



Targeted Prevention and Diversion: Evidence Pack

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Summary

Targeted prevention and diversion are not “types” of intervention but rather a process through which interventions and packages of support are delivered. These approaches link together police, Youth Justice Services (YJSs) and other partners to ensure proportionate, timely and needs-led responses.

- **The best available evidence suggests diverting children from formal criminal justice system offers significant benefits by avoiding stigma and reducing reoffending.** [The Youth Endowment Fund \(YEF\) Toolkit](#) suggests that informal pre-court diversion can reduce reoffending by around 30%, while formal pre-court diversion may reduce violence by 25% and reoffending by 14%.^{1,2} However, the evidence base is currently limited and is based predominantly on US studies and older reviews, highlighting the need for further UK-based evaluation.
- **Recent clarification from the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) confirms that police recorded outcomes are moving away from the language of “positive outcomes” and will instead be grouped as Solved, Resolved and Unresolved.** Youth cautions sit within Solved, while diversionary activity, deferred cautions and deferred prosecutions sit within Resolved. The Home Office has confirmed that both Solved and Resolved are legitimate and acceptable outcomes, with performance focus on reducing Unresolved outcomes. This is an important development because it reinforces the legitimacy of diversion and out-of-court resolutions (OOCRs) within national police performance frameworks.
- **Effective prevention and diversion are not solely about reducing involvement in the formal justice system, but should also focus on how children are identified, referred, assessed and connected to suitable support that meets their needs.** Recent evidence highlights the importance of clear and equitable eligibility, early YJS involvement, timely decision-making and prompt access to proportionate support.³ Diversion works best when it is child-centred, quick, fair and consistent, with good relationships between police, YJSs, children and their families.
- **Effective diversion considers the needs and safety of victims alongside those of the child. Recent inspection evidence found services using creative and effective approaches to engage victims, however challenges remained around inconsistent victim contact, consideration of restorative approaches and recognition of child victims.**³ Practice challenges include unclear responsibility for victim engagement, delays in contacting victims, limited restorative provision and variation in how victims’ views are considered in decision making. There is limited evidence on whether victims feel safer or better-informed following diversion, whether restorative approaches reduce repeat victimisation, how experiences and outcomes differ for child and adult victims, and what outcomes are achieved when victims do not engage or restorative activity is considered unsuitable.

¹ Youth Endowment Fund (2026). Formal pre-court diversion. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/formal-pre-court-diversion/>

² Youth Endowment Fund (2026). Informal pre-court diversion. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/informal-pre-court-diversion/>

³ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. Available from: <https://hmi-probation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/the-effectiveness-of-diverting-children-from-the-criminal-justice-system-meeting-needs-ensuring-safety-and-preventing-reoffending/>

- **There has been an increasing proportion of children diverted over the past decade, although data has only recently been available to start to monitor this effectively.** In 2026, the YJB published diversionary outcomes data for the first time, and found that in the year ending December 2025, **43% of cases involving YJS were resolved without a formal court outcome.** These statistics provide a new but partial picture of recorded diversionary outcomes involving YJSs. They do not show the nature or quality of the support provided, whether children completed it, or whether diversion caused better outcomes. They also do not report on diversionary outcomes where the YJS was not involved.⁴
- **However, OOCR practice remains inconsistent across areas, creating a postcode lottery in diversion decisions, referral processes and access to support.** Delays in referral, weak partnership working, unmet communication and additional needs, limited service availability, and persistent racial disparities can affect children's access to timely and effective diversion.^{5,6,7}
- **Approaches such as cognitive behavioural therapy, mentoring, skills training and structured community activities have been shown to improve wellbeing and reduce offending when delivered promptly and positively.** However, the strength of evidence for other interventions and offences varies, and further evaluations are needed to establish their effectiveness in supporting children and the best approaches to delivery to achieve effective outcomes.⁸

⁴ Youth Justice Board (2026). The use of diversionary outcomes with youth justice service involvement. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-use-of-diversionary-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2025/the-use-of-diversionary-outcomes-with-youth-justice-service-involvement>

⁵ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/the-effectiveness-of-diverting-children-from-the-criminal-justice-system-meeting-needs-ensuring-safety-and-preventing-reoffending/>

⁶ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Understanding referral pathways and diversionary support for children within the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/understanding-referral-pathways-and-diversionary-support-for-children-within-the-criminal-justice-system-in-england-and-wales/>

⁷ Brodie, I. et al. (2025). Exploring racial disparity in diversion from the youth justice system. Available from: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Exploring-racial-disparity-in-diversion-from-the-Youth-Justice-System.pdf>

⁸ Youth Endowment Fund (2026). Violence Prevention Toolkit. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/>

What is prevention?

