



Children in custody 2025–26

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

September 2026

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Introduction

This report, based on our inspections and the results of the surveys of children in custody, shows that standards have remained woeful in the youth estate.

Children at every establishment apart from HMYOI Parc and Oakhill Secure Training Centre continued to be locked behind their doors for much too long – as much as 19 hours a day in Feltham and only marginally less in Werrington and Wetherby, although in the latter there had been some improvement in the last year. Education provision was, except for at Parc, awful and extensive keep-apart lists restricted which classroom or course children could attend.

Levels of violence remained much too high at all of these establishments. At Feltham – which at the time of our inspection was the most violent young offender institution – inspectors found that chronic staff shortages had led to an even more inconsistent regime, with frequent curtailments of activities leading to greater frustration among the boys.

We continued to be critical about the way in which behaviour was managed in youth custody and most establishments failed to get the basics right. The rules were unclear, they were inconsistently applied by staff, there were often few consequences for poor behaviour and there were not enough meaningful incentives to motivate children to behave. That meant children did not receive the consistency in adult support that is essential to establish boundaries and keep everyone safe. Relationships were also not good enough, with many children reporting that staff did not provide enough support.

This report highlights the high proportion of children held on remand. Our 'Children on short-term remand' thematic report, published earlier this year, showed that many spend short periods of time in custody before a suitable bail package can be agreed, which causes unnecessary disruption and cost.

At Oakhill, we found that safeguarding processes had broken down and staff were failing in some of their most basic duties to keep children safe and make sure that concerns or incidents were appropriately reported. Standards were so poor that I decided to issue an Urgent Notification to the Secretary of State for Justice.

The number of children held in the youth estate has never been lower and it continues to be very well resourced compared to adult prisons. Despite this, the Youth Custody Service has failed to make meaningful improvements to the endemic and seemingly intractable problems that this inspectorate and the children in our surveys have identified for many years. There are too many managers in the centre, and in young offender institutions officers are not adequately trained, expectations are too low and children fail to thrive.

Only at Parc YOI, where standards have remained consistently high for many years, are children are given the boundaries, support, care, motivation and education to succeed. The Youth Custody Service would do well to learn from the success of this establishment.

Charlie Taylor

Chief Inspector of Prisons

August 2026

Background

In 2025–26, children in custody were held in one of four settings: Oakhill Secure Training Centre (STC), secure children's homes (SCHs), young offender institutions (YOIs), and the secure school, Oasis Restore, although this new establishment closed temporarily in August 2025 due to security flaws and did not reopen until June 2026. This closure put additional pressure on the other sites, in particular Feltham YOI and Oakhill STC, which had to manage additional children and an ever-increasing remand population.

As the children's estate has become more fragmented, so have inspection arrangements. Inspections of YOIs in England are carried out by HMI Prisons in partnership with Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), while in Wales HMI Prisons works with Estyn and Health Inspectorate Wales. Inspections of Oakhill STC are led by Ofsted and supported by CQC and HMI Prisons. Inspections of secure children's homes in England are led by Ofsted and in Wales by Care Inspectorate Wales. The secure school is inspected under a separate framework by Ofsted. As a result, it is difficult to assess outcomes, measure progress or make comparisons between the different types of establishments which hold children.

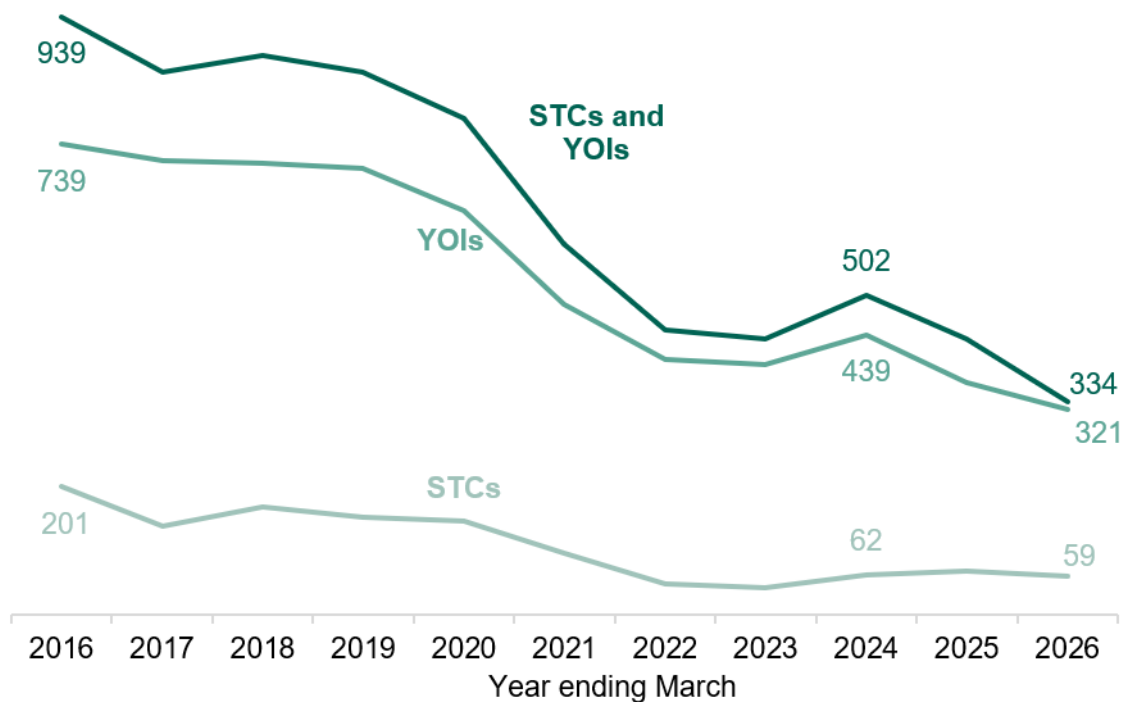
Figure 1: Map of counties which have Youth Custody Services inspected by HMI Prisons



In 2025–26, the number of children held in STCs and YOIs decreased, continuing a long-running trend. The average population of children and young people held in these establishments – which includes some who are 18 – was 371 in 2025–26, compared with 939 in 2015–16. The smaller population has improved staff-to-child ratios in all settings, and all sites have continued to operate at well below capacity.

Figure 2: STC and YOI populations continue their longer-term falls, although the fall has slowed in recent years

Youth Custody Service data, YOIs and STC in England and Wales; includes 18-year-olds



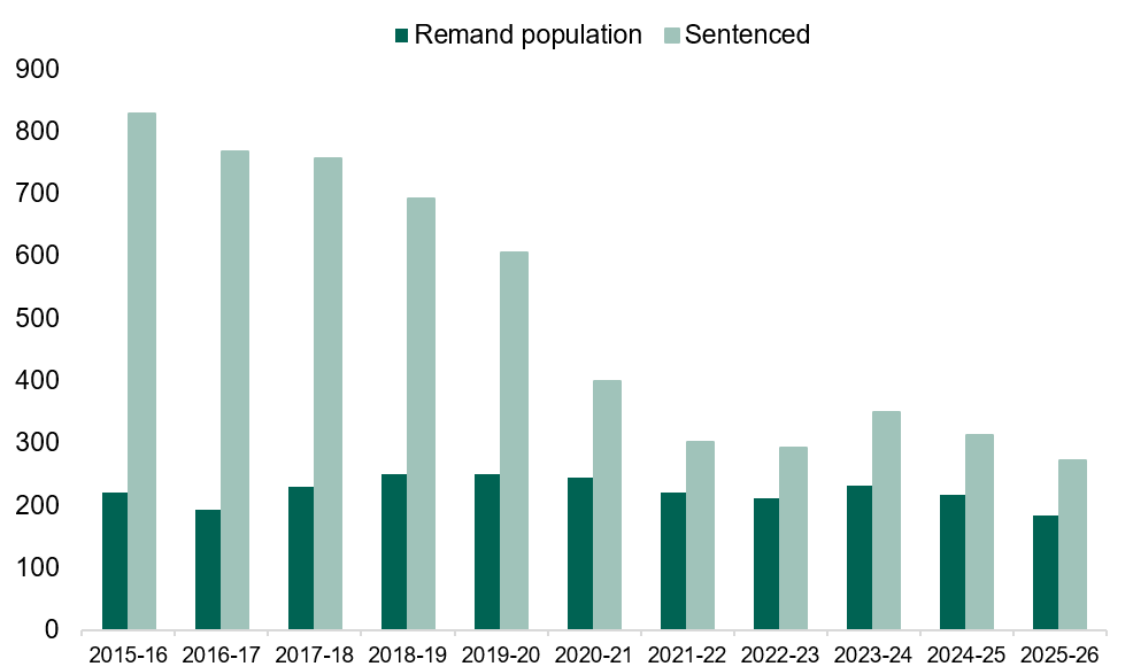
Source: Youth Custody Report, 2026

Despite the fall in population the number of children held on remand has plateaued. In 2025–26, HMI Prisons published a thematic review about children held on short-term remand before being released into the community¹. It found that children were too often held in custody while awaiting trial or sentencing, even when professionals believed they could be safely and more cost-effectively managed in the community.

¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2026), 'Children on short-term remand: A thematic review by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons'. Available at: https://hmiprison.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/children-on-short-term-remand/

Figure 3: While the number of sentenced children in the secure estate has fallen, the remand population has remained more steady

Youth Custody Service data, YOIs and STC in England and Wales; includes 18-year-olds



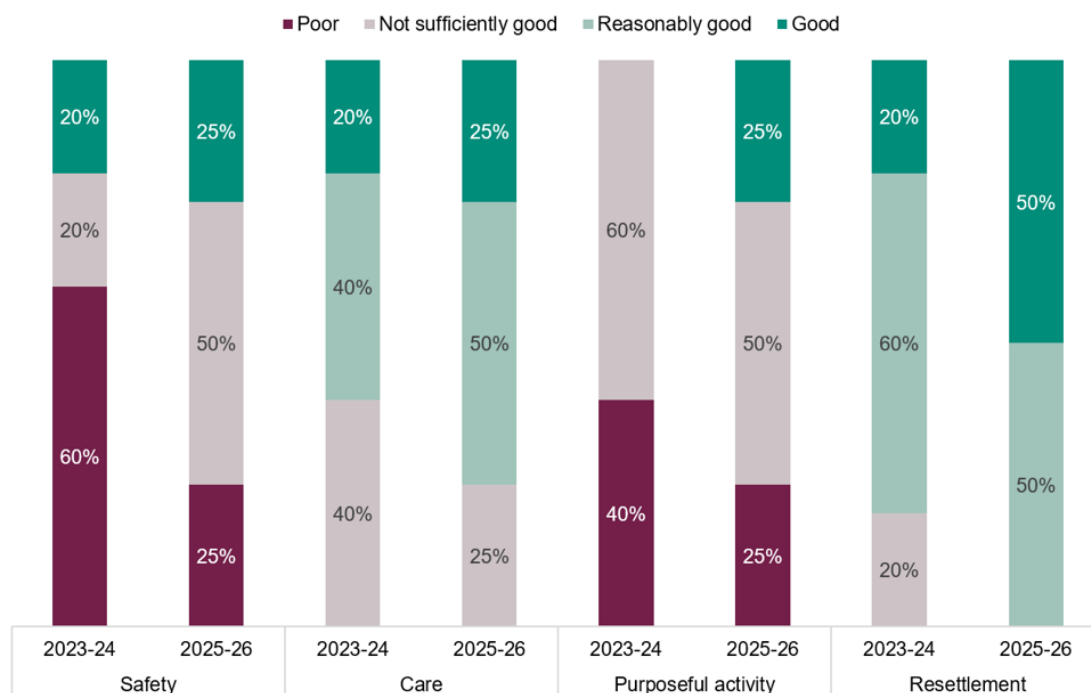
Source: Youth Custody Report, 2026

Section 1 Overview of findings

- 1.1 In 2025–26, we carried out five inspections – four in YOIs and one in the STC. We found some progress overall, but improvement in most establishments was slow and fragile, and children still spent too long in their cells. While safety had improved at Werrington and the provision of work at Wetherby had enhanced purposeful activity, both areas were judged to be not sufficiently good.
- 1.2 A stable leadership team at Werrington had worked to identify children who frequently made or used weapons and placing them on a four-week management plan. This included additional cell searches, restriction of privileges such as dining out of cell, and the requirement to move cells when directed, and had led to a reduction in the use of weapons in the institution. In addition, there had been some success in reducing the number of children who needed to be kept apart from one another for safety reasons.
- 1.3 The governor at Wetherby had responded to substantial weaknesses in the education provision and had worked to mitigate the impact by providing more work and vocational training. These included the introduction of ‘Q branch’ (where children worked with staff to carry out minor repairs), a horticulture project and waste management initiative. Children were enthusiastic about these new opportunities, which allowed some to access to more than 11 hours a day out of cell.
- 1.4 At Parc, better joint working between the education provider and the prison had expanded education, skills and work provision, which were now judged by Estyn to be good. Education was much improved and children were making good progress. At the time of the inspection leaders were managing an increased population but this had not impacted negatively on outcomes which we judged to be good in all four healthy prison tests.

Figure 4: While there had been improvement since previous inspections too many areas were not sufficiently good

Percentage of inspections receiving each healthy prison score from HMI Prisons inspections of YOIs in England and Wales in 2023–24 (n=5) and 2025–26 (n=4)



Source: HMI Prisons inspection reports

- 1.5 Despite these improvements, there were continued, long-running weaknesses in safety and education in the establishments. Only Parc was safe enough and Ofsted judged the overall effectiveness of education as 'inadequate' at every YOI in England and 'requires improvement' at Oakhill STC. These issues were most acute in the south of England. At Feltham YOI we found behaviour management in disarray; we observed many examples of rules not being enforced, poor behaviour being rewarded and children reacting aggressively to staff.
- 1.6 At Oakhill, outcomes were so concerning that the Chief Inspectors of Ofsted, HMI Prisons and the Care Quality Commission invoked the Urgent Notification Protocol. Just before our visit, the centre director and one of the two deputy directors had been formally suspended from their duties. The other deputy director had also been dismissed recently from employment. Another 30 staff had been suspended in the months before the inspection. There were fundamental weaknesses in safeguarding at the STC, and a failure by leaders to report serious matters to local authority children's services and the local authority designated officer. This significantly delayed investigations and action to protect children from harm. Leaders were not following the STC rules when separating children, sometimes for several days. Children also faced delays in accessing health care for physical and mental health conditions and medicines administration was unsafe.

- 1.7 In recent years there have been multiple false dawns in institutions holding children. Although any improvement in outcomes for this particularly vulnerable group of detainees is welcome, it needs to be sustained and accelerated. The challenge for national leaders is to consolidate the small gains of 2025–26 and take advantage of the lower population to create a system of custodial institutions that are able to meet the high levels of need of the children that remain.

Section 2 Who are the children in custody?

- 2.1 HMI Prisons carries out a survey of children at each YOI or STC inspection. We aim to offer all children in the establishment a questionnaire, which includes self-reported demographic information. For this report, the data from all surveys throughout the year is combined. Due to the nature of self-reported data, the proportions reflect the answers of the children and may not align with national statistics.
- 2.2 The overwhelming majority of children in YOIs and the STC are boys (97%) and nearly all (99%) are above the age of 15. Seven per cent of the children surveyed reported being parents themselves.
- 2.3 Our survey data consistently shows children in YOIs and STCs differ dramatically from the population in the community. Of children surveyed in 2025–26, 64% told us they had previously been in local authority care, compared with less than 1% of children in the general population². Forty-eight per cent said they had health problems and 38% reported having a disability, highlighting the challenges they may have had before encountering the criminal justice system.
- 2.4 Seven per cent of children reported being from the Traveller community, which continued to be the most overrepresented group in children's custody.

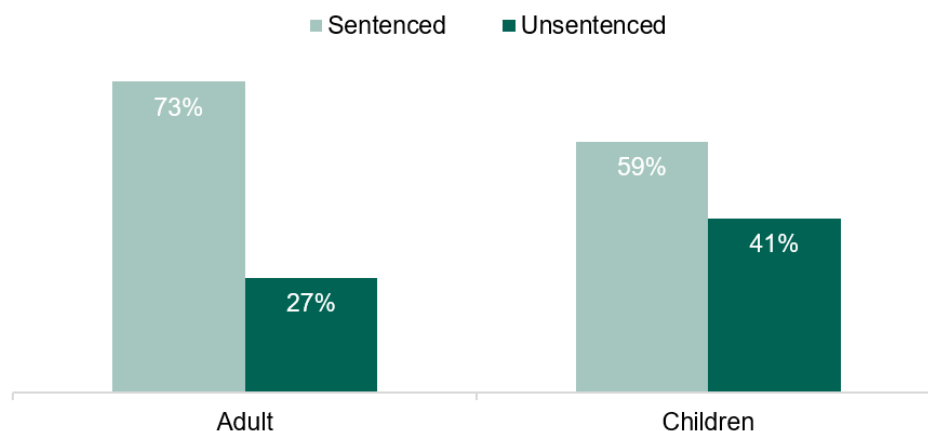
Children on remand

- 2.5 Of the children who responded to our survey, 41% had either not been convicted and were being held on remand or were waiting to be sentenced. This is a much higher proportion than in the adult prison system.

² Department for Education (2025). 'Children looked after in England including adoptions'. Available at: [Release home - Children looked after in England including adoptions - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Figure 5: The proportion of children not sentenced is considerably higher than in the adult male estate

Surveyed prisons, YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

Children on short-term remand

Between 1 August 2024 and 31 July 2025, 190 children were remanded to custody before subsequently being bailed. Almost half of the remanded children spent just two weeks or less in custody, and these short stays meant they received little or no access to meaningful education or support.

