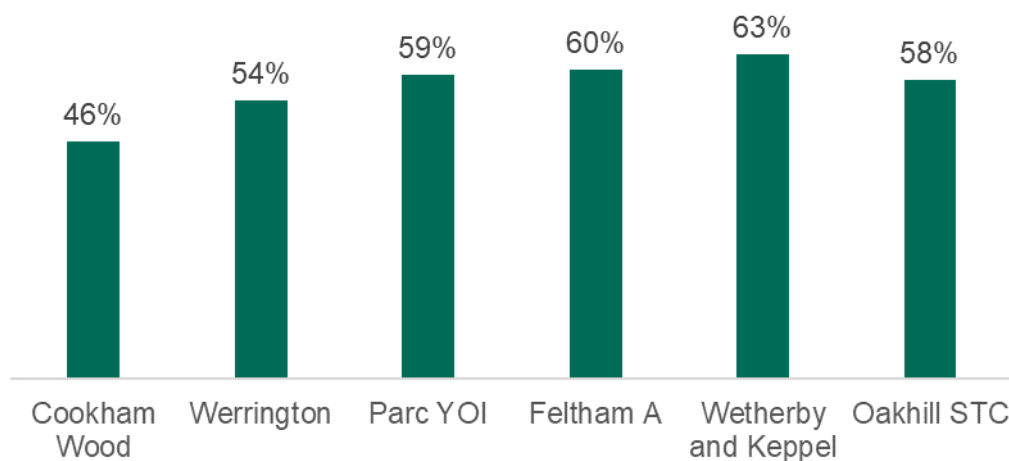
Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

## Resettlement and keeping in touch with the community

- 2.29 A sentence or remand plan should be in place for every child to enable them to address the reasons they are in custody and to facilitate a smooth transition either back into the community or to an adult prison. Just 57% of children told us they knew about their plan.

**Figure 13: The percentage of children who were aware of their sentence or remand plan varied by establishment**

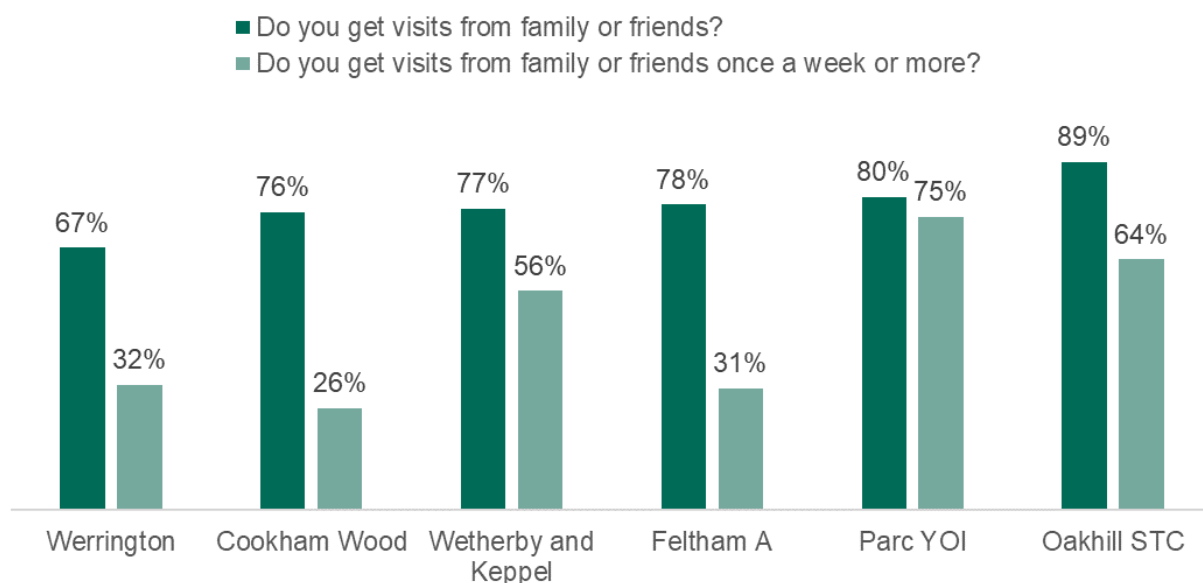
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.30 For these plans to be effective they needed to be informed by staff from across the institution as well as carers and professionals from the community. We found that while there was good input from children's families, youth offending teams and social workers in the community, there were almost never contributions from the frontline residential staff who spent the most time with the children. The exception to this was at Parc, where the widespread use of the youth justice application framework (an electronic tool that can be accessed by staff in custody and the community) by residential staff ensured key information was shared with caseworkers.
- 2.31 Children at all establishments attended regular remand and planning meetings but just 40% told us that they had had a say in what would happen to them after they had left their current YOI or STC. This suggested that many children did not feel they had any agency in the planning process.
- 2.32 One area of improvement from last year was that children who reported having visits were now more likely to have them weekly.