Prevention schemes are local partnership approaches developed between services aimed at providing early and/or targeted prevention to support children (and their parents/carers) who may be displaying behaviour associated with offending, antisocial behaviour or vulnerability.⁹ Prevention is broadly considered in two categories:

Early Prevention is support for children (with no linked offence) to address unmet needs / welfare concerns, usually delivered by mainstream and voluntary sector services.¹⁰ For the purpose of this evidence pack early prevention and associated interventions will not be included.

Targeted Prevention is specialist support for children who have had some contact with criminal justice but are not currently being supported through diversion, an out of court resolution or statutory order (this could include children who have had previous YJS intervention).¹⁰

Prevention programmes are voluntary, and both the child and their parents/carers must agree with the approach before the child can be referred. Typically, a child will be identified by an agency such as the school, the YJS, the police or health care. Typical approaches include mentoring, family support, social and emotional skills training, and access to positive community activities.

How this support is organised varies locally. Some YJSs deliver prevention directly, while others work with or through Early Help and wider children's services. Research on YJS integration suggests these arrangements can help children access support and provide continuity where needs remain, but it did not identify one preferred organisational model.¹¹

The Turnaround programme is an early intervention programme, launched in December 2022, led by the Ministry of Justice. The programme provides multi-year funding to YJSs across England and Wales, enabling them to intervene earlier and improve outcomes for children on the cusp of entering the youth justice system.

An independent process and implementation evaluation found that multi-agency allocation meetings, child-focused assessments and flexible funding supported delivery. It also identified challenges including staffing pressures, eligibility criteria and potential duplication with existing prevention and early intervention services. The evaluation showed encouraging outcomes, with only 7% of children receiving a caution of conviction a year after completing a Turnaround intervention. However, the evaluation did not include a comparison group, so it cannot establish whether Turnaround caused reductions in offending or improvements in other outcomes.¹²

⁹ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2023). Youth Justice – specific types of delivery. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-research/evidence-base-youth-justice/specific-types-of-delivery/prevention/>

¹⁰ Youth Justice Board. (2021). Definitions of Prevention and Diversion. Available from: https://vjresourcehub.uk/wp-content/uploads/media/Definitions_for_Prevention_and_Diversion_YJB_2021.pdf

¹¹ Youth Justice Board (2024). Integration in youth justice services in England and Wales. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66a9f80ca3c2a28abb50da2d/Integration_in_youth_justice_services_print_version.pdf

¹² Ministry of Justice (2026). Turnaround Programme – Independent process and implementation evaluation. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697a12281d8c53a85d6bd3c6/Turnaround_evaluation_report_final.pdf

Available research and local evaluations suggest that timely, relationship-based early help, particularly when linked to education, family and community support, can improve school attendance, wellbeing and engagement, which are key protective factors against offending.^{13,14}

Evidence gap: Few UK studies of prevention programmes include a comparison group or follow children over time, and national data on participation in prevention programmes are not currently available. It is therefore difficult to establish whether improvements or the absence of further offending result from the support provided, or to identify which approaches work best for different children.

What is diversion?

Diversion is a process for resolving a linked offence without prosecution in court. It supports accountability, helps repair harm, and prevents further offending, while avoiding the stigmatising impact and harms of criminalisation.^{15,16}

The term **out-of-court resolution (OOCR)** refers to the different ways of resolving a situation without going to court. They can be either **informal (non-statutory)** or **formal (statutory)** and do not involve a decision made through a court process. Both aim to keep the child away from formal court proceedings and support a meaningful, proportionate resolution.^{17,18} For more information on the types of out-of-court resolution please consult the [Case management guidance - How to use out-of-court resolutions - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

The [YEF's Diversion Practice Guidance](#) identifies seven areas for effective delivery: a supportive culture towards diversion, clear and equitable eligibility, reduced use of police custody, robust joint decision-making, swift access to support, clear arrangements for reviewing and closing cases, and ongoing scrutiny of delivery.¹⁹

Three key national reviews by HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025), the Youth Endowment Fund (2025), and the Centre for Justice Innovation (2024) highlight the same point: Diversion works best when it is child-centred, quick, fair and consistent, with good relationships between police, YJSs, children and their families.^{20,21,22}

¹³ Webb, C. (2021). In Defence of Ordinary Help: Estimating the effect of Early Help/Family Support Spending on Children in Need Rates in England using ALT-SR. *Journal of social policy*. Available from: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-social-policy/article/abs/in-defence-of-ordinary-help-estimating-the-effect-of-early-helpfamily-support-spending-on-children-in-need-rates-in-england-using-altsr/971483141DC8841E312008A5126C7704>

¹⁴ Department for Education (2023). The role of systems of support in serious youth violence: evidence and gaps. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/649ac6ecf90109000c818883/The_role_of_systems_of_support_in_serious_youth_violence_-_evidence_and_gaps_June_2023.pdf