We looked in depth at the experiences of 25 children all of whom spent seven days or less in custody. Most were in custody for the first time, few were given clear information about why they were being held, and some said they were confused and scared. Many were vulnerable and had complex needs, including neurodivergent conditions, previous experience of trauma, and experience of being in local authority care.

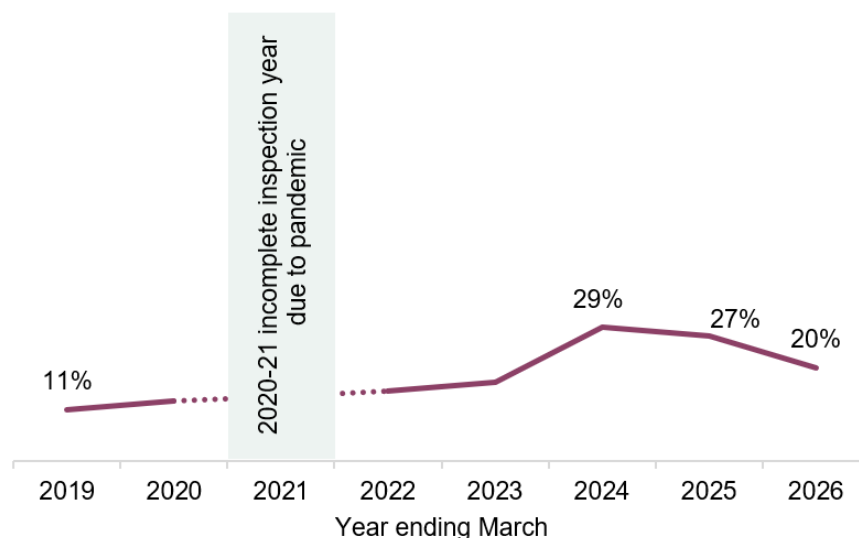
In too many cases we found that children were remanded to custody because there was no credible alternative presented at court. This outcome could have been avoided if youth justice services (YJS) were informed earlier, if community services were better coordinated, and if there was more clarity between the courts and YYS about the key components of a robust bail package.

Young adults in the children's estate

- 2.6 The number of 18-year-olds responding to our survey had reduced but remained at 20% of the overall youth custody population. The drop is due to a concerted effort to transfer 18-year-olds who are on remand or serving long sentences to the adult estate.

Figure 6: The proportion of the youth custody population who were 18 years old has continued to fall from its peak in 2023–24

YOIs and STC in England and Wales

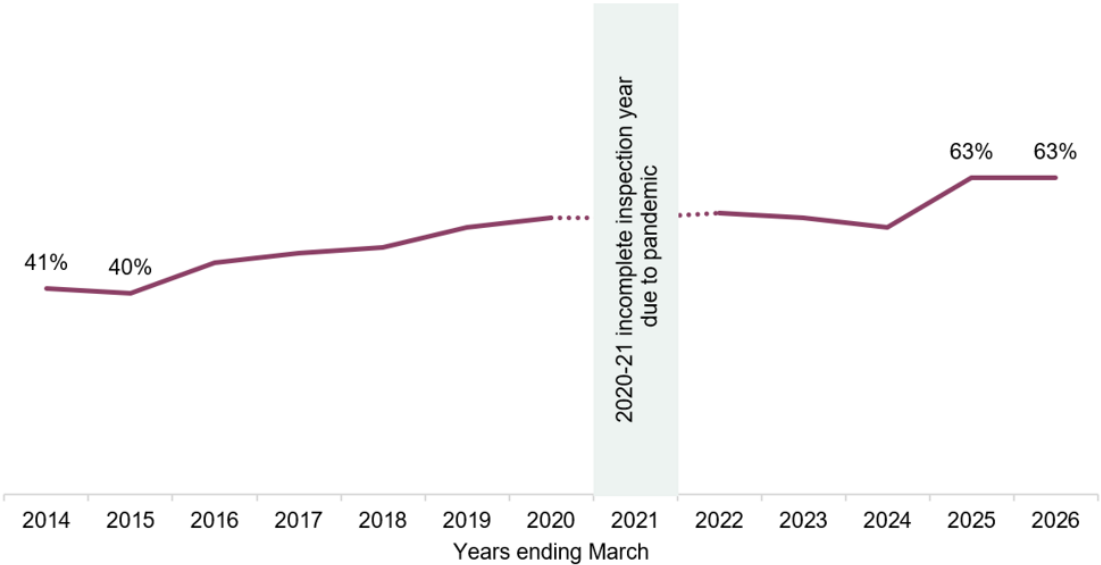


Source: HMI Prisons survey data

Some groups continue to be overrepresented

- 2.7 In recent years the youth justice system has been much more successful at diverting some groups of children away from custody than others. As a result, while the number of children held in custody has fallen, Muslim children and those from ethnic groups other than white have become increasingly overrepresented. Muslim children now make up 38% of the population, compared with 21% in 2019–20.
- 2.8 The proportion of children from an ethnic group other than white remains unchanged at a historical high of 63% of the population, compared with 33% when we first started asking this question in 2001.

Figure 7: The proportion of children who reported being from an ethnic group other than white remains the highest it has been since 2014
YOIs and STCs in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data

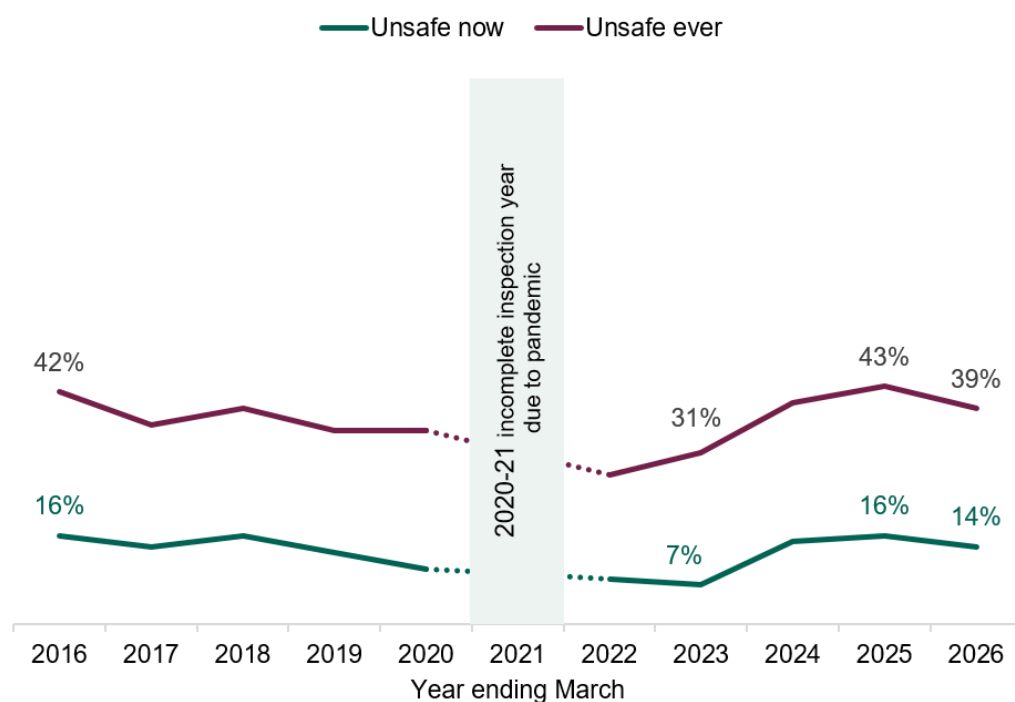
Section 3 What did we find?

- 3.1 This section combines findings from our survey, one-to-one interviews with children carried out during each inspection (see appendix X) and findings from inspections during 2025–26.

Violence and behaviour management remained challenges

Figure 8: The number of children reporting ever having felt unsafe and currently feeling unsafe remains too high

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data

- 3.2 Of the children surveyed, 39% had felt unsafe at some point and 14% said they felt unsafe at the time of the survey. These perceptions varied across the establishments: at Werrington 20% felt unsafe, compared with 10% at Parc and Feltham.
- 3.3 Our inspections found that violence remained a regular feature of life in children's establishments. Children at Feltham, at the time of the inspection, was the most violent YOI, had been involved in over 400 assaults in the previous year, 126 of which had involved weapons. At Werrington levels of violence had increased: there had been 324 assaults, 44 of which required treatment in hospital. At Wetherby (which held more children than either Feltham or Werrington) there had been nearly 500 assaults. Even at Parc, where children felt safer, there had been 87 incidents of violence. Each of these incidents had had a substantial impact on children and staff in the establishments, who were frequently injured.