**Figure 14: More than half of children in each establishment had visits from loved ones, but not all of these children received these visits once a week or more**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2023–24



Source: HMI Prisons' detainee surveys

- 2.33 At Parc we found some excellent support for children to maintain contact with their families.

'Both social visits and secure video calls were used extensively. Following analysis of data and consultation with families, the social visits schedule had been changed and there were now two-hour slots in the morning and afternoon on both Saturday and Sunday. This was especially helpful for families travelling long distances as they could stay nearby overnight and visit on both days. As a result, there had been a large increase in the number of social visits with over 670 in the last year compared with 195 at our last inspection.' **Parc YOI**

- 2.34 In contrast, at other YOIs children told us they were reluctant to have visits because of a risk that violence would break out in front of their family or friends. At Cookham Wood, Werrington and Feltham managers were only allowing children who were not in conflict with each other to access the visits hall at the same time. This, and the sheer number of conflicts, had the impact of restricting all children's access to social visits and made it impossible for children, particularly those on remand, to get their entitlement.
- 2.35 The use of secure video calls was a missed opportunity at most sites and we were often told by leaders that the low uptake was because children were not enthusiastic about using the service. However, we found that many children did not know about it and there was little support to help children administer the process.
- 2.36 At Parc, which held 28 children at the time of the inspection, staff helped children and their families to book calls and the number had

increased to 125 a month over the previous year. In contrast the 165 children at Wetherby had made 38 secure video calls a month and the 77 children at Cookham Wood made just 16.

## Section 3 Children on remand

- 3.1 In 2023, HMI Prisons conducted a joint thematic inspection with HMI Probation and Ofsted on work with children subject to remand in youth detention (See: [A joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth detention \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/jip/joint-thematic-inspection-of-work-with-children-subject-to-remand-in-youth-detention/)). HMI Prisons explored provision for children in YOIs and the one STC. The thematic highlighted that children who had been remanded to custody were not always receiving their specific entitlements, and were therefore treated the same as convicted children.
- 3.2 Children on remand made up 45% of the youth custody population in the year ending March 2022, the highest in 10 years, and this proportion remained high at 44% in the year ending March 2023 (see: [Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2022-to-2023)). The median length of remand was 47 nights in the latest year, but this masks wider variation. While the majority (69%) of remand episodes lasted between one and 91 nights (502 remand periods), 66 children (9%) were held on remand for 274 nights or more. Figure 15 shows the full breakdown for periods of remand. Some children will spend long periods of time on remand which can lead to considerable disruption to their lives.

**Figure 15: The majority of remand episodes ending in 2022–23 lasted between one and 91 nights**  
STCs and YOIs in England and Wales, 2022–23



Source: Youth Justice Statistics: 2022–23

- 3.3 Of those on remand, 63% did not go on to receive a custodial sentence in the year ending March 2023. This remains a crucial issue and it is important to highlight the experiences of these children to help improve practice.
- 3.4 The statistics reported in the following section combine children on remand with those who are waiting to be sentenced due to the survey response options used in the HMI Prisons survey. This group will be referred to as unsentenced children to distinguish them from sentenced children.