¹⁵ McAra, L. and McVie, S. (2022). Causes and impact of offending and criminal justice pathways: follow up of the Edinburgh study cohort at age 35. Available from: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Causes-and-Impact-of-Offending-and-Criminal-Justice-Pathways.pdf>

¹⁶ Youth Justice Board (2025). Applying the Child First framework in youth justice services. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6853c3fb679778c74ec15e96/Applying_the_Child_First_framework_in_youth_justice_services.pdf

¹⁷ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Formal pre-court diversion. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/formal-pre-court-diversion/>

¹⁸ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Informal pre-court diversion. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/informal-pre-court-diversion/>

¹⁹ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Diversion practice guidance. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/YEF_Diversion_Practice_Guidance_FINAL.pdf

²⁰ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). Joint inspection finds a "fragmented and inconsistent" system for children receiving out-of-court disposals. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/joint-inspection-finds-a-fragmented-and-inconsistent-system-for-children-receiving-out-of-court-disposals/>

²¹ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Diversion practice guidance. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/YEF_Diversion_Practice_Guidance_FINAL.pdf

²² Centre for Justice Innovation. (2024). 'Valuing Youth Diversion: A toolkit for practitioners'. Available from: https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024/cji_vyd_6thed.pdf

Evidence gap: It remains unclear how far positive outcomes from diversion result from avoiding formal system contact, the support provided alongside diversion, or both. There is also limited evidence on which children benefit from structured intervention and when minimal or no further intervention may be more proportionate.

Victims and restorative approaches

National guidance recognises victim engagement as part of effective diversion and OOCR. The Victims' Code gives victims the right to have their views sought and considered when an OOCR is being considered, and to be informed of the outcome and the reasons for it. The National Police Chief Council and YJB guidance similarly emphasises seeking and recording victims' views where possible, while making clear that the final decision does not depend on victim consent and should not be unduly delayed where contact cannot be made.

Restorative approaches are related to, but distinct from, consultation on the outcome. Victims of offences should be offered information about restorative justice, which can include indirect communication, reparation or face-to-face activity. Participation is voluntary and must be assessed as safe and appropriate.

The 2025 joint inspection found considerable variation in whether victims were contacted early enough to inform decisions, kept updated or offered meaningful restorative opportunities. It also identified weaknesses in considering victim safety where victims did not engage and in recognising the distinct needs of child victims.⁵

Evidence gap: Evidence remains limited on whether victims feel informed, involved and safe following diversion, whether their support needs are met, and whether restorative approaches improve wellbeing or reduce repeat victimisation.

There is also little evidence on how diversion manages continuing safety concerns in cases involving greater harm or where safety concerns extend beyond the end of the resolution.

Evidence is particularly limited for child victims, including those affected by violence, exploitation or abuse, victims who cannot be contacted or decline involvement, and cases where restorative activity is not safe or appropriate.

Types of Out-of-Court Resolutions

	Resolution	Typical conditions / What it entails	Duration	Admission of guilt required?	Enters youth justice system?
Formal OOCR	<u>Youth Caution (Outcome 2)</u>	Formal police caution. May be accompanied by assessment and voluntary intervention from the YJS. Recorded on police systems.	No fixed intervention period; caution is administered once.	Yes , the child must admit the offence and there must be sufficient evidence to charge.	Yes
	<u>Youth Conditional Caution (Outcome 2)</u>	Formal caution with conditions attached (e.g., reparation, restorative justice, educational or rehabilitative activities). Failure to comply may lead to prosecution for the original offence.	Conditions are completed within a specified period set as part of the caution.	Yes , the child must admit the offence and agree to the conditions.	Yes
Informal OOCR	<u>Community Resolution (Outcome 8)</u>	Lowest-level disposal. May involve apology, reparation, restorative activity, community-based intervention or referral to support services.	Usually completed immediately or over a short, agreed period.	Usually acceptance of responsibility is expected, though it is not a formal admission of guilt in the same way as a caution.	No
	<u>Deferred Prosecution (Outcome 23)</u> – Introduced from April 2026	A prosecution decision is deferred while the child completes an agreed diversionary, educational, restorative or support intervention. If the child successfully completes the intervention, no further action is taken. If they fail to engage, the prosecution proceeds. Applied differently for knife offences, please see: <u>Government guidance for child knife possession offences</u>	Time-limited and completed within a locally agreed period.	No formal admission or acceptance of responsibility required. May be used where a child provides a no comment interview, partial accounts or does not admit the offence, but not where the child explicitly denies the offence.	No

