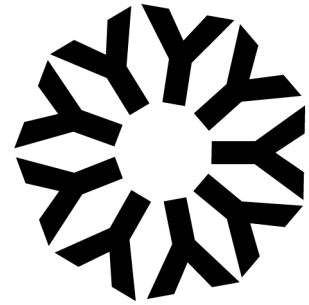


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Joint Inspection of Youth Offending Teams of England and Wales

Report on:
Merton
Youth Offending Service

2005

Foreword

This is one of the last reports to be published in phase two of the inspection programme of youth offending teams across England and Wales. The Merton Youth Offending Service had come through a difficult period of instability and still needed to consolidate its management arrangements, particularly at a strategic level. It was disappointing to find that there was a lack of commitment by some partners, and that the key area of health had not been satisfactorily resourced. However, the new Service Manager was beginning to engage with a number of crucial strategic areas of development that can only strengthen the service's contribution to both the children and criminal justice agendas.

We found that the Merton Youth Offending Service had a number of strengths and a well-motivated team that placed the interests of children and young people at the centre of its work. Work to prevent children and young people from engaging in criminal activity and work with those serving custodial sentences was strong. There was also excellent engagement with parents/carers.

Further development is required in the areas of assessing and managing the risk of harm presented by children and young people, and effective practice. Although work with the victims of crime, other than those of children and young people on referral orders, had not been well established, we are optimistic that, with the implementation of a protocol with the Witness Care Unit, this service would continue to improve.

Our overall assessment of the performance of the Merton Youth Offending Service was that it had a good basis for development. The report contains a number of recommendations to assist the Youth Offending Service in taking this agenda forward and we are confident that it will make progress.

Andrew Bridges
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

August 2005

Fieldwork for this inspection was undertaken in 2005

- ◆ The file reading took place week commencing 6 June.
- ◆ The second week commenced on 4 July.

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Glossary

ASBO	Anti-social Behaviour Order
Asset	Assessment tool developed by the Youth Justice Board
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CSCI	Commission for Social Care Inspection
DAT	Drug Action Team
DTO	Detention and Training Order
EPQA	Effective Practice Quality Assurance
Estyn	HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMIC	HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HMI Prisons	HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HMI Probation	HM Inspectorate of Probation
INSET	In service training
ISSP	Intensive Supervision & Surveillance Programme
MAPPP	Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel
MYAP	Merton Youth Awareness Programme
National Standards	National Standards for Youth Justice Services
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
Onset	YJB tool for assessing children and young people at risk of offending
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PSR	Pre-sentence report
SFSC	Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bounded
SSIW	Social Services Inspectorate for Wales
VLO	Victims Liaison Officer
YISP	Youth Inclusion Support Panel
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YOS	Youth Offending Service
YOT	Youth Offending Team

Introduction

The joint YOT inspection programme commenced in September 2003 and is the first full inspection to examine the work of YOTs, established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The programme is being implemented in three phases, the first of which was completed in July 2004 and focused on establishing benchmarks for the later phases of the inspection.

This, the second phase of the inspection, started in September 2004 and builds on the findings from the first. Few changes have been made. Emphasis has continued to be placed on two core areas:

- ◆ the management and partnership arrangements, including the role and functioning of the local Management Board
- ◆ work with children and young people, which now encompasses prevention of offending, work with children and young people who have offended and work with their parents/carers.

The third core area to be covered by the inspection is work with victims and restorative justice. Whilst these issues are seen as no less important, it is acknowledged that YOTs may be at different stages of development in this area of work. We do, however, expect a high level of engagement with victims to be demonstrated, with appropriate arrangements for restorative justice.

Key findings

Management and partnership arrangements

- ◆ The Chief Executive retained some strategic oversight of the YOS, through the Safer Merton Strategy Group, which held overall responsibility for the community safety agenda for Merton.
- ◆ The Safer Merton Strategy Group and the YOS Management Group needed to clarify their roles and responsibilities, with regard to the strategic oversight and direction of the YOS.
- ◆ Statutory partners were not contributing sufficiently to the strategic development and management of the YOS.
- ◆ The Youth Justice Plan reflected shared strategies with partner agencies and was approved at the appropriate management level.
- ◆ The YOS had effective protocols with some of its partner agencies.
- ◆ Although seconded staff provided valuable services to the YOS, the staffing and funding arrangements with partner agencies required strengthening.
- ◆ The secondment of health workers to the YOS needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- ◆ Although there were regular team and development meetings, staff needed targeted training in order to improve their practice and induction processes needed to be developed.
- ◆ Managers and staff received some supervision and most had been appraised.
- ◆ Managers needed to take more responsibility for ensuring that all staff and volunteers had had enhanced CRB checks and that these were regularly updated.

Work with children and young people and their parents/carers

- ◆ There was a partnership approach to referring children and young people to the Turnaround Project (YISP), which offered accessible and good quality services to the local community.
- ◆ Although the panel meetings provided a good forum for a multi-agency approach to the prevention of anti-social behaviour, prevention initiatives across the borough required greater coordination.
- ◆ Risk of harm assessments were not conducted robustly and there was inadequate management oversight. MAPPP decisions and plans were not recorded and used to inform supervision.

- ◆ Specialist assessments for education were available as appropriate, and mentoring, education and training initiatives were proving successful in engaging children and young people.
- ◆ Specialist assessments for substance misuse were available as appropriate and facilities were readily available, but provision needed to be made for better sharing of information between the substance misuse worker and other YOS staff.
- ◆ The physical and mental health needs of children and young people were not assessed by the YOS, and access to appropriate provision was limited.
- ◆ Although the YOS had developed a good format for supervision plans, which were prepared within the required timescale, their quality required improvement.
- ◆ The YOS needed to adopt the principles of effective practice and provide targeted, evaluated interventions.
- ◆ There were no specific programmes aimed at black and minority ethnic children and young people, and girls and young women.
- ◆ The YOS was clearly focused on safeguarding children and young people.
- ◆ The YOS had dedicated parenting workers who undertook assessments of parents'/carers' needs using a recognised tool, and provided access to services appropriate to a diverse range of parents/carers.
- ◆ YOS staff engaged well with children and young people serving custodial sentences.
- ◆ Recent Asset scores showed an improvement over initial scores. The majority of children and young people complied well with their orders and reported a change in their attitudes and offending behaviour.

Victims and restorative justice

- ◆ Although victim contact services were developing and some victims were offered the opportunity to become involved, the YOS needed to review its work with victims.
- ◆ Restorative justice processes needed to be more central to the work of the YOS across all orders and interventions.
- ◆ Greater attention could be given to direct and restorative interventions for victims from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Overall assessment

The overall performance of the Merton YOS was assessed as being a **good basis for development**.

There were concerns regarding the contribution of some partners to the strategic development and resourcing of the YOS. Particularly with regard to the involvement of the Safer Merton Strategy Group, membership of the YOS Management Group and the gap in replacing the service manager and other core staff; all of which had had a detrimental effect on the strategic and practice development of the service. However, with the revised terms of reference for the YOS Management Group and closer links with the Children and Young People's Strategic Group, it was anticipated that these would address some of the areas of concern identified in the inspection.

We were impressed by the motivation and activity of the staff group in many areas of their work. Preventative work was developing and we were encouraged by the interventions offered by the Turnaround Project (YISP). There were some good examples of work with parents/carers, work with children and young people with regard to their education needs and with those serving DTOs.