- 3.4 In interviews, some children told us that feeling unsafe in custody was inevitable and was linked to the unpredictability of the environment and observing other children fighting and carrying weapons. Children at all sites reported conflict between gangs which was generally linked to problems in the community or disputes within the establishment, including where children were located. They also said that high levels of force and disrespectful behaviour from staff contributed to feelings of unsafety.
- 3.5 Children regularly mentioned group assaults. They told us they fought to protect their friends or establish themselves within a group in custody and were concerned that not taking part in these incidents would make them a target in future.
- 3.6 The children we spoke to told us that most young people carried weapons for protection. Some felt carrying a weapon was part of the culture in custody and these implements were often used in fights. They said that commonly used weapons included rocks in socks, screws, plugs, tin lids, plastic knives and razor blades. At Wetherby, a recent ban on razor blades meant children had started to create weapons from other types of metal, including aluminium door sheets, door handles, windows, food trolleys and fencing. Children at Wetherby expressed concern that these weapons were more dangerous than those previously used.
- 3.7 While children were searched regularly for weapons, this was not always effective. At Wetherby, metal detecting wands sometimes failed to detect the metal weapons children were carrying. Leaders at Werrington had introduced metal-detectable cutlery and toothbrushes, and removed razor blades in an effort to reduce access to weapons.
- 3.8 Children told us that staff did not always do enough to keep them safe. They said staff did not always recognise or acknowledge their concerns about mixing with some other children or moving wings, and did not always intervene quickly enough during fights or assaults.
- 3.9 However, children at Parc said that the presence of staff helped them to feel safe. There were five officers on a wing at all times, and they had created a positive atmosphere.
- 3.10 Children told us that staff did not always recognise different forms of bullying and that they would not necessarily report it to staff. Some said they would rather handle it themselves, while others were worried about staff and other children gossiping, which could put them at additional risk. In our survey, only 26% said they would report being bullied or victimised by other young people and less than half (49%) said they would report it if they were being bullied or victimised by staff. This indicates that a substantial number of incidents go unreported.
- 3.11 One of the key reasons for continued high levels of violence was ineffective or inconsistent behaviour management by staff. This was a particular weakness at Feltham and Werrington.

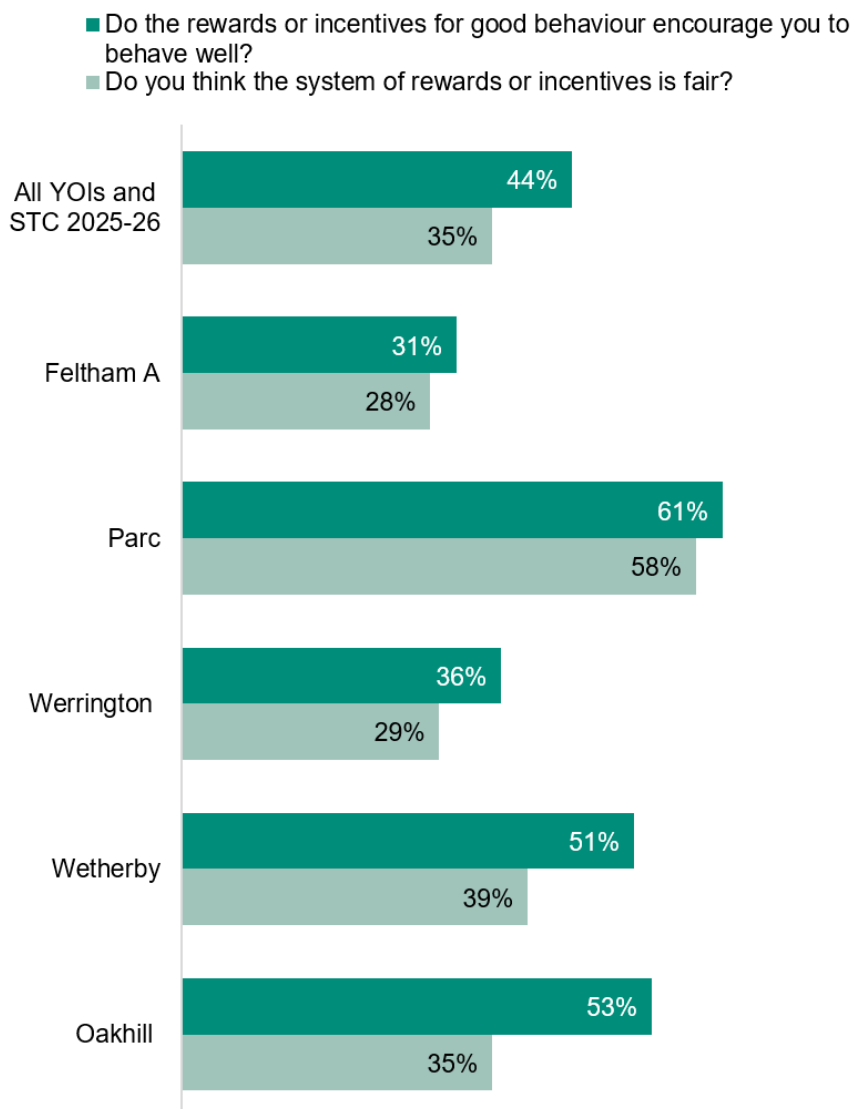
‘Leaders had designed a system of instant, weekly and longer-term incentives to try and motivate children to behave well. However poor implementation fundamentally undermined their effectiveness. Instant rewards (merits) were used inconsistently, with some children demanding merits to stop disruptive behaviour. This was a particular problem in education where too often compliance was rewarded over effort or good work. In addition, key incentives in the weekly rewards scheme [...] were not delivered because time out of cell was so limited.’

Werrington inspection report

- 3.12 Only 44% of children reported that rewards or incentives schemes at their establishment encouraged them to behave well, although this had improved from 34% in 2024–25.

Figure 9: Children reported rewards and incentives were most effective and fair at Parc, compared with other children's establishments

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

- 3.13 In addition, only 35% of children thought that the system of rewards was fair, and 37% said that staff did not usually explain what they had done wrong if they got in trouble. Often, children told us that staff did not apply rules fairly and that the reasons for punishments were not always explained. They said that paper slips detailing punishments were frequently slid under their doors, rather than staff talking to them in person.

“I’m on enhanced unit and its hardly worth staying on as the staff on the unit always want us behind our doors etc.”

Child at Feltham

“The IEP, there's no difference between standard and enhanced and basics only difference is no TV.”

Child at Werrington

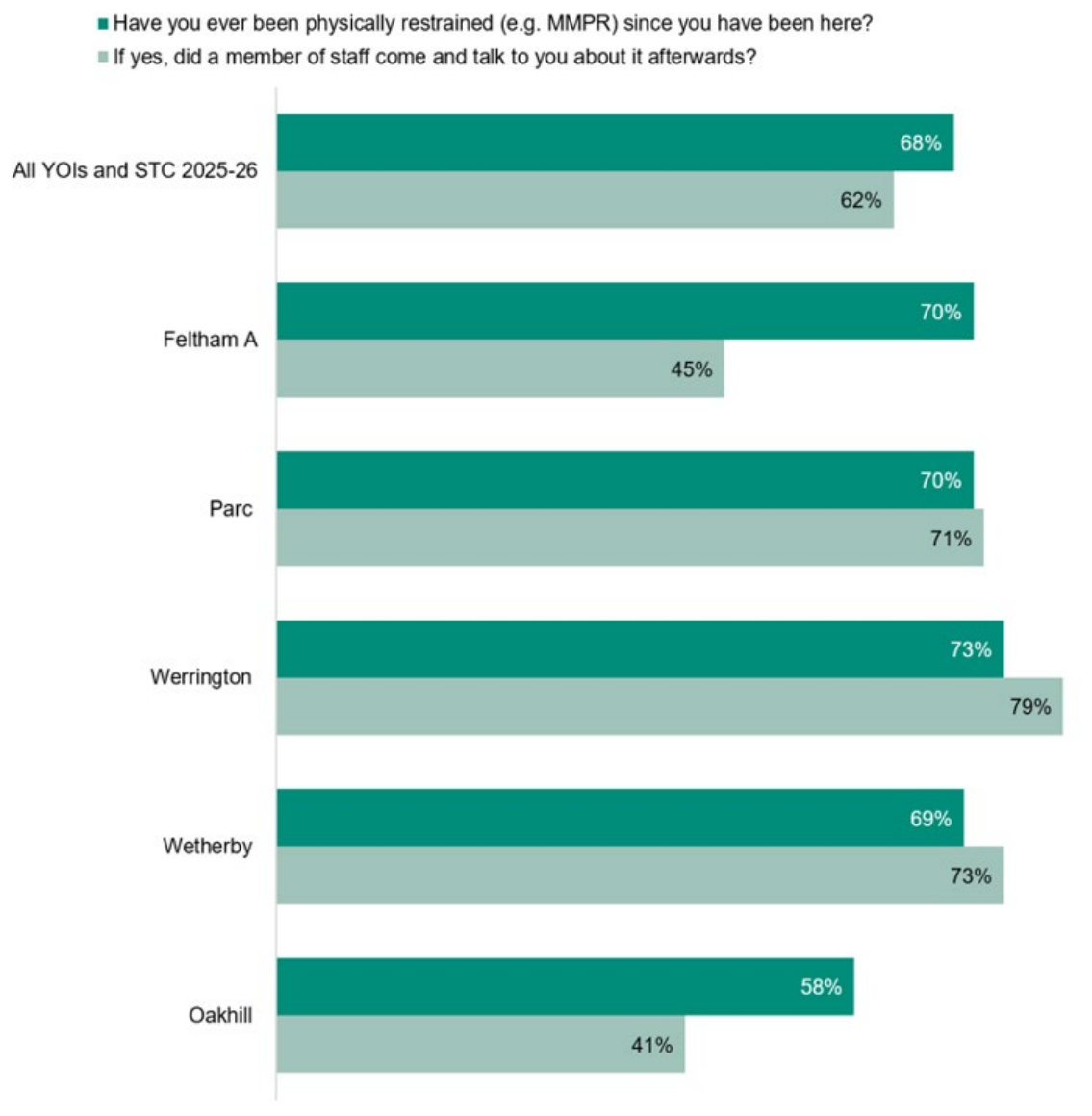
- 3.14 In the absence of effective behaviour management, leaders still relied heavily on keeping children apart to avoid violent incidents. This meant staff were often managing several different groups on a wing and sometimes made mistakes. Children referred to these mistakes, where groups who should not have been able to mix were able to gain access to each other, as ‘gate slips’. While children told us gate slips happened rarely, they sometimes resulted in serious injuries and contributed to feelings of unsafety.