	Resolution	Typical conditions / What it entails	Duration	Admission of guilt required?	Enters youth justice system?
Informal OOCR	<u>Deferred Caution (Outcome 22)</u>	Used where diversionary, educational, restorative or support activity has been undertaken, or is agreed, and it is not in the public interest to take formal action. This can be used for lower-level offences without an admission of responsibility, or where diversionary activity is completed as part of a deferred caution approach. No further action is then taken.	Time-limited and completed within a locally agreed period.	Usually acceptance of responsibility is required for participation, but prosecution/caution is deferred while diversionary activity is completed.	No
	<u>No Further Action (Outcome 21)</u>	Used where further investigation could provide sufficient evidence, but pursuing the case is not in the public interest.	Not applicable	No formal admission or acceptance of responsibility required.	No
	No Further Action (Outcome 20)	Used where another agency has taken appropriate action and the victim is aware of that action.	Not applicable	No formal admission required.	No

Evidence gap: Outcome 22 and the newly introduced Outcome 23 provide routes to diversion where a child has not made a formal admission. However, their effects on access, engagement, disparities and outcomes have not yet been evaluated nationally.

Key roles in the delivery of diversion and OOCR

Local areas use different arrangements to make diversion decisions, including police and YJS meetings and wider multi-agency panels. Recent inspection evidence did not identify one consistently superior model. Important factors were timely and relevant information, clear accountability, an escalation route where professionals disagree, and prompt access to suitable support.²³

Evidence gap: Research has not established whether any particular organisational or decision-making model produces better outcomes. There is also limited comparative evidence on the costs, workforce requirements and sustainability of different approaches, including services developed through time-limited funding.



Police role

- Police play a key role in OOCR decision-making, assessing the offence, available evidence and wider public interest considerations. Wherever possible, decisions should be informed through joint decision-making arrangements with the YJS.²⁴
- Police should refer potentially eligible children to the YJS promptly and, wherever possible, before the final outcome is selected. This enables information from the child, family and partner agencies to inform the decision.
- The **Child Gravity Matrix (CGM)** supports proportionate decision-making. The seriousness of the offence should be assessed using the CGM, a structured national tool jointly developed by National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) with support of the YJB and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), alongside consideration of:
 - Whether the child admits responsibility
 - The evidence available
 - Aggravating and mitigating factors
 - The child's previous history
 - Whether prosecution is in the public interest



YJS role

- YJS practitioners use the **Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool (PDAT)** to assess the child and identify factors to support positive outcomes for the child such as inclusion in education and access to health provision, identify safety and well-being concerns, identify the child's strengths, interests, activities, and support networks which can help them to develop a pro-social identity. This culminates in the creation of a plan with the child.
- The YJB commissioned an independent process evaluation of the implementation of the PDAT. The research found the PDAT is helping practitioners deliver more strengths-based, child-friendly assessments. Children reported feeling listened to, supported and

²³HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. Available from: <https://hmi-probation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/the-effectiveness-of-diverting-children-from-the-criminal-justice-system-meeting-needs-ensuring-safety-and-preventing-reoffending/>

²⁴ Youth Justice Legal Centre (2025). Out of court disposals legal guide. Available from: <https://yjlc.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/2025-06/YJLC-Guide-Out%20of%20Court%20Disposals-11JUNE25.pdf>

actively involved in shaping their Plans. However, implementation has varied across YJSs, influenced by leadership, culture and training.²⁵

- YJS practitioners plan, refer to and / or deliver proportionate, supportive activities, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mentoring or restorative work, and ensure the child's voice and welfare are central.²⁶
- HMIP emphasises that high-quality YJS work includes early involvement, clear assessment, and child-and-family engagement.²⁷

Evidence gap: The PDAT is intended to support more consistent assessment and recording, but its effects on proportionality, children's participation, decision-making and outcomes have not yet been evaluated.



Partner and community role

- Schools, health, and voluntary partners contribute to assessment and delivery of support (e.g. counselling, sports, family work).
- Strong multi-agency collaboration ensures that diversion leads to positive outcomes rather than administrative disposal.

Challenges with OOCRs and delivery

Despite evidence of benefit, recent Joint Inspections, findings from the YJB's performance oversight, and academic research have shown that OOCR practice remains inconsistent across England and Wales.

Inconsistent practice and recording challenges

- Schemes vary between local areas, including eligibility criteria, how quickly referrals happen, and whether YJSs are consulted.²⁸
- Inconsistent use of the Child Gravity Matrix can lead to variation in decision-making and outcomes for children.²⁸
- Lack of a nationally consistent standard creates unfairness between areas, where similar cases are managed differently depending on location.²⁸
- There is significant inconsistency in how Outcome 22 is used across police forces and it continues to be widely perceived as a "negative" or purely administrative outcome, rather than a constructive intervention. Recent clarification from NPCC, agreed with the Home Office and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), helps address this by placing diversionary activity, deferred cautions and deferred prosecutions within the "Resolved" category of police recorded outcomes. This

²⁵ Youth Justice Board (2026). Evaluating the implementation of the Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool. Available from: [Evaluating the implementation of the Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool - GOV.UK](#)

²⁶ Youth Justice Board (2024). Case Management Guidance. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/case-management-guidance>

²⁷ HM Inspectorate of Probation. Joint inspection finds a "fragmented and inconsistent" system for children receiving out-of-court disposals. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/joint-inspection-finds-a-fragmented-and-inconsistent-system-for-children-receiving-out-of-court-disposals/>

²⁸ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/the-effectiveness-of-diverting-children-from-the-criminal-justice-system-meeting-needs-ensuring-safety-and-preventing-reoffending/>

confirms that these are legitimate and acceptable outcomes, rather than being viewed less favourably than sanction-based disposals.