Key areas of concern were the assessment and management of risk of harm to others, effective practice, and the lack of resources for addressing the physical and mental health needs of children and young people. These issues needed to be addressed.

Recommendations

The Chair of the Management Group should ensure that:

- ◆ an action plan is devised to address the following recommendations and forwarded to the lead inspector within three months of the publication of this report
- ◆ strategic oversight and direction of the YOS is improved by the clarification of the respective roles of the Safer Merton Strategy Group and the YOS Management Group, as well as the development of clear lines of accountability
- ◆ all staff and volunteers are subject to an enhanced CRB check that is reviewed at least every three years
- ◆ the YOS develops an information sharing protocol with its partner agencies so that the management of individual cases is enhanced by the availability of relevant and timely information.

The Service Manager should ensure that:

- ◆ staff receive training and induction appropriate to their role
- ◆ all staff receive regular supervision and are appraised within a performance management framework
- ◆ supervision plans contain appropriate content and are used by case managers in planning and reviewing work with children and young people
- ◆ a risk of harm policy is developed and implemented, and risk of harm assessments are completed on all relevant cases, regularly reviewed and endorsed by managers as appropriate
- ◆ facilities and interventions are developed to address the specific needs of children and young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who offend or are at risk of offending, and their parents/carers
- ◆ individual and group work interventions are based on effective practice principles and are offence focused
- ◆ victim and restorative justice work is developed so that all victims are consulted and a range of restorative options available.

The PCT should ensure that:

- ◆ through the provision of a health worker, the needs of children and young people, in relation to their physical and mental health, are identified and addressed in an appropriate and timely manner.

Overview

- ◆ The London Borough of Merton is located in south west outer London, south of the River Thames. It is bordered by Wandsworth to the north, Lambeth and Croyden to the east, Sutton to the south and Kingston to the west.
- ◆ The local authority of Merton had a total population of 187,908, measured in the Census 2001. Of this population, 21.6% were aged 0-17 years at the time of the census. This figure was lower than the average for England and Wales of 22.7%.
- ◆ Merton had a predominantly white population, 75.0%, but this was much lower than the average for England of 90.9%. The percentage of Asian or Asian British residents, 11.1%, was much higher than the average for England of 4.6%. The percentage of Black or Black British residents, at 7.8%, was also much higher than the English average of 2.1%.
- ◆ The level of employment in Merton, 65.8%, was higher than the average for England and Wales of 60.6%. The level of unemployment was 3.3%, similar to the average for England and Wales of 3.4%. 21.4% of those unemployed in Merton were aged 16-24 and 18% were aged 50 and over. 9% had never worked and 28% were long-term unemployed. There was a lower percentage of retired residents in Merton, 9.9%, compared to 13.6% in England and Wales. There was also a lower percentage of residents who were permanently sick or disabled, 3.1% compared to 5.5% nationally at the time of the census.
- ◆ Merton Council was classified as 'fair' in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2004.
- ◆ The YJB figures for youth offending for the period April 2003 to March 2004 show that 37.7 offences were committed per 1000 children and young people aged 0-17 years in Merton.
- ◆ The YJB summary of YOT performance against the key performance indicators for 2003/2004 ranked Merton YOS in 37th position.

1. MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

1.1 Leadership

Inspection criteria

The Management Board:

- ◇ *provides strategic oversight and direction and coordinates the provision of youth justice services by the YOT and partner organisations*
- ◇ *is made up of appropriate representatives who attend and participate actively in meetings*
- ◇ *ensures the provision of accurate and timely data returns, both for its own use and that of the YJB*
- ◇ *gives support and guidance to the YOT Manager, ensuring that they engage with local and national priorities*
- ◇ *ensures that the Youth Justice Plan is implemented.*

The Safer Merton Strategy Group, which was chaired jointly by the Chief Executive of Merton Council and the Borough Commander, held overall strategic responsibility for the community safety agenda within Merton. In managing the range of responsibilities covered by the Safer Merton Strategy Group, responsibility for a number of functions had been delegated to sub-groups that reported back to its bi-monthly meetings. Sub-groups included the DAT, ASBO, Prolific & Priority Offenders, Domestic Violence and the YOS Management Group. Although, the quarterly data returns to the YJB were included in the YOS reports to the Safer Merton Strategy Group, they were usually presented to the group after they had been sent to the YJB. The Youth Justice Plan was presented and signed by members of the group.

Due to the varying demands placed on the Safer Merton Strategy Group, it could not provide the appropriate strategic oversight to the YOS and had consequently delegated some of its strategic responsibilities to the YOS Management Group, which was chaired by the Head of Environment and Regeneration. The group met bi-monthly and received reports and quarterly performance data from the Service Manager. Membership consisted mainly of operational managers who did not have the authority to make decisions or to influence reluctant partners, particularly with regard to the staffing of the YOS. Its functions were described by some members as operational, whilst others saw its role as both operational and strategic. The YOS Management Group appeared to engage as well as it could with the challenges facing the YOS, and had revised its terms of reference and membership in order to gain a wider perspective. There was, however,

evidence to suggest that some YOS business was, at times, conducted outside of the YOS Management Group meetings.

We were disappointed to find that there was not a strong commitment by all partners to the strategic management of the YOS. Although CAMHS was represented at a middle management level on the YOS Management Group, the PCT was not. It was significant that senior managers in the PCT and the Education Department did not make themselves available for this inspection.

The YOS had undergone an extended period of instability in terms of its management and core staff. The operational manager left in December 2002 and the former service manager left in December 2003. The then practice manager was temporarily promoted to the operational manager's post from December 2002 to August 2003, at which point he became the full-time operational manager. But no other arrangements were made to cover the post of service manager or practice manager. In May 2004, one of the team members was promoted to the post of practice manager and the current service manager took up his position in November 2004. It would appear that the YOS was seen as a well-functioning team and the commitment to replacing the above positions had not been viewed as a priority.

The Service Manager was supervised by the Head of Environment and Regeneration, but the Council was undergoing a reorganisation during the inspection and the YOS was in the process of being moved into the Children, Schools and Families Department. Within this new structure, the YOS Management Group would be chaired by the Head of Social Care and be accountable to the Safer Merton Strategy Group and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

We had initially been concerned at the apparent lack of engagement of the Service Manager at a strategic level within the Safer Merton Strategy Group and other significant groups. However, we were encouraged to find that the Service Manager had started to make significant contribution to the development of the YOS and was gradually becoming involved in the various strategic groups in the area.

Strengths:

- ◆ The Chief Executive retained some strategic oversight of the YOS through the Safer Merton Strategy Group.
- ◆ The Youth Justice Plan was approved at the appropriate management level.
- ◆ The Service Manager was being encouraged and supported to engage with local and national priorities.
- ◆ Data returns to the YJB were presented to both the Safer Merton Strategy Group and the YOS Management Group.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ The Safer Merton Strategy Group and the YOS Management Group needed to clarify their roles and responsibilities with regard to the strategic oversight and direction of the YOS.
- ◆ Statutory partners were not contributing sufficiently to the strategic development and management of the YOS.
- ◆ The Service Manager should be fully engaged at a strategic level across the range of services that dealt with children and young people at risk of offending or who had offended.