## Daily life

- 3.5 We found the day-to-day experiences of unsentenced children were similar to those of sentenced children. On weekdays, 66% of unsentenced children and 77% of sentenced children reported spending more than two hours out of their cell; this fell to 44% of unsentenced and 45% of sentenced children at weekends. The greatest variation was between establishments rather than the child's legal status, with a stark difference between YOIs and the STC. For example, 96% of unsentenced children at Oakhill STC reported spending more than two hours out of their cell during the week with 88% reporting the same at the weekend. In YOIs these figures were 60% during the week and 35% at the weekend.

## Relationships between staff and children

- 3.6 Being on remand can be an unsettling time for children. For some it may be their first experience of custody, and the support of staff is crucial in enabling them to settle and cope. However, unsentenced children did not report more positively about their relationships with staff, and appeared to have the same experience with staff as sentenced children. Fifty-five per cent of unsentenced children and 50% of sentenced children reported feeling cared for by staff. The majority reported that staff treated them with respect: 71% of unsentenced children and 74% of sentenced children. Similarly, 73% of unsentenced children reported that there was a member of staff they could ask for help, compared with 74% of sentenced children.

## Contact with family and friends

- 3.7 Children on remand in YOIs are entitled to three social visits a week, compared with two visits every four weeks for those who are convicted. In STCs all children, regardless of their legal status, are entitled to one visit a week. However, only 69% of children on remand or awaiting sentence reported they had had social visits from family and friends, and of these only 52% received at least one visit a week. No child in the STC and only 15% of unsentenced children in YOIs received more than one social visit a week. Access to social visits and calls depended far more on the establishment restrictions, keep apart lists and difficulties booking sessions described above rather than their legal status.
- 3.8 During our remand thematic, some children said being located far from home and the high cost of travel meant it was difficult for their families to visit. Sentenced and unsentenced children reported similar difficulty in our inspection surveys, with 41% of sentenced children saying it was quite or very difficult for family and friends to visit, compared with 38% of unsentenced children. For children on remand, this made their already uncertain time in custody even more disruptive. Uptake of secure video calls as an alternative to social visits was low for these children. Only 28% of children who were not sentenced received secure video calls, and of those only 37% received at least one a week, with only 16% receiving more than one a week.



- 3.9 The same proportion (66%) of unsentenced children and sentenced children reported receiving help from staff to keep in touch with family and friends. However, the ability to maintain contact in practice was limited by the cost of calls and emails. Children on remand are entitled to pocket money from their social worker (as a child in care), but this was not received by all children. Some children were unaware of the entitlement and some establishment rules made it difficult for social workers to send in money. Children on remand are particularly vulnerable and it is important for them to maintain contact with family and friends, but they were not receiving the basic entitlements to facilitate contact.

## Education and health

- 3.10 Experiences of education were similar for all children within each establishment, regardless of their legal status. Of unsentenced children, 76% reported taking part in education; this was 80% for sentenced children. Children we spoke to as part of the remand thematic described not being able to continue with their community education, and in some cases formal exams, when they arrived in custody. In the thematic we found that children on remand were not allocated to long-term education courses due to uncertainty about when they would be released. Only 47% of unsentenced children reported having learned anything in custody that would help them when they were released.

'If I get bail, it's going to be a waste of my life these past few weeks where I could have been doing my CSCS card... I was passing my mock tests [in the community], I was getting full marks. I was supposed to be in some multi-skills thing [in prison] to do it but there ain't any room in there... I don't want to get it all in place here for me to get bail tomorrow... it would be a waste of their time [education providers] and my time.' **Remand thematic**

- 3.11 Only 12% of unsentenced children were taking part in any interventions, such as offending behaviour programmes. Our thematic found that interventions were limited to sentenced children in some establishments. This was a missed opportunity for children who spent longer periods of time on remand to receive support to address their offending behaviour. These children could ultimately be released for time served when finally convicted and no meaningful work would have taken place while they were in custody to reduce their chances of reoffending.
- 3.12 Children's experience of health care was also similar within each establishment regardless of their legal status. Sixty-two per cent of unsentenced children and 67% of sentenced children reported being helped with their health problems. During the remand thematic, we found that children on remand were sometimes not provided with long-term treatment due to uncertainty about their release dates. Again, this was a missed opportunity for these children, and disruption or delays in

accessing support had the potential to cause more disruption to their lives.