Delays in referral

- Long delays between arrest and intervention weaken the impact and children may lose motivation.²⁹
- Recent research found that unclear referral processes, limited police awareness and poor-quality referral information could delay YJS involvement and access to support. Dedicated liaison roles, shared referral forms and feedback between the police and YJS helped in some areas.³⁰

Weak joint working

- In some areas diversion decisions remain largely police-led, with YJS involvement occurring too late to meaningfully shape decision-making.³¹
- Joint working can depend too heavily on individual professional relationships rather than established protocols. This makes arrangements vulnerable to staff turnover and can lead to gaps in information-sharing, support or exit planning.³¹
- Where several services are involved, unclear responsibility can result in duplicated assessments, conflicting plans or delays in connecting the child to support.³¹
- Effective panels should include police, YJS, education, health and social care from the start.³²

Evidence gap: Children considered for prevention or diversion may also be victims of criminal or sexual exploitation, creating an overlap between safeguarding and justice responses. Evidence is limited on how these responses are aligned in practice, which prevention and diversion approaches are effective for children affected by exploitation, and whether diversion avoids unnecessary criminalisation while ensuring that safeguarding needs are addressed.

Racial disparities

- Black and minority ethnic children still face barriers to diversion, including over-policing, negative interactions with police, advice to give 'no comment' interviews that restrict access to diversionary options, and lack of attention to race, culture and identity in assessments and decision-making processes.³³

²⁹ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/the-effectiveness-of-diverting-children-from-the-criminal-justice-system-meeting-needs-ensuring-safety-and-preventing-reoffending/>

³⁰ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Understanding referral pathways and diversionary support for children within the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/understanding-referral-pathways-and-diversionary-support-for-children-within-the-criminal-justice-system-in-england-and-wales/>

³¹ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/the-effectiveness-of-diverting-children-from-the-criminal-justice-system-meeting-needs-ensuring-safety-and-preventing-reoffending/>

³² Youth Justice Board (2024). Case Management Guidance. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/case-management-guidance>

³³ Brodie, I. et al. (2025). Exploring racial disparity in diversion from the youth justice system. Available from: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Exploring-racial-disparity-in-diversion-from-the-Youth-Justice-System.pdf>

- Qualitative research indicates that some Black boys are excluded from diversionary outcomes because they are less likely to admit responsibility for an offence, often linked to broader experiences of distrust towards the police and other authorities.³⁴

Evidence gap: Children considered for prevention or diversion may also be victims of criminal or sexual exploitation, creating an overlap between safeguarding and justice responses. Evidence on equitable access and outcomes remains limited. National statistics identify differences by ethnicity, age, sex and geography but cannot establish how far these reflect offence type, previous contact, local decision-making or other factors. Evidence is particularly limited by socioeconomic circumstances, care experience, education status, place of residence and the interaction between different characteristics.

Accessibility and communication

- The Centre for Justice Innovation argue **“One of the clearest remaining barriers is the requirement for a child to admit the offence before accessing diversion”**, preventing otherwise suitable cases from being resolved out of court.³⁵
 - This requirement can exacerbate racial and systemic inequalities, particularly for children with low trust in the justice system or SEND/communication needs.
 - New Zealand’s ‘no contest model’ has been labelled a learning opportunity for England and Wales through the introduction of Outcome 23, providing opportunities to widen access to diversion, dismantle barriers that prevent eligible cases from being diverted, and reduce unnecessary progression into the formal justice system, all without compromising public satisfaction or victim satisfaction.³⁶
- Communication and neurodevelopmental needs are not always identified before diversion decisions are made. Behaviour linked to Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND), Additional Learning Needs (ALN), trauma or speech and language needs may be interpreted as unwillingness to engage.³⁷

Evidence gap: Further evidence on how well SEND/ALN and communication needs are identified before decisions are made, how interventions are adapted and whether children receive appropriate support from liaison and diversion services, speech and language therapists and appropriate adults is required.