1.2 Partnership and resources

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *A range of interventions and services are provided to meet the needs of children and young people who have offended and those at risk of offending.*
- ◆ *YOTs are appropriately staffed by partners according to legislation and Home Office guidance.*
- ◆ *The Youth Justice Plan reflects partner strategies.*
- ◆ *Protocols have been agreed between the YOT, its statutory partners and other organisations, outlining the level of service, human resources issues and funding arrangements.*
- ◆ *Contracts are in place with other agencies to ensure the coordination of work and the appropriate delivery of services to meet the needs of children and young people.*

The YOS was divided into three distinct operations, with one team responsible for diversion activity, another for court and other statutory work, and a third for projects.

The lines of responsibility for service delivery appeared to be clear, although we were concerned that the areas of work that cut across the three units, such as training and CRB checks for all staff and volunteers, did not have a dedicated responsible manager. We were pleased to find that, in order to develop a discreet management team, the Service Manager had started to convene regular meetings between all four managers and was using an action learning approach to development and problem solving.

The YOS did not appear to be well funded by all partner agencies and was heavily reliant on temporary staff. Other staff were paid honorariums to cover additional tasks within the team. A number of key staff positions were also been left vacant when the team had been without a Service Manager. The YOS Management Group meeting of October 2004 noted that

two social worker posts had been vacant for two years and were being filled by temporary staff, whilst the CAMHS worker position had been vacant since 2003. The social worker positions were filled prior to the start of the inspection, but the half-time CAMHS worker position remained vacant, together with five other vacancies, namely the YISP key worker, YISP administrative officer, reparation officer, referral order coordinator and information support officer. However, the latter three vacancies were filled by the second week of the inspection and the new team members were expected to take up their positions by September 2005.

Little progress had been made with regards to the position funded by the Health Service. We were concerned that not enough effort had been put into recruiting for the health posts or providing an alternative service, and felt that the Safer Merton Strategy Group should have taken a more active approach in holding the PCT accountable. The impact of not having in-house health and/or CAMHS workers meant that the YOS was unable to make appropriate referrals to CAMHS in respect of tier 1-3 services within the required timescales and was often waiting four to six months for CAMHS appointments. Additionally, there was no provision for the YOS to offer health reports or opinions in support of their PSRs to the court.

The YOS budget appeared to be a complex one with little or no contribution from some statutory partner agencies towards a pooled budget for running costs. Social Services and the local probation area were the only two statutory partners to have contributed towards staffing and running costs, whilst education had contributed funds for employing a worker and the police had seconded staff. The PCT had not contributed any funds towards running costs or to the buying-in of relevant services.

We found, therefore, that the YOS was not well resourced and that some services were not available within the YOS. This included victim/offender mediation, structured individual interventions and group work. We were also concerned that some projects had been terminated through lack of funding.

Although some staff had been seconded by their parent agencies, all social work and education staff were employed within the YOS and seen as YOS employees. Social Services and the Education Department did not hold any direct responsibility for these staff members and they were, therefore, not linked into these organisations, either for professional development purposes or for the sharing of information. However, child protection and other relevant training offered by Social Services was available to all YOS staff.

The YOS, Social Services and Housing Department had developed a comprehensive protocol with regard to their joint services. The protocol identified the responsible agency for all aspects of cross-cutting work and included information sharing and their joint representation at particular forums, including the MAPPP.

Good practice

At the beginning of each case the YOS support worker was able to check the Social Services' database to see if the child or young person was known to Social Services and any information was passed on to the allocated YOS worker.

The YOS was covered by the joint protocols that had been developed between the London Probation Area and London Youth Offending Teams. The protocols covered all aspects of staff secondments and service delivery. Although the Probation Officer was seconded to the YOS under the terms of this thorough joint protocol, we found no evidence of any contact with their parent agency. It was not surprising, therefore, to find that the post-holder felt isolated from their parent agency.

There were agreements between the Metropolitan Police and the YOS with regard to final warnings and an undated staffing protocol that comprehensively covered all aspects of the seconding arrangements between the two. However, we found that practice starkly contradicted these protocols as the police did not always notify the YOS within the timescales set by the Home Office/YJB guidance and the YOS did not contact the victims or assess the children and young people during the bail period.

The police contributed a full-time police officer post and a part-time inspector whose role within the YOS and local area was the Head of Diversion. The Diversion Team was located in the YOS and was responsible for delivering most of the prevention agenda, including the YISP. There were complex supervision and management arrangements for this group. The Head of Diversion was directly supervised by the Police Superintendent on the YOS Management Group, and he in turn supervised the YISP Manager. All three were members of the YOS Management Group. The Head of Diversion also line managed the seconded police officer.

Good practice

Mutual sharing of information existed between the police and the YOS. The YOS police officer was able to take intelligence from YOS staff to the police's 'tasking and coordinating' meetings and return information from that meeting, about the children and young people supervised by the YOS, back to the team.

We were pleased to find that some specialist staff had been seconded from other partner agencies. The Youth Service had seconded a youth worker on a part-time basis who was able to arrange a number of activities including a much acclaimed boxing club that was managed by a former champion boxer. We understood that this facility was designed to help the children and young people develop a number of skills including self-control.

A full-time substance misuse worker was seconded by MYAP to provide assessments and screening for all children and young people referred to the YOS. Those requiring treatment were referred to MYAP. We were concerned however, that the agreement with MYAP did not allow the substance misuse worker to share information with YOS staff with regard to

the assessment and treatment of the children and young people referred. This had severely affected the case supervisor's ability to make an overall assessment of the child's or young person's needs and their progress.

There were strong partnerships between the YOS and education at both pre- and post-16 levels. The pre-16 out of school panel met regularly to discuss children and young people who were either out of school or deemed to be at risk of exclusion. The well-documented records revealed that the process was thorough and great care was taken to allocate each child or young person, and to continue to support them and their parents/carers. The Connexions provision within the YOS was initially of concern to us, as the post had only been funded for three hours a week. However, we were told that an agreement had been reached with Connexions to increase this resource to two and a half days a week. It would be important to formalise this arrangement through a joint agreement.

There was no formal agreement with the Housing Department over the accommodation needs of homeless young people. Neither was there a formal referral process and our interviews with YOS staff suggest that this provision was not readily available. We were concerned that the lack of suitable and available accommodation was not being adequately addressed.

We were encouraged to note that the Youth Justice Plan reflected shared priorities between the partner organisations, in particular the Crime and Disorder Strategy and the Children and Young People's Strategy. As the YOS moves into the newly formed Children, Schools and Families Department, it would become even more closely aligned with the children's services agenda. The Interim Children and Young People Plan, to which the Service Manager had contributed, contained key aims and objectives for the period May 2005–2006 and had clearly identified targets for developing services within the YOS.

The YOS had service delivery protocols with a number of its statutory and voluntary partners. Of particular note were the arrangements with partners from voluntary and statutory agencies for the management and staffing of the Turnaround Project (YISP), which was jointly funded by the Children's Fund and the Safer Merton Partnership, and the Merton Parent Support scheme which worked in collaboration with St Mark's Community Centre. Both of these services were located within the YOS and, although there had been staff shortages, they were contributing extremely well to the YOS. The recent EPQA assessment had awarded the parenting programme maximum scores.

We were impressed by the relationships between the YOS and the local court. It was clear that there was collaboration and consultation of many areas of mutual concern, including the provision of training by the YOS for members of the Youth Court Bench and membership of the Referral Order Steering Group by the Court Clerk and Chair of the Youth Panel. The YOS also shared the London-wide multi-agency service level agreement with regard to warrants.

**Good
practice**

YOS staff regularly contacted the court clerks during the preparation of PSRs to check that proposals were legal and practicable, resulting in high congruence rates.