## Returning to the community

- 3.13 In our surveys, only 34% of children who were on remand or awaiting sentence reported having anyone to help them prepare for release. This was lowest (11%) for unsentenced children at Cookham Wood, where it was also significantly lower than for sentenced children in the establishment (46%).
- 3.14 In 2023–24, a lower proportion of children who were on remand or awaiting sentence reported they had had a say in what would happen to them on release: 32% compared with 47% of sentenced children. A child interviewed as part of our remand thematic told us of their frustration in engaging with professionals.

‘Talking to all professionals is like talking to a brick wall.’ **Remand thematic**

## A lack of support

- 3.15 The experience of custodial remand is filled with uncertainty for children. Children we spoke to as part of our remand thematic described experiencing disruption in multiple areas of their lives, as well as uncertainty about how long it would continue. The specific remand entitlements should have alleviated some of these concerns, but too many children were not receiving what they were entitled to; this could exacerbate the negative impact of custody. There is also a lack of clarity about the next steps for children on remand – not enough work is carried out to prepare them for what is coming next, whether that is release or a custodial sentence.

## Appendix I Demographic and background characteristics

Demographic and other background characteristics of children who completed a questionnaire – overall, between types of, and within establishments – from self-reported data.

				YOIs			Total YOIs	STCs	Total STCs	Total all children
		Cookham Wood	Wetherby and Keppel	Werrington	Feltham	Parc		Oakhill		
<b>Gender</b>	Male	100%	98%	100%	100%	100%	<b>99%</b>	98%	<b>98%</b>	<b>99%</b>
	Female	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	<b>1%</b>	2%	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>
	Non-binary	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	<b>0%</b>	0%	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Age</b>	14 or under	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>0%</b>	2%	<b>2%</b>	<b>0%</b>
	15	1%	4%	4%	7%	0%	<b>4%</b>	27%	<b>27%</b>	<b>7%</b>
	16	16%	16%	26%	7%	18%	<b>17%</b>	50%	<b>50%</b>	<b>21%</b>
	17	56%	47%	38%	55%	47%	<b>48%</b>	10%	<b>10%</b>	<b>43%</b>
	18 or over	26%	33%	32%	31%	35%	<b>31%</b>	10%	<b>10%</b>	<b>29%</b>

<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	36%	67%	44%	22%	65%	<b>49%</b>	37%	<b>37%</b>	<b>47%</b>
	Mixed	14%	15%	16%	15%	18%	<b>15%</b>	24%	<b>24%</b>	<b>16%</b>
	Asian	7%	5%	7%	7%	0%	<b>6%</b>	7%	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>
	Black	36%	13%	29%	54%	6%	<b>27%</b>	28%	<b>28%</b>	<b>28%</b>
	Arab	0%	0%	0%	2%	6%	<b>1%</b>	2%	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>
	Other	6%	0%	3%	0%	6%	<b>2%</b>	2%	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Traveller</b>	Yes	10%	10%	3%	4%	0%	<b>7%</b>	8%	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>
	No	90%	90%	97%	96%	100%	<b>93%</b>	92%	<b>92%</b>	<b>93%</b>
<b>Religion</b>	No religion	16%	34%	31%	15%	59%	<b>28%</b>	26%	<b>26%</b>	<b>28%</b>
	Christian	50%	49%	37%	44%	35%	<b>45%</b>	46%	<b>46%</b>	<b>45%</b>
	Buddhist	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>0%</b>	0%	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
	Jewish	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>0%</b>	3%	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>
	Muslim	31%	14%	31%	38%	6%	<b>25%</b>	23%	<b>23%</b>	<b>24%</b>
	Sikh	0%	3%	0%	2%	0%	<b>1%</b>	0%	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>
	Other	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	<b>1%</b>	3%	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Health problems</b>	Yes	49%	47%	31%	37%	69%	<b>44%</b>	45%	<b>45%</b>	<b>44%</b>