Use of force

- 3.15 The consequence of persistently high levels of violence and disorder is that use of force is a regular feature of life in both YOIs and Oakhill STC. Over two-thirds of children (68%) reported having been restrained by staff. In general, children were seen afterwards by health care and minimising and managing physical restraint (MMPR) staff. Not all children at Oakhill were seen by these teams, however, and some felt that the conversations did not always cover their well-being.

Figure 10: A higher proportion of children reported being restrained at Werrington, but those children were also more likely to report staff talking to them about it afterwards than at other children’s establishments

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

3.16 Parc was the only establishment where staff had not used pain-inducing techniques since the previous inspection. At other sites we continued to find that pain-inducing techniques were used in incidents where there was no threat of serious harm.

‘Pain-inducing techniques had been applied eight times in the last 12 months and on some occasions, they had been deemed inappropriate by the independent review of restraint panel.’

Werrington inspection report

‘Pain-inducing techniques had been used on 11 occasions (10 mandibular and one inverted wrist flexion), compared with nine previously. These techniques were not always applied appropriately or proportionately.’

Wetherby inspection report

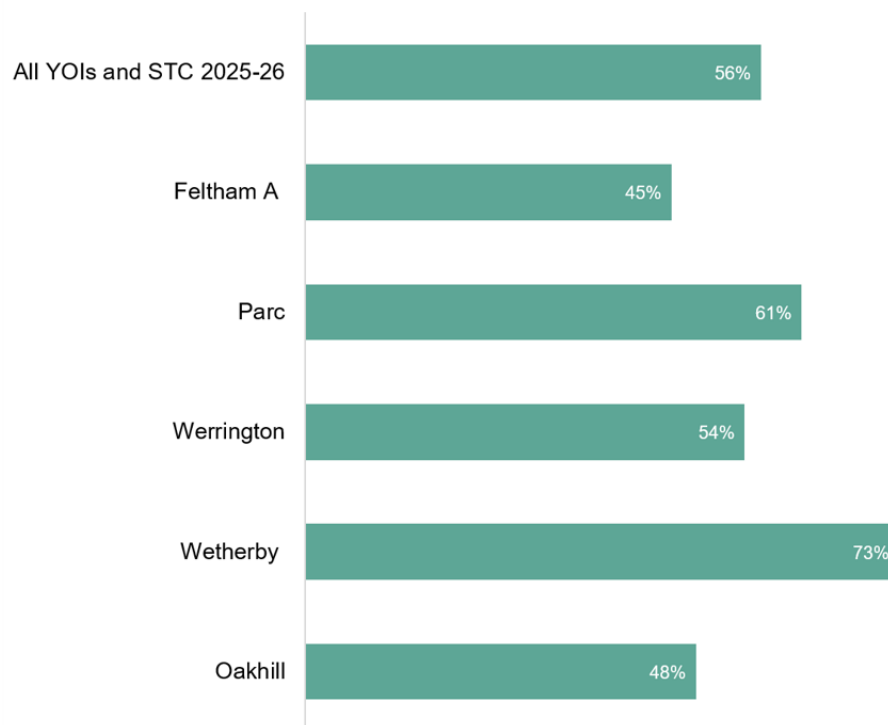
- 3.17 During the year PAVA incapacitant spray had been issued to specialist staff working in YOIs. We saw PAVA drawn but not used on just one occasion during an incident involving two children and a weapon at Wetherby. PAVA had been used at other sites after our inspections, and we continue to have concerns about its use in resolving problems caused by ineffective and inconsistent behaviour management.

Separation from normal location

- 3.18 Children who are at risk or pose a risk to others can be separated from their peers in both YOIs and the STC. This is a last resort and should not be used as a punishment because of the well-documented impact that isolation has on a child’s well-being. Despite these safeguards, 56% of children reported having been separated from their peers as a punishment.

Figure 11: A higher proportion of children reported being kept away from other young people at Wetherby than at other children’s establishments

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

- 3.19 At Oakhill, the STC rules state that children should only be separated from others for a short period of time, and for no longer than three hours. However, we found children who had been separated for several days.

Illicit drug use was an emerging threat

- 3.20 While violence and disorder remained the most prominent security priority, the trafficking of drugs and other contraband was an emerging problem across the estate. At Parc the proportion of positive results from random drug tests had risen to 11% and at Werrington 19% of intelligence-led tests were positive. Wetherby was not carrying out random tests and leaders at Feltham did not have a coherent plan to address this developing issue.
- 3.21 In our interviews, children at Oakhill and Werrington said they were aware of contraband within the establishments, including illicit drugs, USB sticks and vapes. Children told us staff were not always doing enough to prevent the flow of these items into the establishment.

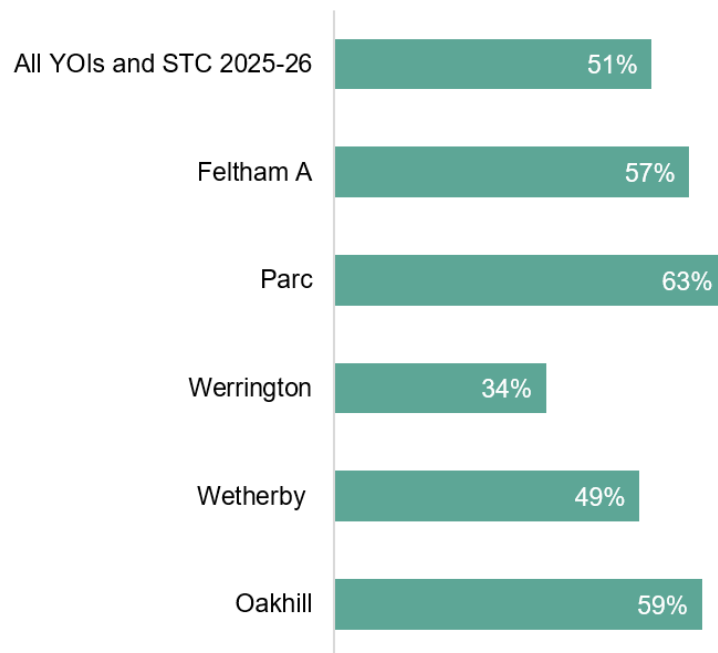
Weak relationships with staff undermined engagement

- 3.22 Weak relationships between staff and children undermined behaviour management and progress in education skills and work.

- 3.23 Only 51% of children told us they felt cared for by most staff at their establishment, a figure that has remained persistently low in recent years. One in three children reported not having a member of staff they could turn to for help if they had a problem.

Figure 12: A higher proportion of children at Parc felt cared for by staff than at other children's establishments

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

Building trust: the importance of positive relationships in young offender institutions

In June 2025 we published this thematic review about the importance of relationships in YOIs . The review found children and staff wanted the same things: consistency and enough time to get to know each other properly. Yet many aspects of daily life thwarted this interaction. Children were often locked up for long periods of time, staff were frequently moved to different units and there were few spaces for children to talk privately to staff. Rather than dining together children ate largely alone in their cells, and a lack of informal interaction opportunities meant officers only talked to them as they were being escorted around the establishment. Most children said they were unable to have a meaningful weekly conversation with a member of staff they knew.

- 3.24 In our 2018 thematic review about incentivising and promoting good behaviour³, we highlighted that children who had good relationships with staff were more likely to be motivated to engage with behaviour management schemes, education and other interventions. Eight years later, behaviour management is an increasing priority. However, chronic inconsistency and a failure to deliver regular time for staff to get to know the children in their care are corroding the relationships needed to make meaningful progress.