Strengths:

- ◆ The YOS had effective protocols with some of its partner agencies.
- ◆ Information was shared by the YOS with the police in order to assist in the prevention and reduction of crime.
- ◆ The Youth Justice Plan reflected shared strategies with partner agencies.
- ◆ Seconded staff from partner agencies provided valuable services to the YOS.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Statutory partners' staffing and funding arrangements with the YOS required strengthening.
- ◆ Arrangements for the secondment of health workers within the YOS must be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- ◆ The YOS needed to develop a staff secondment agreement with Connexions.
- ◆ YOS case supervisors did not have access on the assessment and treatment of children and young people by MYAP.
- ◆ Probation staff seconded to the YOS did not receive support from the local probation area, by way of supervision, access to training or exchange of information.
- ◆ Links with the Housing Department required strengthening.

1.3

Staff supervision, development and training

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Staff are regularly supervised in accordance with their developmental needs and assessed level of competence.*
- ◆ *Annual appraisals contain objectives which are linked to local and national targets.*
- ◆ *All staff are provided with appropriate training opportunities to equip them to meet the requirements of the Youth Justice Plan.*
- ◆ *Staff are appropriately qualified and have had a satisfactory enhanced criminal record check within the past three years.*
- ◆ *Volunteers are appropriately trained, available for YOT activities and have had a satisfactory enhanced criminal record check within the past three years.*
- ◆ *Joint agreements are in place for the management of disciplinary, capability and grievance procedures.*
- ◆ *Complaints are properly managed.*

We found a committed team, who was willing to learn, develop its practice and engage in a process of continuous development.

The Service Manager received regular supervision from the Head of Environment and Regeneration and, in addition, had six-weekly professional development meetings with the Head of Social Care. The operational and practice managers both received regular supervision and all managers in the YOS, including the Head of Diversion, met fortnightly for joint learning and development following an action learning model.

Supervision for practitioners within the YOS had been erratic. Some reported that, although ad hoc consultation with managers was readily available, they had had no more than three individual supervision sessions during the previous 12 months. The opportunity to address specific practice and developmental needs were thus limited. However, we were pleased to find that most had been appraised with training plans linked to their appraisals. Team and practice meetings were held regularly and provided useful forums for team and practice development. All staff had received some training during the last year, including child protection and the YJB effective practice INSET. We identified the need for operational managers and staff to receive training in the following areas:

- ◆ Assessing and managing the risk of harm to others posed by children and young people.
- ◆ Assessments using Asset.
- ◆ Setting SMART objectives in supervision plans based on the assessments.
- ◆ Planning and delivering effective individual and group work intervention programmes.

The induction of new staff members varied as there was no structured process, leaving some staff to make their own arrangements. It was apparent that some practitioners were not aware of some basic areas of team practice and procedures, including the complaints procedure.

The YOS had recruited a significant number of volunteers who worked alongside the team as referral order panel members, appropriate adults and mentors. All three schemes had recruited volunteers from a wide age range and the gender breakdown followed the national trend of a higher percentage of female volunteers. We were disappointed to find that although 22% of Merton residents were said to be from black and minority ethnic groups, the number of YOS staff and volunteers did not reflect this. It was particularly important as the YOS had stated in its Youth Justice Plan update 2004 that: 'Young people of visible ethnic minority origin appear disproportionately liable to receive statutory orders particularly at the higher end of the scale of available court disposals'. It would seem that the YOS was not able to take advantage of opportunities that might be available from its local minority ethnic residents.

Referral order volunteers had been trained, were highly motivated and committed to the service they provided for the YOS. In addition to the initial training, the volunteers met every two months with the coordinator for further training and support. They expressed the view that they were well supported by the coordinator.

Appropriate adults were recruited by a part-time coordinator, who was also responsible for their continued support and met with them quarterly.

The volunteers involved in the Mentoring with Literacy and Numeracy Support scheme had participated in an extensive training programme that had equipped them with the relevant knowledge and skills. The YJB funding for the scheme ended in October 2004 and funding had been successfully obtained for a further two years from the European Social Fund.

Although we were impressed by the evident commitment of the YOS staff to their work, we felt that they were allowed a surprising level of self-determination over many operational issues. We were concerned that none of the managers within the YOS knew with certainty that the volunteers used by the YOS had had enhanced CRB checks because the responsibility for ensuring that such checks were undertaken had been delegated to the practitioners who recruited and trained them. A further area of concern was the decision to send children's and young people's reports to referral order panel members by email. Although this allowed panel members to prepare for the meetings, YOS managers did not know whether or not any security measures were in place to protect the identity of the children and young people concerned. We felt that such important management decisions should not have been solely left to practitioners.

Staff employed within the YOS were subject to the Council's disciplinary, capability and grievance procedures. Protocols with seconding agencies contained arrangements that linked back into the seconding agencies' own processes.

The YOS had developed risk management procedures that addressed safety at work and lone working. It had also adopted the Council's complaints procedures for service users. Both of these procedures were used by some of the more established staff members, but had not been consistently communicated across the team. As a result, risk assessments were not undertaken prior to making home visits or seeing children and young people and their parents/carers away from office premises. These issues should have been addressed as part of a coherent induction process.

Strengths:

- ◆ The YOS had a committed staff team.
- ◆ Managers and staff received some supervision and most had been appraised.
- ◆ There were regular team and development meetings.
- ◆ Joint arrangements for the management of disciplinary, capability and grievance were in place.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Staff needed targeted training in order to develop their practice.
- ◆ Induction processes needed to be developed for new members of staff.
- ◆ Managers did not know whether all staff and volunteers had had enhanced CRB checks or that they were regularly updated.
- ◆ The YOS needed to recruit more volunteers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

This section is judged as satisfactorily met.

2. WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS/CARERS

2.1 Assessment

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF OFFENDING

Inspection criteria

- ◇ *There is a mechanism to identify those children and young people within the area who are at risk of offending.*
- ◇ *There are arrangements to assess the needs of those individuals identified as being at risk of offending and these arrangements take account of cultural differences, diversity and safeguarding issues.*

The YOS' duty to children and young people at risk of offending was primarily discharged through partnerships with the Turnaround Project (YISP), which was launched in May 2004 and consisted of full- and part-time staff. The staff provided support and advice to the children and young people and their parents/carers on the programme, whilst volunteer mentors were also used to address some of the children's and young people's education needs. Referrals to the programme came from a variety of partner agencies, including the police, primary schools and the education welfare service.

We were able to read ten YISP case files and were impressed to find that in all cases Onset and Asset assessments were used to comprehensively assess the child's or young person's skills and needs. Each assessment included a home visit where parents/carers and child or young person were interviewed together. We found that in some cases, the parents/carers and child or young person also completed their relevant sections of the assessments. The YISP meeting provided the next stage of the process where assessments and other relevant information from partner and referring agencies were discussed and, where appropriate, an intervention plan agreed. This was then communicated to the parents/carers.

We observed a YISP meeting and were very impressed with the discussions and the way in which the meeting was conducted. The panel ensured that the YISP resources were used only for those children and young people at risk of anti-social behaviour and offending, and inappropriate referrals were redirected to the relevant services.

Although most of the cases we inspected did not have SMART intervention plans and interventions were not always clearly recorded, it was evident that the programme offered a range of activities relevant to the needs of children and young people and their parents/carers. We were also pleased

to find that safeguarding children and young people was central to the programme's role. Referrals to family therapy and involvement in child protection processes featured in a number of cases.