	No	51%	53%	69%	63%	31%	<b>56%</b>	55%	<b>55%</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>Disability</b>	Yes	37%	42%	24%	28%	44%	<b>35%</b>	34%	<b>34%</b>	<b>35%</b>
	No	63%	58%	76%	72%	56%	<b>65%</b>	66%	<b>66%</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>Been cared for in local authority</b>	Yes	65%	67%	53%	67%	75%	<b>64%</b>	54%	<b>54%</b>	<b>63%</b>
	No	35%	33%	47%	33%	25%	<b>36%</b>	46%	<b>46%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Have children</b>	Yes	4%	15%	7%	8%	0%	<b>9%</b>	8%	<b>8%</b>	<b>9%</b>
	No	96%	85%	93%	92%	100%	<b>91%</b>	92%	<b>92%</b>	<b>91%</b>

## Appendix II Methodology

### Administering the survey

At the time of the survey, researchers from HMI Prisons attempted to invite all children in every secure training centre (STC) and young offender institution (YOI) to complete a questionnaire. In some instances, for example when a child was at court or an outside hospital, it was not possible to speak to all children. In total, 95% of children detained in YOIs and STCs at the time of our survey were offered the opportunity to complete a questionnaire. Every effort was made to speak to each child individually to explain the purpose and confidentiality of the survey, its voluntary nature and the independence of the inspection process. We also offered to administer the questionnaire via an interview for children who said they needed assistance.

We asked children to not put their name on their questionnaire, but to enable us to follow up any child protection and safeguarding issues, each questionnaire was numbered so that any relevant comments could be traced back to the respondent. Children were made aware of this. Self-completed questionnaires were placed in sealed envelopes and collected by HMI Prisons researchers.

### Response rate

In the 2023–24 reporting year, as shown in Table 1, questionnaires were completed (either through self-completion or via an interview) and returned by 81% of the children in the available sample (representing 77% of the children who were resident in the establishment at the time of the survey). The response rate ranged from 73% at Feltham A to 88% at Oakhill.

**Table 1: Sample sizes and response rates across STCs and YOIs during 2023–24.**

The response rate for YOIs and STCs has been calculated as a proportion of the total number of children who were offered a questionnaire.

YOIs	Date of Survey	Population on survey date	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of returned questionnaires	Response rate
Cookham Wood	04 April 2023	83	81	69	84%
Wetherby and Keppel	20 November 2023	164	155	125	81%
Werrington	31 July 2023	87	85	71	84%
Parc	09 October 2023	27	23	17	74%
Feltham A	04 March 2024	80	75	55	73%
YOI total		441	419	337	80%

STCs	Date of Survey	Population on survey date	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of returned questionnaires	Response rate
Oakhill	23 August 2023	59	56	49	88%
STC total		59	56	49	88%
YOI AND STC TOTAL		500	475	386	81%

## Non-responses

Missing data, where respondents have not answered a question, have been excluded from the analysis. This means that the percentages calculated are from a total sum where there may have been different response rates to each question within the survey.

Figures quoted in this report have been rounded to the nearest whole number. In some cases, due to the way we round the data, a result of 0% can, in fact, have been reported and/or experienced by a very small number of children. For example, across the entire YOI sample of 337 individuals, the response of one child on a given issue would appear as 0% in our report.

## Analyses conducted

In addition to presenting the aggregated survey responses for children in custody (across all STCs and YOIs), additional analyses are reported:

- a comparison between survey responses received from children in STCs and YOIs
- responses from children in each STC and YOI as well as the overall response from children in that type of custody setting
- statistical comparisons between different sub-groups within the 2023–24 responses, where numbers allowed. Highlighting is used in tables to show where there are statistically significant differences.

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