Daily life caused frustrations

- 3.25 In interviews children told us that their wings and cells were generally clean and tidy and our inspection findings supported this view. However, there were substantial differences in the size of each unit: at Oakhill living units could accommodate up to eight children while at Werrington and Wetherby children lived in units that could hold more than 40 children. These larger units felt much more institutional and did not support the building of effective relationships between children and frontline staff.



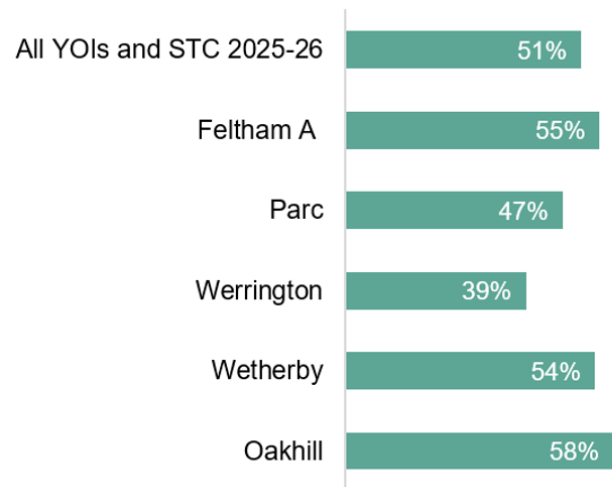
Living units at Wetherby (left) and Werrington (right)

- 3.26 Wings were not always calm or quiet enough for children; in interviews, the larger units at Werrington were described as noisy and 'wild'. However, even on some of the smaller wings at Wetherby, children reported that there was screaming and shouting out of windows late in the evening. Overall, only 51% of children said it was quiet enough for them to relax or sleep at night.

³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). 'Improving behaviour in prisons: A thematic review'. Available at: <https://hmiprison.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipris-reports/incentivising-and-promoting-good-behaviour/>

Figure 13: A higher proportion of children at Oakhill reported wings being quiet enough to sleep at night than at other children’s establishments

YOIs and STC in England and Wales

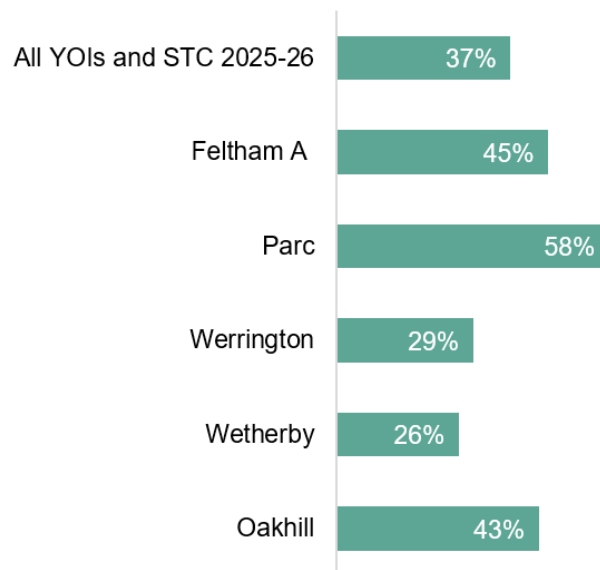


Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

- 3.27 At Parc cells had been refurbished since the last inspection and now had integral showers. This was the last YOI to undergo refurbishment and it meant that the overwhelming majority of children across the estate now had access to in-cell showers.
- 3.28 Regulating cell temperature was a key frustration for children and in our survey just 37% of children said the temperature of their cell was about right. In interviews children at Werrington and Oakhill mentioned a lack of windows and vents, and at Wetherby children told us the heating had been broken recently.

Figure 14: A higher proportion of children at Parc reported the room temperature to be about right than at other children’s establishments

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

Food

3.29 Children had very different views on the quality and quantity of the food they received. Only 35% said that the food was quite or very good and 37% said that they got enough to eat at mealtimes always or most of the time. Children often told us that they supplemented meals with canteen purchases when they could.

3.30 These views varied substantially between establishments. The worst perceptions were at Oakhill.

‘The main kitchen is unhygienic. The floors, backs of doors and staff areas are in a poor state. Food is therefore being prepared in an environment that could negatively impact on children’s health.’

Oakhill inspection report

3.31 At Parc, children were much more positive, particularly about provision during the week which came from the staff restaurant rather than the main kitchen. Another key difference at Parc was that children could eat meals together outside of their cells. In contrast, some children at Werrington reported only being allowed to eat out of their room once every other week, and even this was regularly cancelled.

Figure 15: Children at Parc reported a higher rate of satisfaction with the food than at other children's establishments

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



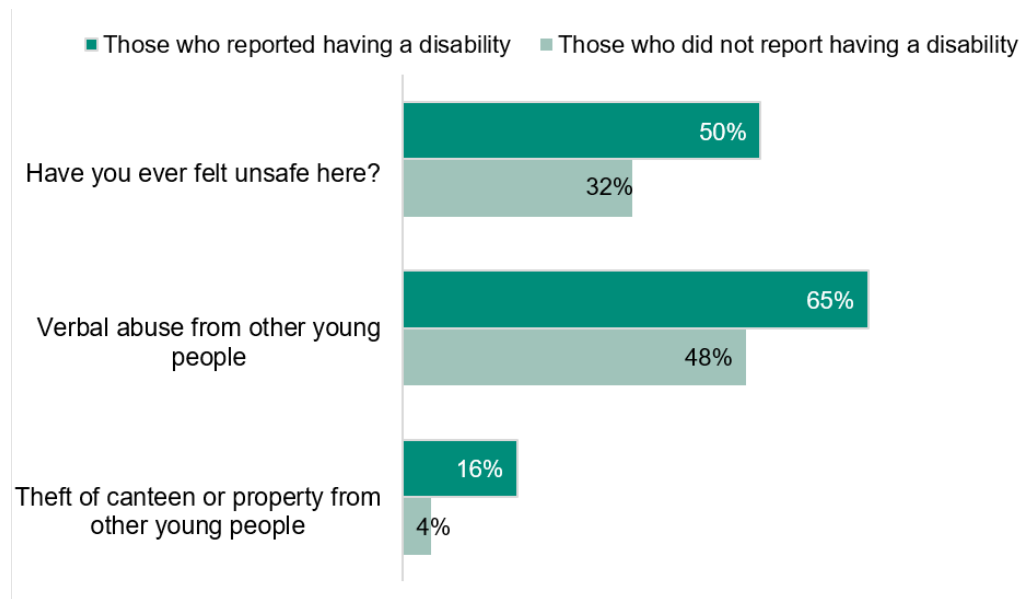
Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

Fair treatment and inclusion

- 3.32 While most groups of children reported similarly about their treatment, those who had a disability were notably less positive than their peers without a disability.
- 3.33 Children who reported having a disability were more likely to be white and from a Traveller community than those who did not, which suggested either a concentration of need in those groups or different rates of reporting in the population. Our inspections identified that these disabilities were much more likely to be learning difficulties, mental health conditions or issues relating to neurodivergence than physical disabilities, which remained rare among children in custody. Children who reported a disability were also more likely to report having a drug problem when they arrived in custody.
- 3.34 Children with a disability had very poor perceptions of safety. Half said they had felt unsafe, with 65% reporting having been the victim of verbal abuse and 16% having experienced their property being stolen.
- 3.35 These children were also less likely than their peers to report receiving at least two hours out of their cell on weekdays.

Figure 16: Children who reported a disability were more likely to feel unsafe and suffer verbal abuse of theft than those who did not report a disability

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



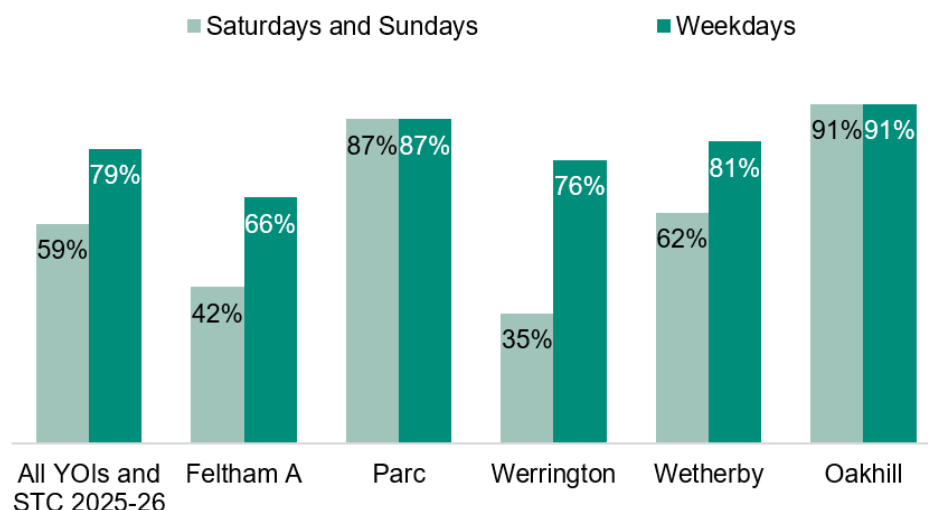
Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

3.36 The findings are important because they suggest that focusing resources towards those with a disability would have a sizeable impact on perceptions of safety across the system.