Strengths:

- ◇ There was a partnership approach to referring children and young people to the Turnaround Project (YISP) and appropriate assessments were conducted.
- ◇ Children and young people and their parents/carers were involved in the assessments.
- ◇ Panel meetings provided a good forum for a multi-agency approach to the prevention of anti-social behaviour.
- ◇ Safeguarding children and young people was central to the YISP's role.

Areas for improvement:

- ◇ Intervention plans needed to be SMART.
- ◇ Recording needed to be clearer.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE OFFENDED

Inspection criteria

- ◇ *An Asset assessment is satisfactorily completed at the beginning and end of all interventions which takes account of cultural differences, diversity and safeguarding issues.*
- ◇ *Risk of harm to others is fully assessed.*
- ◇ *Risk of harm, either to self or from others, is fully assessed.*
- ◇ *Specialist assessments are undertaken on those with specific needs or who are assessed as a risk of harm to others.*
- ◇ *Resources have been identified and capacity exists to meet assessed need.*

Of the cases inspected, we found that initial assessments were completed in accordance with the national standard requirement for timeliness in 77% of cases, and for quality in 72% of cases. Although we were disappointed to find that only 33% of children and young people had completed a 'What do you think?' questionnaire, we were very pleased to find that 84% of children and young people were involved in their assessments.

Further attention needed to be given to the assessment of risk of harm to others. There were a number of cases that had not been appropriately assessed and it was apparent from discussions with staff that they either did not understand its importance or did not have the required knowledge or ability for the task. We found that a full risk of harm assessment was completed in just over half of the relevant cases viewed. We also found

that only 63% (5) of cases assessed as 'risk aware' or 'risk concern' had been referred to a manager and that 25% had been subject to regular management reviews. Although some cases were referred to the MAPPP, the case files contained no record or reference to the MAPPP decision or a risk management plan. There did not appear to be a multi-agency approach to managing the risk posed by children and young people who were assessed as presenting a serious risk of harm.

We found that 13% (5) of children and young people in the case files we reviewed were assessed to be at risk of self-harm and 18% (7) were at risk of harm from others. We were impressed to find that appropriate action to safeguard these children and young people had been taken in all cases. This demonstrated that the YOS was clearly focused on safeguarding children and young people.

Children's and young people's physical and mental health was not adequately assessed by the YOS. There was no provision to assess physical health needs and YOS staff were not able to make referrals to CAMHS within the required timescales for tier 1-3 services. Consultations were not held within the required 15 working days.

We were pleased to find that all children and young people on final warning programmes and community penalties received a tier 2 assessment by the substance misuse worker and, where appropriate, were offered intervention.

The YOS education worker contributed to the Asset assessment by assessing the literacy and numeracy needs of children and young people during the early stages of their involvement with the YOS. Where a need was identified, referrals were made to the appropriate resources, including mentoring support.

With regard to final warning cases, we found that although the agreement between the police and YOS was in line with the Home Office/YJB guidance, it was not implemented. Some children and young people were bailed by the police and a final warning was later administered at a surgery, but the YOS had not completed the assessments until after the final warning was given. In other cases, the final warning was given before the YOS was notified. We were, however, pleased to find that the police were regularly notifying the YOS of their decision to give a final warning, within one working day (88%).

Strengths:

- ◆ The majority of children and young people were involved in their assessments.
- ◆ The YOS was clearly focused on safeguarding children and young people.
- ◆ Substance misuse assessments were available as appropriate.
- ◆ Education assessments were available to all children and young people requiring this service.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Risk of harm assessments were not robustly conducted and there was inadequate management oversight.
- ◆ MAPPP decisions and plans should be recorded and inform supervision.
- ◆ The police and YOS were not delivering final warnings in accordance with Home Office/YJB guidance.
- ◆ The physical and mental health needs of children and young people were not assessed by the YOS.

PARENTS/CARERS

Inspection criteria

- ◆ An assessment of the parenting skills and needs of the parents/carers of children and young people who have offended or are at risk of offending has been undertaken and is used to inform any intervention.

In accordance with YJB requirements, the YOS operated a process where parenting needs were identified at the PSR or prevention stage. The YOS had two part-time parenting officers and worked collaboratively with a partner agency to deliver parenting support services. The parenting workers used the assessment tool developed by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence to assess the skills and needs of parents/carers in order to determine the most appropriate response. This thorough assessment process also included home visits.

Some parents/carers were subject to parenting orders from the court, whilst the majority were voluntary referrals from partner agencies and YOS staff, who were able to refer at any stage of their involvement with children and young people.

We found that the YOS and local court had developed a relationship of mutual trust. The court therefore relied on the advice from the YOS with regard to the need for parenting orders and, in the majority of cases, reports to the court had indicated that because the parents/carers had accepted voluntary intervention, there was no need for a statutory order.

In the cases we examined, we found that 70% of parents/carers had been involved in the assessments of their child.

Strengths:

- ◆ The YOS had dedicated parenting workers.
- ◆ Assessments of parents'/carers' needs and skills were undertaken using a recognised assessment tool.
- ◆ Staff were supportive of work with parents/carers.

- ◆ Partner agencies were able to refer to the parenting programme.
- ◆ The court trusted the YOS to intervene appropriately with parents/carers.
- ◆ The majority of parents/carers were involved in their child's assessment.

2.2 Interventions

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF OFFENDING

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *There are arrangements in place to provide interventions for those children and young people who are assessed as at risk of offending.*

The Turnaround Project (YISP) was located in the YOS' Diversion Team. It was a borough-wide project, which took referrals from primary and secondary schools, as well as partner agencies in the voluntary and statutory sectors.

Turnaround delivered a range of services to children and young people, including mentoring, family support, family therapy and various leisure activities. The project had produced a booklet that outlined its range of services. During the course of the inspection, we visited a gym – a joint initiative between Turnaround and the Youth Service – and found that the youth workers engaged well with children and young people. It was evident that the aim was not just to provide physical activity or to fill-in time, but also a means of developing other skills and improving self-esteem. In one year, Turnaround had worked with 82 children and young people and their families, a third of whom were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds or of dual heritage.

Although Turnaround was a successful project within the YOS, we were concerned about the lack of coordination between this and the other strands of prevention work, either in place or under development, by different agencies or groups in the borough. This situation was likely to cause confusion or duplication.

Providing appropriate education for this group of children and young people was said to be of high priority. The social inclusion worker worked with the YOS to support children and young people at risk of exclusion and offending. Specific places were available at Smart centres and there was a fast-track system to keep children and young people in or return them to education.

Strengths:

- ◆ The Turnaround Project (YISP) offered accessible and good quality services to the local community.

- ◆ Referrals to the project came from a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies.
- ◆ The range of services provided was appropriate to the needs of the children and young people and their families.
- ◆ Families from black and minority ethnic backgrounds benefited from the services.
- ◆ Education provisions were targeted at children and young people at risk of exclusion and offending.