- Children need accessible explanations of the process, the outcome and whether the intervention is voluntary or mandatory. Assessment and support should be adapted to enable meaningful participation.³⁸

³⁴ Centre for Justice Innovation (2021). Equal diversion? Racial disproportionality in youth diversion. Available from: https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2021/CJI_Exploring-disproportionality.pdf

³⁵ Centre for Justice Innovation (2026). Beyond admission: could Outcome 22 & 23 become England and Wales’ version of “no contest”? Available from: <https://justiceinnovation.org/articles/beyond-admission-could-outcome-22-23-become-england-and-wales-version-no-contest>

³⁶ Centre for Justice Innovation (2026). Beyond the milestone in youth justice: Learning from New Zealand. Available from: https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2026/beyond_the_milestone_in_youth_justice_learning_from_new_zealand.pdf

³⁷ Centre for Justice Innovation (2024). How is youth diversion working for children with special educational needs and disabilities? Available from: https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024/send_youth_diversion.pdf

³⁸ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/the-effectiveness-of-diverting-children-from-the-criminal-justice-system-meeting-needs-ensuring-safety-and-preventing-reoffending/>

Evidence gap: We currently have limited understanding of how requirements to admit an offence or accept responsibility affect access to diversion and contribute to disparities. This should include the influence of trust in the police, legal advice, appropriate adults and children's communication or neurodevelopmental needs.

Limited support availability

- Stretched support services can limit access to timely help, leaving children's needs unmet by the end of the OOCR process.³⁹
- Recent research identified particular difficulties accessing education, emotional and mental health, neurodevelopmental and family support within the timescales required for diversion.⁴⁰

Monitoring and data gaps

- Few areas track outcomes or engagement consistently.⁴¹
- The new YJB Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool will help standardise this.⁴²

³⁹ HM Inspectorate of Probation. Joint inspection finds a "fragmented and inconsistent" system for children receiving out-of-court disposals. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/joint-inspection-finds-a-fragmented-and-inconsistent-system-for-children-receiving-out-of-court-disposals/>

⁴⁰ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). Joint inspection finds a "fragmented and inconsistent" system for children receiving out-of-court disposals. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/joint-inspection-finds-a-fragmented-and-inconsistent-system-for-children-receiving-out-of-court-disposals/>

⁴¹ Brodie, I. et al. (2025). Exploring racial disparity in diversion from the youth justice system. Available from: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Exploring-racial-disparity-in-diversion-from-the-Youth-Justice-System.pdf>

⁴² Youth Justice Board (2025). YJB's Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/prevention-and-diversion-assessment-tool/>

Trends and key data

Use of diversionary outcomes with YJS involvement ⁴³

In the year ending December 2025, **43% of recorded outcomes involving a YJS were diversionary**, meaning they did not result in a caution or court sentence. That figure is likely to be an underestimate. It does not include diversion delivered solely by the police or through wider local partnerships.

There were around 13,500 diversionary outcomes with YJS involvement. Of these:

- **45%** were Community Resolutions.
- **36%** were Outcome 22 disposals recorded as deferred prosecution or deferred caution.
- **15%** were NFA Outcome 22 disposals.
- **4%** were NFA Outcomes 20 or 21.

Evidence limitation: While these statistics provide valuable insight into how services prevent children from progressing further into the criminal justice system, they should be interpreted with caution. They present only a partial picture of diversionary activity across England and Wales, and, as this is a relatively new dataset, further validation and quality assurance work may still be required. The data also do not provide information on the support children received, the quality of that support, or whether it contributed to improved outcomes.

The YJB has begun collecting data on completion of out-of-court disposals through the new Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data, however this is still a new dataset undergoing quality improvement and is not currently published.^{44,45}

Differences between groups

Characteristic	Proportion receiving a diversionary outcome ⁴⁶
White children	53%
Black children	27%
Asian children	34%
Children aged 10 and 14	66%
Children aged 15 to 17	39%
Girls	65%
Boys	44%

⁴³ Youth Justice Board (2026). The use of diversionary outcomes with youth justice service involvement. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-use-of-diversionary-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2025/the-use-of-diversionary-outcomes-with-youth-justice-service-involvement>

⁴⁴ Youth Justice Board (2023). Key performance indicators for youth justice services, Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/key-performance-indicators-for-youth-justice-services>

⁴⁵ Youth Justice Board (2025). Quality and methodology information for new KPIs. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/quality-and-methodology-information-for-new-kpis>

⁴⁶ This table presents the number of children receiving a diversionary outcome as a proportion of children receiving diversionary outcomes, cautions and court sentences.

White children are twice as likely as Black children to be steered away from the justice system. This pattern was similar for Asian children and Mixed ethnicity children, who were also more likely to receive a caution or court sentence than a diversionary outcome. However, the data cannot establish why these differences occur. They may reflect differences in offence type, previous offending, local practice or geography, as well as other barriers to accessing diversion.