Time out of cell improving but education not good enough

Figure 17: Children at some establishments reported much less time out of their room on weekends compared with weekdays than at other children's establishments

Proportion of children reporting more than two hours out of their room a day, YOIs and STC in England and Wales

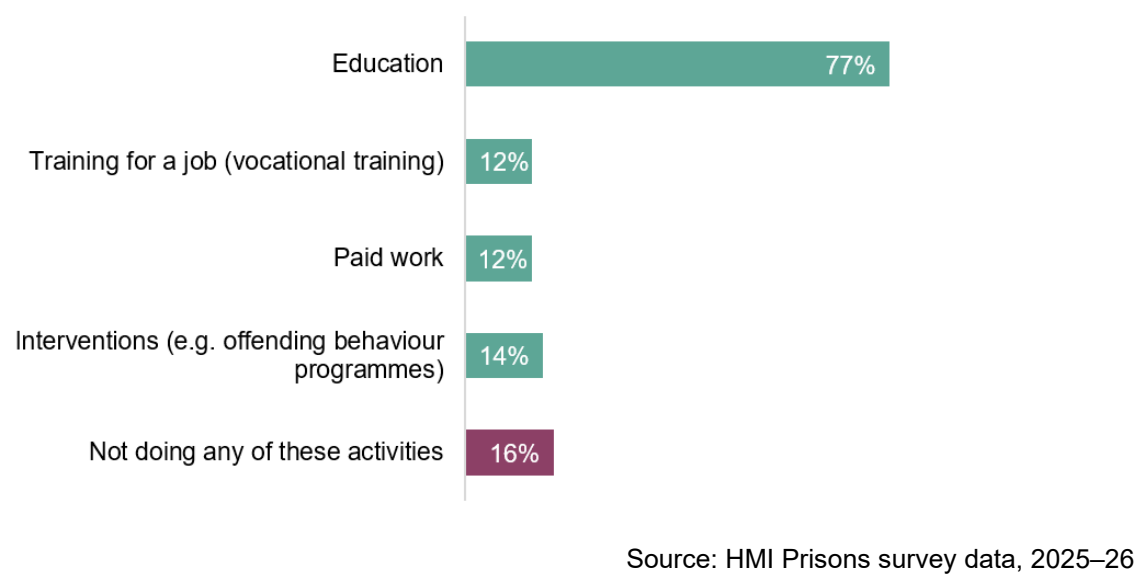


Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

- 3.37 Fewer children reported receiving less than two hours out of cell on weekdays or during the week than last year. However, the average time out of cell at Feltham and Werrington remained poor, at less than four hours a day.
- 3.38 Time out of cell was best at Oakhill, where children told us they could consistently have up to 13 hours a day out of their room and had good access to a range of activities, including a film club and hair and beauty sessions in the evenings and at weekends.
- 3.39 The governor at Wetherby had been creative in the face of poor education provision, focusing on improving work and vocational training. This had improved the average time out of cell to five hours and 20 minutes on weekdays and three hours and 43 minutes at weekends. However, these averages masked substantial variation. Children taking part in the new employment opportunities could get 11.5 hours a day out of their cell during the week, while those subject to rule 49 (segregation from the main population) received an average of just over two hours.
- 3.40 Time out of cell at the weekend, and for many on a Friday, differed, with often less time out of cell or access to activities such as the gym. Only 59% said they could spend more than two hours out of their cell at the weekend. However, children at Oakhill were consistently unlocked and able to attend activities at the weekend.

- 3.41 Children at Parc were also able to access a wider range of enrichment activities with each child receiving 12 hours of activity a week.
- 3.42 The fundamental problem in purposeful activity was the quality of education, skills and work. This was only judged to be good enough at Parc and was inadequate at all three English YOIs. Across the estate 16% of children reported that they were not doing any education, work or offending behaviour interventions and many more did not receive enough contact time to make progress.

Figure 18: A higher percentage of children reported doing education than other activities
YOIs and STC in England and Wales



- 3.43 At Werrington, leaders had not improved education, skills and work since the previous inspection. As a result, far too many children were leaving having not learned or achieved anything that would improve their prospects on release.

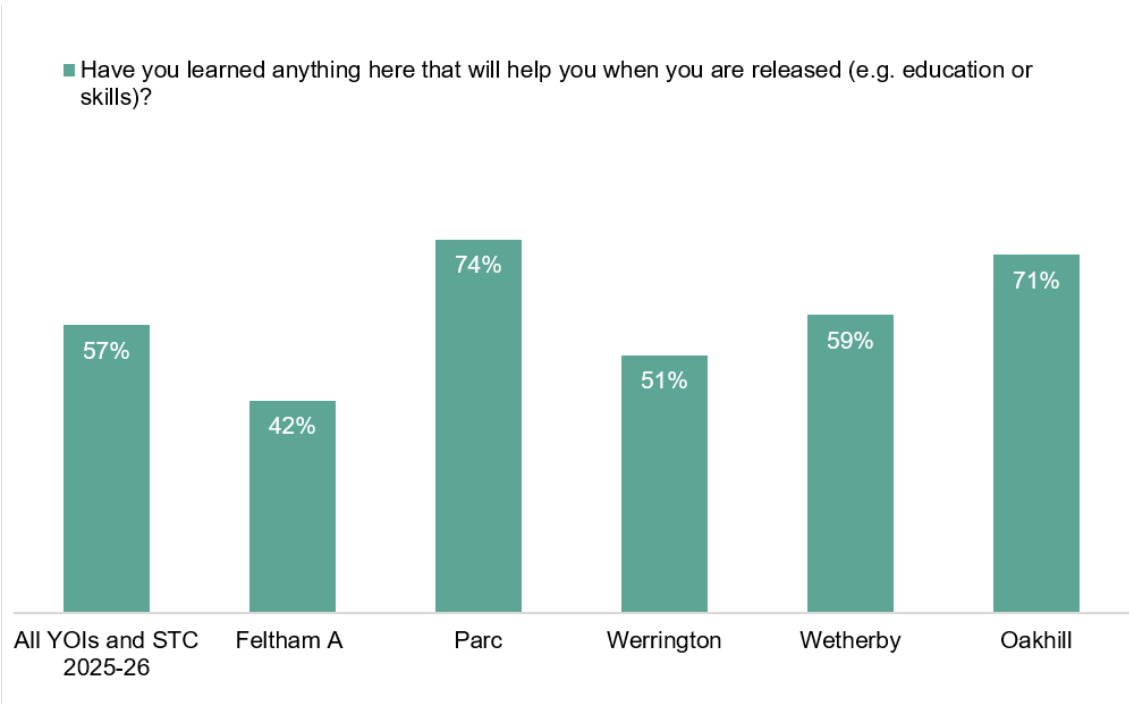
“Make education a top priority and stop taking people out of education for no reason. A lot more time out of cell.”

Child at Werrington

- 3.44 The situation was similar at Feltham where problems with behaviour management and violence meant children did not receive sufficient education to meet either their entitlement or need. Attendance at lessons was very low and punctuality was poor. As a result, most children received only half of the allotted time in lessons, and some even less.
- 3.45 Even at Oakhill, where children were unlocked and attended education, the curriculum was too narrow to meet their needs. This prevented younger children from accessing many national curriculum subjects.

Figure 19: Children at Feltham were the least likely to report learning something that will help them on release

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



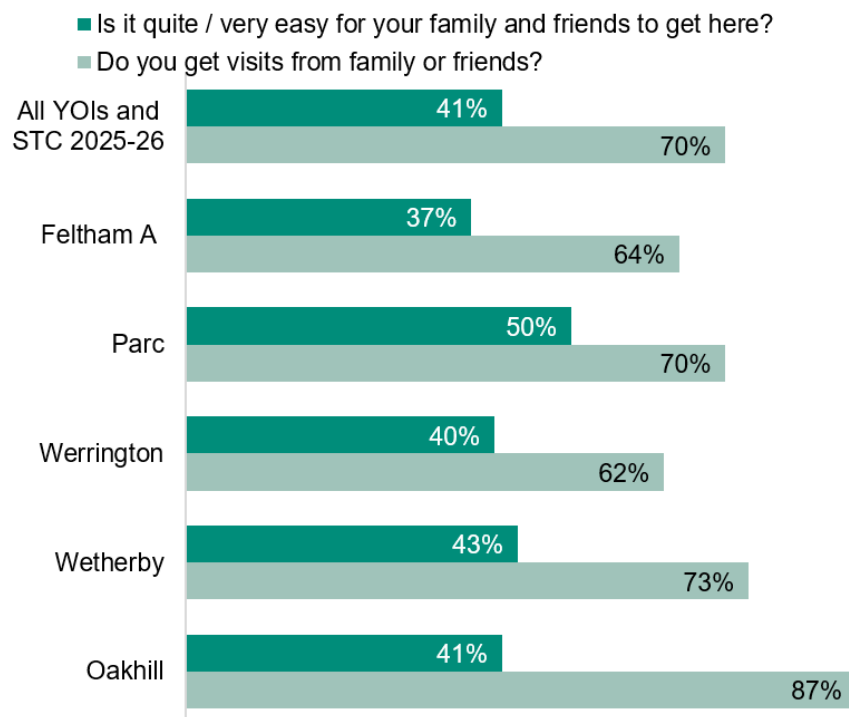
Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

3.46 Difficulties managing behaviour were at the heart of the problem. Children continued to be allocated to classes because of safety reasons rather than for their educational needs.