Area for improvement:

- ◆ Prevention initiatives in the borough lacked coordination.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE OFFENDED

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Interventions with children and young people who have offended are targeted in areas of assessed need, such as education, health and parental relationships, etc.*
- ◆ *Interventions with children and young people who have offended are specific to the needs of girls and young women, children and young people from minority ethnic groups, those with disabilities and take account of safeguarding issues.*
- ◆ *Supervision plans are written in accordance with national standards, emanate from Asset and contain SMART objectives.*
- ◆ *Interventions are structured, evaluated and consistent with the principles of effective practice.*
- ◆ *Frequency of appointments for children and young people who have offended is consistent with national standards and Home Office/YJB guidance for final warnings, referral orders, community penalties, DTOs (custody and post-custody) and ISSPs (where they exist).*
- ◆ *For those children and young people who have offended, enforcement follows non-compliance.*

We were pleased to find that 82% of initial supervision plans were completed within the national standard timescales. Although the YOS had developed a good format for supervision plans, we were concerned at the lack of correlation between the plans and the Asset assessments. We also found that progress against the objectives in the plans had been reviewed in accordance with the national standard requirement for timeliness in only 50% of cases. We, therefore, assessed the majority of plans to be either 'not sufficient' or 'poor'. In spite of this, the YOS had ensured that 82% of the children and young people supervised, understood the requirements of their orders or licences.

The frequency of appointments arranged with children and young people were generally within national standard timescales, but the number of appointments kept conformed to the national standard in only just over half of the cases reviewed. We were concerned about the significant number of appointments with the duty officer, which had meant a lack of continuity for the child or young person and the likelihood that their assessed needs were not being met. We also found that home visits were not being made in accordance with the national standard requirement.

The YOS had latterly sought advice from the YJB regarding the requirement to home visit. The YJB had responded by saying: 'Regarding home visits, there is no requirement in relation to general community orders, but for final warnings and community rehabilitation orders and the community element of community punishment and rehabilitation orders there is specific mention on home visits'.

We found this advice to be in contravention of the national standard requirement for court-ordered interventions. Although the national standard did not give specific timescales or frequency for home visits it clearly stated: 'All contacts with offenders should be organised to take place at a time, when they do not conflict with a young offender's school or work attendance or religious observance and should include home visits, involving parent(s)/carer(s) appropriately' (page 46, paragraph 8.5). We, therefore, sought further clarification from the YJB who accepted that, whilst correct in terms of the standards outlined in relation to specific orders, this advice did not take account of the expectations in paragraph 8.5. The YJB will be working on a revision of the national standards during 2006 to take account of likely legislative changes and the issue of home visits will be considered again as part of that process.

Initial judgements about acceptability of absences were considered to be appropriate in 89% of cases and breach action had taken place within national standard timescales in 77% of appropriate cases. The court was satisfied with the YOS enforcement practice and found the breach reports to be most informative.

We found that 43% of the children and young people in the case files examined had emotional and mental health needs, but the lack of provision had impacted negatively on the YOS' ability to deliver appropriate health services. YOS staff reported that it sometimes took 22 weeks to get a response from the CAMHS team.

Substance misuse was identified as a significant issue, with 45% of children and young people misusing drugs, whilst 35% misused alcohol. Although we were pleased to find that referrals for interventions had been made in 76% of cases assessed to be misusing substances, we were concerned that MYAP was not contracted to work with alcohol misuse.

We were impressed with the quality of services offered to children and young people needing education services. Where the Asset assessment identified an education need, basic skills assessments were carried out and appropriate referrals made. 68% (25) of children and young people of school age were found to be experiencing difficulty with their schooling and

we were pleased to find that appropriate action had been taken in 92% of cases. We also found that 72% had been engaged in further education and training, including the use of learning mentors. The cases examined showed that a significant amount of time and resources had been put into engaging productively with children and young people and their parents/carers. In order to help schools and pupils develop or maintain their relationships, the education worker would often see children and young people at school. Although we found that 68% of children and young people had been referred to a Connexions adviser, there was often a lengthy waiting period and the service offered was limited. The Connexions worker was only available for three hours each week and staff reported that it was difficult for children and young people to get a service. It was anticipated that this service would improve with the proposed secondment of a half-time worker.

With regard to referral orders, we found that the panel met in accordance with the national standard requirement in 50% (4) of cases. We were told that the child or young person had been ill in three of the cases, but we found that in the fourth case, there were three failures to attend pre-panel appointments and no attempt had been made to refer the case back to court. We were pleased to find that a written report was available to the panel in all cases; however the contract was not followed in 50% of cases. We were disappointed to find that the referral order panel did not meet in the community as was originally proposed in the Home Office/YJB guidance, but met in the YOS office. We were told that other venues were considered, but the decision to meet in the YOS office was made on the basis of health and safety, access to resources and its central location.

ISSP was provided as part of a local consortium and a worker was located within the YOS. The YOS case supervisor retained overall management of the case. Although some of the case files we reviewed did not always contain much information regarding how the child or young person was being engaged by ISSP, the comprehensive records kept by ISSP showed examples of innovative work. ISSP offered cognitive behavioural and other groups from their Croydon facility.

We were impressed with the YOS' approach to working with children and young people serving DTOs. The children and young people were visited by the case supervisor within a few days of their sentence and the case supervisor was involved in sentence planning and reviews in 90% of cases. Although YOS staff reported that the availability of courses and intervention within some secure establishments was poor, we found that upon release they engaged well with both children and young people and their parents/carers, and were able to involve them in a range of activities.

The YOS did not use the Home Office self-classification categories to define the ethnicity of children and young people, and there was no specific provision for black and minority ethnic children and young people, or girls and young women. The Service Manager had acknowledged in his reports to the YOS Management Group that this area of the YOS' work required further development, and drew attention to the significant number of black

and minority ethnic young men who had either been remanded or were serving custodial sentences.

Overall we found a lack of structured group work or individual intervention programmes to address offending behaviour. It was evident that the principles of effective practice were not understood by some YOS staff and were not used in the team's practice. In addition to which, perhaps because of poor recording, it was often difficult to ascertain whether work had been done with the child or young person to address their offending behaviour. We also found that the YOS relied heavily on reparation projects and physical activities.

We did, however, find some good engagement with children and young people and particularly with regard to education, ISSP and the work with children and young people serving DTO sentences. We found that 75% of children and young people receiving a final warning had had an intervention. We also saw some examples of very good individual work particularly with regard to the welfare and well-being of the children and young people. YOS staff were able to demonstrate their ability to deal sensitively with issues affecting children and young people and to give them space where it was deemed necessary.

Good practice

Following sentence all children and young people, together with their parents/carers, were seen at court for their first induction. The order and consequences of non-compliance were explained, reporting instructions were given and all parties signed an agreement.

Good practice

Together with Social Services, the YOS had developed a comprehensive welfare checklist that was used on each visit to the child or young person. The checklist provided the YOS with good quality information that helped them to ensure that the child or young person was safeguarded.

Good practice

The YOS had prepared a pack for children and young people and their parents/carers with separate information on each custodial institution. The pack also gave details of location, travelling routes and public transport.

Strengths:

- ◆ The YOS had developed a good format for supervision plans, which were prepared within the required timescale.
- ◆ Good partnerships were in place with education facilities.
- ◆ Substance misuse facilities were readily available to the YOS.
- ◆ YOS staff engaged well with children and young people serving custodial sentences.

- ◆ Enforcement action was taken appropriately.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ The quality of supervision plans required improvement and they were not reviewed in accordance with the national standard.
- ◆ The YOS needed to adopt the principles of effective practice and provide targeted and evaluated interventions.
- ◆ Access to physical and mental health provision for children and young people was limited.
- ◆ There were no specific programmes aimed at black and minority ethnic children and young people, and girls and young women.
- ◆ Recording on case files needed to be clearer.