Evidence gap: A breakdown by Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) for England or Additional Learning Needs (ALN) for Wales is also not provided. Qualitative research suggests that communication or neurodevelopmental needs may affect children's access to diversion. Difficulties understanding questions, recalling events or communicating under pressure can be misinterpreted as non-compliance, dishonesty or a lack of remorse. This may affect whether a child accepts responsibility or is considered suitable for diversion.

Geographic variation

The proportion of outcomes that were diversionary also varied considerably between areas:

- **63%** in Wales
- **58%** in the East Midlands
- **36%** in the West Midlands
- **17%** in London

These differences highlight variation in the use of diversionary outcomes with YJS involvement across countries and regions. This may reflect differences in local approaches to diversion, including the extent to which diversionary outcomes are delivered by YJS, police or other agencies, as well as differences in the types of offences being committed.

Evidence gap: More consistent definitions and recording are needed to distinguish targeted prevention, informal diversion, formal OOCRs, and the support delivered alongside them. Police and YJS systems do not routinely provide linked information on decisions made, assessments completed, interventions delivered, completion, repeat diversion, and subsequent offending. Data should also be linked, where lawful and proportionate, with education, health and social care outcomes.

Improved data would support analysis of timeliness, access, engagement, completion, longer-term outcomes, disparities, net-widening and cost-effectiveness. The joint inspection specifically identified these as priorities for future evaluation.⁴⁷

Adjusted analysis is also needed to understand how far differences in diversion outcomes reflect offence type, previous contact, local practice and decision-making. Recent London analysis found that ethnic and geographic differences remained after accounting for several characteristics, but its observational design could not identify all factors affecting decisions or establish causality.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2025). Joint inspection finds a "fragmented and inconsistent" system for children receiving out-of-court disposals. Available from: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/joint-inspection-finds-a-fragmented-and-inconsistent-system-for-children-receiving-out-of-court-disposals/>

⁴⁸ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Secondary data analysis of youth diversion in London. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/YEF-SDA-London-Diversion.pdf>

Longer term trends⁴⁹

Children cautioned or sentenced

In the year ending March 2025, around **13,300 children received a caution or sentence**. This was a decrease of 3% from the previous year and a decrease of 65% from the year ending March 2015.

This long-term downward trend has been a useful proxy measure for the number of children entering formal justice processes and the extent to which children may be supported through diversionary interventions, in the absence of routinely collected diversion data up until the most recent year. Because 2026 has been the first year in which the YJB has published Diversion data, it is not yet possible to observe trends over time in that data.

First Time Entrants (FTEs)

In the year ending December 2024, there were around **8,100 first-time entrants (FTEs) to the youth justice system**, down 4% from 2023 and at the lowest level on record. For the second consecutive year, more FTEs received a court sentence (59%) than a youth caution (54% received a court sentence in 2023; compared to 28% in 2014).

This suggests **diversionary outcomes are increasingly replacing cautions**. Now that Diversion data is being routinely collected from Youth Justice Services, it will be possible to better understand this trend in future years.

⁴⁹ Youth Justice Board (2026). Youth Justice Statistics: 2024 to 2025. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2024-to-2025/youth-justice-statistics-2024-to-2025>

Examples of practice models

The YJB hosts space for youth justice practitioners to share examples of positive practice from their everyday work in this area. Many of these are shared on the [YJB Resource Hub](#). A few examples have been included below:

Early Support Project, Diversion and Prevention Service – Milton Keynes YJS

The Early Support Project (ESP) is a diversion and prevention service that provides voluntary support to children who have received informal outcomes (such as Community Resolutions) or are identified as vulnerable to criminal exploitation or involvement in youth violence. The intervention uses a strengths-based, health and education-focused approach, offering assessments (including Speech, Language and Communication Needs), advocacy, and tailored support to address structural barriers and prevent escalation into the formal youth justice system.⁵⁰

Focused Deterrence Offer – Wiltshire YJS

Wiltshire YJS operates a county-wide focused deterrence offer through a fortnightly multi-agency panel involving YJS, social care, and the Police and Crime Commissioner's office. The panel reviews referrals and provides strengths-based and trauma-informed tailored support via commissioned services such as youth work, therapeutic farm activities, wellbeing coaching, mentoring, education, and creative arts.^{51, 52}

Youth Offending Prevention and Early Intervention Service – Cwm Taf YJS

Cwm Taf Youth Offending Prevention and Early Intervention Service offers several community-based programmes to identify and support children and families, including boxing / martial arts activities to encourage children's personal development and to help them find confidence and discipline, and a Youth Outreach Service and Community Van to engage with children in the local community and provide support.⁵³

⁵⁰ Milton Keynes YJB (2021). Early Support Project, diversion and prevention service – Milton Keynes Youth Offending Team. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/early-support-project-diversion-and-prevention-service-milton-keynes-youth-offending-service-october-2021/>

⁵¹ Wiltshire YJS (2025). Focused deterrence report – Wiltshire Youth Justice Service. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/wiltshire-youth-justice-service-report-on-focused-deterrence/>

⁵² It is important to note that focussed deterrence can also use targeted enforcement. It is primarily a violence-reduction and prevention approach, rather than a diversionary intervention routinely used as part of an OOCR intervention package.