Family contact remained difficult for many children

Figure 20: Children at Oakhill were more likely to receive visits from family and friends than children at other establishments

YOIs and STCs in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

- 3.47 At Parc, children could contact their family and friends via the phone in their cell or a tablet. These were regularly used and appreciated by the children.
- 3.48 Accessing visits or secure video calls was more of a challenge. While children with family nearby told us they could regularly access in-person visits, just 41% of children in our surveys said it was quite or very easy for their family and friends to travel to the YOI or STC. In interviews children whose family lived further away told us they unable to have visits as frequently, and some did not get any at all. Only 70% of children received visits, and of those only 38% had them once a week or more.
- 3.49 At Werrington there was no place for families to wait before visits, and the visitors' centre at Wetherby was regularly closed.

‘Provision for visitors was inadequate. For example, the visitors’ centre was not always open and lacked facilities including hot drinks and food; this was unacceptable considering that most children’s homes were between 50 and 100 miles away.’

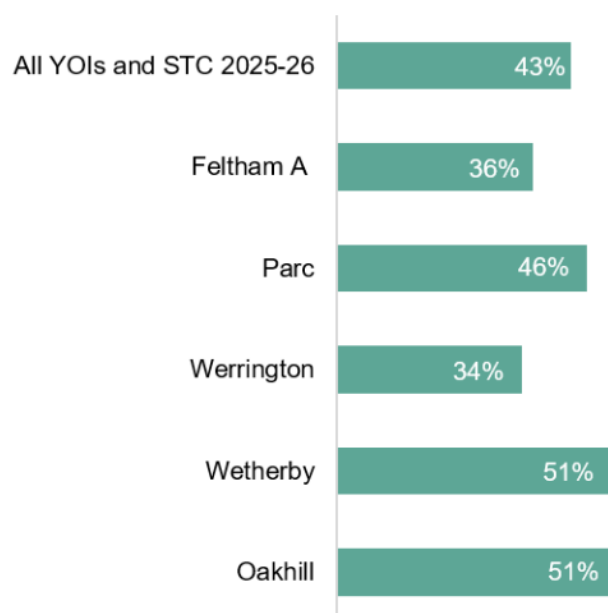
Wetherby inspection report

- 3.51 Access to visits was further frustrated by safety concerns. At some sites children could only access visits with their wing or a specific group of children. This reduced the number of visiting slots available and made it impossible for some children on remand to access their entitlement.
- 3.52 Children were aware of video visits but only 29% used them, with some children describing the arrangement process as frustrating. There was a clear link between the support offered to children and families to access these calls and the number of children who used them. At Parc the system was managed well and there was good take up, while at Feltham there was less awareness and the facilities went unused.

Resettlement needs frequently not addressed

Figure 21: Less than half of children reported that someone was helping them to prepare for leaving the establishment

YOIs and STC in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons survey data, 2025–26

- 3.53 In too many cases effective resettlement planning was undermined because accommodation was confirmed too close to the date of release. This was the main reason that only a minority of children had education or work arranged in the community before they were

released from custody. Less than half of the children at Wetherby had something to do when they were released, and at Feltham only 14% of children had education or work in place.

- 3.54 Children serving longer sentences generally move into the adult estate when they turn 18. We found planning for this transition was generally good in YOIs, provided that placements had been secured in time, but it ultimately depended on engagement from the receiving establishment. This was typically better in the adult prisons which received more children.
- 3.55 NEWTs (resettlement caseworkers) prepared children well for their move to the adult estate and often maintained contact after they had been transferred.
- 3.56 During the year the Youth Custody Service piloted a new approach to release on temporary licence (ROTL). Leaders at Wetherby had responded well and had expanded the availability of the scheme. In the year before our inspection ROTL had been used 407 times for 26 children.

‘ROTL was used creatively to support resettlement and community reintegration. There was strong evidence of multi-agency and interdepartmental discussion to determine suitability and identify the most appropriate placements. Records we reviewed showed sustained positive changes in children’s behaviour once they began attending ROTL, demonstrating its value as a progression tool.’

Wetherby inspection report

- 3.57 In contrast at Parc, which was also part of the pilot, ROTL had been used just four times in the previous year.

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	STC	Total STC	Total all children
		Feltham A	Parc	Werrington	Wetherby		Oakhill		
Gender	Male	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	88%	88%	97%
	Female	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12%	12%	2%
	Non-binary	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Other	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Age	14 or under	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	3%	3%	1%
	15	4%	3%	3%	7%	4%	9%	9%	5%
	16	15%	6%	18%	11%	13%	36%	36%	18%
	17	58%	79%	55%	55%	59%	43%	43%	56%
	18 or over	22%	12%	23%	27%	23%	9%	9%	20%

Ethnicity	White	27%	61%	36%	44%	39%	28%	28%	37%
	Mixed	18%	15%	26%	17%	20%	21%	21%	20%
	Asian	37%	9%	23%	21%	25%	33%	33%	26%
	Black	13%	6%	14%	9%	11%	9%	9%	11%
	Arab	4%	0%	1%	5%	3%	4%	4%	3%
	Other	1%	9%	0%	3%	2%	5%	5%	3%
Traveller	Yes	6%	16%	5%	5%	7%	5%	5%	7%
	No	94%	84%	95%	95%	93%	95%	95%	93%
Religion	No religion	19%	45%	23%	25%	25%	19%	19%	24%
	Christian	41%	29%	30%	41%	36%	33%	33%	36%
	Buddhist	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%
	Hindu	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	2%	1%
	Jewish	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Muslim	40%	26%	48%	30%	37%	43%	43%	38%
	Sikh	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%
	Other	0%	0%	0%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%

Health problems	Yes	54%	47%	39%	56%	49%	42%	42%	48%
	No	46%	53%	61%	44%	51%	58%	58%	52%
Disability	Yes	39%	55%	31%	44%	40%	27%	27%	38%
	No	61%	45%	69%	56%	60%	73%	73%	63%
Been cared for in local authority	Yes	71%	91%	61%	56%	66%	56%	56%	64%
	No	29%	9%	39%	44%	34%	44%	44%	36%
Have children	Yes	4%	19%	4%	9%	8%	4%	4%	7%
	No	96%	81%	96%	91%	92%	96%	96%	93%

Appendix II Methodology

Administering the survey

At the time of the survey, researchers from HMI Prisons attempted to invite all children in Oakhill Secure Training Centre (STC) and each 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, 96% of children detained in YOIs and the STC 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

For 2025–26 surveys, as shown in Table 1, questionnaires were completed (either through self-completion or via an interview) and returned by 86% of children in the available sample (representing 82% of the children who were resident in the establishment at the time of the survey). The response rate ranged from 79% at Wetherby & Keppel to 86% at Werrington.

Table 1: Sample sizes and response rates across the STC and YOIs during 2025–26

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

YOI	Date of survey	Population on survey date	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of returned questionnaires	Response rate
Feltham A	20 May 2025	93	90	72	80%
Parc	9 March 2026	39	38	33	87%
Werrington	15 April 2025	81	79	76	96%
Wetherby & Keppel	27 October 2025	97	96	76	79%
YOI Total		310	303	257	85%

STC	Date of survey	Population on survey date	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of returned questionnaires	Response rate
Oakhill	17 June 2025	72	64	58	91%
YOI and STC total		382	367	315	86%

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 and STC sample of 315 completed questionnaires, 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 the STC and all YOIs), additional analyses are reported:

- a comparison of survey responses in 2025–26 with those in 2024–25
- a comparison between survey responses received from children in the STC and YOIs
- responses from children in the STC and each YOI as well as the overall response from children in that type of custody setting
- statistical comparisons between different sub-groups within the 2025–26 responses, where numbers allowed. Highlighting is used in tables to show where there are statistically significant differences.

Inspection interviews

As part of each full inspection of YOIs and the STC HMI Prisons researchers conduct qualitative interviews with up to 10 children to gain further insight into topics of interest to the inspection team. Children are selected for interview based on their personal characteristics, experiences within the establishment, or other criteria which is decided depending on the topics being covered in the interviews.

The interview topics are determined by the findings from the survey analysis and other observations from the pre-inspection visit. The interview findings are used alongside the survey findings and other information gathered during the inspection to inform overall judgements.

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