PARENTS/CARERS

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Parents/carers (where appropriate) are made aware of the requirements of the interventions and are kept informed about progress during the course of the intervention.*
- ◆ *Interventions which are appropriate to the diverse needs of parents/carers are provided for, and taken up by parents/carers of children and young people who either have offended or are at risk of offending in accordance with assessed need.*

Although we found that some YOS staff made efforts to see children and young people away from the office, and often arranged meetings with them in schools and other venues, we found a very low level of home visiting and involvement with parents/carers throughout the period of supervision.

The support offered to parents/carers by the Turnaround Project (YISP) included practical help with claiming benefits and housing, advice and support for return to education and skills development, individual support with their children and attendance at the parenting programme offered by the YOS.

In addition to offering individual parenting support and advice, the parenting officers ran two group work programmes. The first consisted of an eight-week course that addressed parenting skills and issues. Those who wished to undertake further training were able to move on to the 13-week SFSC parenting programme. The SFSC programme was run in partnership with the Children's Fund, the Home Office Race Equality Unit and the St Marks Community Centre. The groups usually consisted of 15 parents/carers, a third of whom would normally be known to the YOS. The SFSC programme was followed by a further set of workshops that addressed areas of need that had been identified by the parents/carers in the group. We observed a workshop on child development, which was attended by grandparents, men and women, and parents/carers from black

and minority ethnic backgrounds. We were impressed with the input and the way in which parents/carers engaged with the subject.

Although there was a flexible approach to the way individual support was offered by the parenting officers, some YOS staff expressed regret that the parenting groups were not available during the evenings.

We interviewed 15 parents/carers, some of whom had children who attended the YOS across a range of orders and activities, including the YISP and referrals from partner agencies. All were overwhelmingly pleased with the services and support they had received, particularly from the YISP and parenting programme. A number said that they had unsuccessfully tried to get help from statutory and voluntary organisations and that they had seen the parenting programme or their involvement with the YISP as a last attempt to get help. All the parents/carers we spoke to on the SFSC programme said that they had already started to share their learning with members of their family, friends and neighbours. Feedback from parents/carers included:

- ◇ *"The parenting worker is great, she gives me practical advice and a book that I find extremely useful, she is very good at listening and I don't feel looked down on or as a failure."*
- ◇ *"This type of group would have been useful to me when my children were young. I find the steps I have learned useful and I think it is important to pass my learning on to my children who are also parents as they are not able to attend."*

We heard a number of success stories from the parenting workers and participants. One parent from a previous eight-week programme, who had left school at 15 without qualifications, was introduced to a local college where she completed a return to higher study course. She later went on to university and completed a diploma in social work.

Other parents/carers had gained skills and confidence from the group and had obtained various forms of employment including work as a teenage pregnancy adviser, the organiser of the, formerly defunct, Gingerbread group and SFSC facilitators.

Strengths:

- ◇ Parents/carers expressed satisfaction with the service they received.
- ◇ The YISP engaged well with parents/carers.
- ◇ The parenting programme offered services appropriate to a diverse range of parents/carers.

Area for improvement:

- ◇ Parenting groups were not available in the evenings or weekends

Good practice

The parenting officers arranged group visits to a local college of further education where parents/carers were able to speak to lecturers about their particular subjects of interest. Those who had English as a second language were also catered for by specially tailored courses.

2.3

Outcomes

Inspection criterion

- ◆ *Those assessed as being at risk of offending and undertaking interventions are engaged in activity to reduce their risk of offending and address their needs.*
- ◆ *For those children and young people who have offended examination of the case file provides evidence of progress and a reduction of risk factors.*
- ◆ *The YOT demonstrates a reduction in reoffending for all bands of penalties (pre-court, first tier, community penalties and custody).*
- ◆ *Indicative accounts of outcomes from children and young people, parents/carers and other relevant persons show positive outcomes.*
- ◆ *For those children and young people who have offended, supervision plan objectives are met in areas of assessed need.*
- ◆ *Interventions for parents/carers promote effective parenting.*

Offending behaviour

Reviews of Asset and supervision plans were not consistently conducted by the YOS. But we were pleased to find that in 69% of cases the most recent Asset score showed an improvement over the initial score, and that only 18% of the children and young people in the sample had been involved in further criminal activity during the period of YOS supervision. There was also evidence to show that 68% of children and young people had complied with the conditions of their orders.

Four children and young people were interviewed and a further 18 completed the Viewpoint electronic questionnaire. Their involvement with the YOS varied between one month and three years and their age between 13-18 years. They had committed offences ranging from theft to violence against the person and sexual offences. The majority found YOS staff to be helpful and said that they were treated fairly and with respect. It was disappointing to find that the children and young people who had cultural or religious needs felt that these were not taken into account during their supervision. We were, however, pleased to find that the majority had undertaken some form of offending behaviour work and over half reported that they had stopped offending. Some children and young people reported that:

- ◇ *"Coming to the YOS was a waste of time, but I understand that it is a punishment."*
- ◇ *"They listen to me and are fair as well."*
- ◇ *"Going to prison has changed my life, made me think that I won't be going back."*

Education

The evaluation of the Mentoring with Literacy and Numeracy Support scheme reported that it had had 45 referrals during the last year, most of which were from the YOS. It found that 33% had not engaged, but of those that did, 45% had taken GCSE examinations before leaving school. Although the initial mentoring period was three months, a significant number of children and young people had continued to be mentored well beyond this initial period.

Overall, the education outcomes for children and young people under 16 were satisfactory. We found that they were placed on appropriate provision and many gained confidence and skills. The education worker and social inclusion worker often asked that participation in education should be a condition of the children's and young people's court orders, as they found that this helped to focus the child or young person. In order to maintain continuity, education and training provisions were also available during the summer months. The children and young people we spoke to were very positive about the help that they had received and one commented that: *"They were bang on to college for me and I got it faster because of them. I'm doing a plumbing apprenticeship and it's very hard to get on to this course, but the YOS helped."*

Good practice

The education worker established effective links with the school, via the Head Teacher, for a young person who had been experiencing difficulty at school. They were able to arrange part-time education provision with support that involved the parents. The education worker continued to meet the young person on school premises on a regular basis in order to discuss progress. The young person became engaged and planned to move on to a vocational training course.

Good practice

A young woman who was capable of attaining good grades at GCSE had missed a lot of schooling. Arrangements were made for her to attend Blessed, an educational programme held locally, and with support from her mother she was regularly attending school. She was keen to continue with her education and had started to attend interviews for local colleges.

Health issues

The YOS did not have a CAMHS or health worker to address the physical, emotional and mental health needs of children and young people. In the files reviewed we found that health had improved in only a small proportion of those with physical, emotional and mental health needs. Out of the 22 children and young people who had been interviewed or completed the Viewpoint questionnaire, only one said that they had received help with their health.

With regard to substance misuse, although children and young people were seen, because the substance misuse worker kept separate records and only informed the caseworker of their attendance, we could find no evidence of the type of interventions used or the effectiveness of such interventions. However, two of the four children and young people interviewed said they had had problems with substance misuse for which they had received help and the problem had improved.

Safeguarding

We were informed that the YOS and Social Services were developing their relationship and they believed it would be further strengthened by the YOS' move into the Children, Schools and Families Department. A protocol existed with Social Services in relation to shared or linked responsibilities including Looked After Children, remands to local authority accommodation and referrals across the two agencies.