⁵³ Cwm Taf Youth Offending Prevention and Early Intervention Service – Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/cwm-taf-youth-offending-prevention-and-early-intervention-service-cwm-taf-youth-offending-service/>

Ongoing and future activity

Who	What
YJB	The YJB plays an important role in supporting diversion through national guidance, oversight and improvement activity with Youth Justice Services, strategic engagement with police forces and PCCs, and partnership working with the NPCC Children and Young People Portfolio to promote effective and consistent diversionary practice across England and Wales.
	The YJB launched the Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool ⁵⁴ in 2024, with data collection being mandatory as per the 2025/26 Data Recording Requirements. It will take time to receive enough data before it can be used for analysis.
	The YJB have launched a new collaborative space – Basecamp: Diversion and Youth Justice Policing to strengthen collective practice through sharing learning and best practice, joint problem-solving, cross area-networking and collaboration and guidance and resources. ⁵⁵
YEF	The YEF is in the process of multi-site trials for A&E Navigators and Mentoring. ⁵⁶
	The YEF have launched a new digital tool for diversion, designed to support youth justice partnerships, including police, to self-evaluate their area's out of court resolution practice against the best available evidence. ⁵⁷
	The Whole Area Model (WAM) is a YEF pilot focused on improving the consistency, quality and equity of diversion practice across whole police force areas. It seeks to embed evidence-informed approaches throughout the diversion pathway, from first police contact through to assessment, decision-making and access to support. The model responds directly to concerns highlighted in recent research and inspection activity regarding variation in diversion practice, referral processes and outcomes for children. Alongside supporting local areas to strengthen partnership working, referral pathways and quality assurance arrangements, the programme aims to build the national evidence base on effective diversion and share learning across the sector. ⁵⁸
Home Office	The Home Office have an ongoing evaluation of the pilot to devolve decision-making for child victims of modern slavery. ⁵⁹

⁵⁴ YJB (2024). YJB's Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/prevention-and-diversion-assessment-tool/>

⁵⁵ Youth Justice Board (2026). Basecamp launch: Diversion and youth justice policing. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/basecamp-launch-diversion-and-youth-justice-policing-may-2026/>

⁵⁶ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Youth Endowment Fund to support grassroots organisations to take part in research to find out what works to keep children safe from violence. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/youth-endowment-fund-to-support-grassroots-organisations-to-take-part-in-research-to-find-out-what-works-to-keep-children-safe-from-violence/>

⁵⁷ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Out of Court Resolution Practice Insight Creator (ORPIC). Available from: <https://insights.youthendowmentfund.org.uk/orpic>

⁵⁸ Youth Endowment Fund (2026). Whole Area Model. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/about-us/our-strategy/sectors/youth-justice/whole-area-model/>

⁵⁹ Home Office (2024). An evaluation of the pilot to devolve decision-making for child victims of modern slavery. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-evaluation-of-the-pilot-to-devolve-decision-making-for-child-victims-of-modern-slavery/an-evaluation-of-the-pilot-to-devolve-decision-making-for-child-victims-of-modern-slavery>

About the evidence pack

Author(s)

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External engagement

A drop-in session was held with the YJB's Academic Liaison Network which focused on the theme of targeted prevention and diversion. Academics in attendance provided their input and relevant resources to form part of this evidence review.

Search methodology

Exclusion criteria: Early prevention and associated interventions, population and policy wide interventions (e.g., evaluation of policy), adult only population studies, essay or opinion pieces, articles behind a pay wall.

Inclusion criteria: Studies in English, published in the last 5 years unless level of relevance showed otherwise, individual studies and grey literature were included but systematic reviews and meta-analysis were prioritised.

Databases searched: PubMed, Google Scholar, EBSCO

Other websites: GOV.UK, Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit, Youth Justice Resource Hub

Papers identified by topic experts have also been included and reference lists of relevant papers have been screened.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, no critical appraisal has been carried out. This means that whilst we can provide a synthesis of the evidence, we cannot provide an estimate on how strong or robust it is.

However, to mitigate this, systematic reviews that have conducted a critical appraisal process have been prioritised in our search and reporting. Thus, this briefing is based on a narrative review of available evidence and includes a wide variety of evidence to provide an overall summary. This narrative review was designed to be an informative (rather than all-encompassing) review of recent data and evidence about targeted prevention and diversion within the youth justice system in England and Wales.