Of the cases reviewed, only 5% (2) of children and young people were Looked After, 13% (5) were considered to be at risk of self-harm and 18% (7) were considered vulnerable to harm from others. We found that Social Services had either been involved or consulted in both cases where the child or young person was Looked After and that action had been taken in all cases where there was a risk of harm from self or others. Additionally, the YOS had consulted Social Services in 41% of other cases.

Strengths:

- ◆ Recent Asset scores showed an improvement over initial scores.
- ◆ The majority of children and young people complied well with their orders.
- ◆ Children and young people reported a change in their attitudes and offending behaviour.
- ◆ Mentoring, education and training were proving successful in engaging and developing children and young people.
- ◆ The relationships between Social Services and the YOS had a good basis for development.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Health specialists should be appointed to the YOS as soon as possible, in order that the needs of children and young people are met.
- ◆ Provisions must be made for better sharing of information between the substance misuse worker and other YOS staff.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS/CARERS

This section is judged as satisfactorily met.

3.

VICTIMS AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

3.1 Assessment of the needs of victims of children and young people who have offended

Inspection criteria

- ◇ *An assessment of victims' needs should be made and used to inform planned interventions.*
- ◇ *All victims are given the opportunity to make informed decisions about their involvement in cases of children and young people who have offended and are supported in doing so.*

Responsibility for work with victims was divided between the YOS police officer who contacted the victims of children and young people receiving final warnings, and another worker who was temporarily covering the roles of referral order coordinator, parenting and victims. We found this area of work to be one of the least well-developed of the YOS' practice. It also did not seem to be well resourced.

Despite the recommendations contained in the Audit Commission's report, *Youth Justice 2004*, a police computer was not located in the YOS office. The seconded police officer was, therefore, required to visit a police station in order to obtain victim details on those children and young people who had been recommended for a final warning. Under these circumstances, it was, therefore, not surprising to find that final warnings were not delivered in accordance with national guidance and the local agreement between the police and the YOS.

The YOS had some well established processes for contacting the victims of children and young people on referral orders. However, contact with the victims of children and young people on other orders only started in October 2004, following the establishment of the Witness Care Unit. These arrangements were still relatively new and it was clear from the files read that not all victims were contacted.

Under the agreement between the YOS and the Witness Care Unit, the details of all the victims of children and young people charged with an offence were sent to the YOS via secure email. The VLO would then contact the victim by telephone, followed by a letter and leaflets. Depending on the response, the VLO would either make a home visit, have a telephone conversation with the victim or take no further action. The VLO had found that most victims did not wish to have further involvement, and the remainder wanted only indirect contact. Victim impact statements were prepared for referral order panel meetings, but were not included in PSRs, an area of regret for the court. However, we were told that the Witness

Care Unit would be providing victim impact statements in accordance with the protocol between the YOS and the Witness Care Unit.

In the files reviewed, we found that victims had been contacted in 16 out of 40 cases. The VLO conducted her own monitoring and of the 60 victims contacted between April 2004 and June 2005, statements were taken from 32 and six attended a referral order panel.

Strengths:

- ◆ The YOS worked with the Witness Care Unit to offer a seamless service to the victims of youth crime.
- ◆ Victim contact services were developing and some victims were offered the opportunity to become involved.
- ◆ Monitoring processes were in place.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Time spent on work with victims and its coordination should be reviewed.
- ◆ The police should make arrangements to ensure the timely provision of victims' information to the YOS police officer, perhaps through the provision of a police computer in the YOS office.
- ◆ Victims were not contacted early enough for their input into the court process.

3.2 Restorative interventions with the victims of children and young people who have offended

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Victims have access to a restorative intervention tailored to their needs.*
- ◆ *Victims are offered the opportunity to specify any reparative element of the child's or young person's supervision plan and to be informed of their progress.*
- ◆ *Restorative and reparative interventions are provided that are appropriate to the age, vulnerability, culture, ethnicity, language needs, literacy levels and gender of the victims and children and young people who have offended.*

Restorative justice was not readily available to the majority of victims and children and young people in Merton. The YOS had, however, developed a number of indirect reparation projects, which included graffiti and litter removal and work in the National Trust cafe in Morden Park. We did not find that the full of range of reparation projects were regularly used and were concerned that children and young people were not always sensitively matched to the most appropriate reparation. The only direct reparation we

encountered in the files we read were letters of apology to the victim, although victims were invited to state the type of reparation they wanted the children and young people to do.

In the files we reviewed, we saw some examples of racially motivated offending for which there were, as yet, no appropriate interventions. The YOS should consider whether restorative justice intervention would be an appropriate medium for addressing this type of behaviour.

We were told that the YOS was planning to work with the Merton Mediation Service and with Victim Support for the provision of services to young victims of crime.

Strengths:

- ◆ Some indirect reparation was available.
- ◆ Victims were invited to choose the type of reparation they wished the children and young people to perform.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Restorative justice processes needed to be more central to the work of the YOS.
- ◆ Restorative and reparative interventions should be appropriate to the child or young person.
- ◆ Greater attention could be given to direct reparation and restorative interventions to victims from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

3.3 Restorative outcomes for victims of children and young people who have offended

Inspection criterion

- ◆ *Victims are satisfied with the work undertaken by the YOT.*

Although the YOS sent victim satisfaction questionnaires to each victim contacted, they did not receive enough responses to assist them in measuring the effectiveness of the service. We interviewed two victims, one of whom spoke of a 'vacuum of information' because they did not know when the letter of apology and the reparation in the form of compensation would arrive. However, both were very positive about their involvement with the YOS and one expressed the view that the YOS was "*highly supportive and went the extra mile*". Marks given out of ten were nine and ten respectively.

Strength:

- ◆ Victims interviewed were satisfied with the service they got from the YOS.

Area for improvement:

- ◆ The YOS needed to review its approach to seeking victim satisfaction information.

3.4 Restorative and reparative outcomes for children and young people who have offended

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Children and young people involved in restorative interventions make a positive contribution to the victim and community.*

The YOS engaged a number of children and young people in writing letters of apology to victims and used community reparation projects to allow them to make indirect reparation. Apart from the letters of apology, direct reparation was limited, with few children and young people actually meeting the victims of their crimes. This detracted from the overall contribution to the community.

We were pleased to find, however, that work to address the impact of offending on victims had been undertaken in over half of the files read. We also found that three out of the four children and young people interviewed said that they had either already done some work on this or were in the process of doing so. We were told that five young people had been offered paid employment as a result of completing reparation projects.

Strength:

- ◆ Children and young people were being made aware of the impact of their offending on their victims.

Area for improvement:

- ◆ The YOS should explore more opportunities to reunite children and young people to their communities.

Good practice

A violent young man had threatened reprisal against his victim. The VLO and police contacted the victim about this whilst work was done with the young person to address his attitude towards the victim. These interventions resulted in the young man moderating his feelings and withdrawing his threats.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT FOR WORK WITH VICTIMS AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

This section is judged as satisfactorily met.

The joint inspection of YOTs

The Government announced the establishment of an independent inspection of YOTs in December 2002. The inspection programme is to be conducted jointly by CSCI, Estyn, the Healthcare Commission, HMIC, HMI Prisons, HMI Probation, Ofsted and SSIW. The joint inspection team is located within and led by HMI Probation, and is funded by the Home Office.

Home Office objectives

The joint inspection contributes primarily to the achievement of Home Office Objective II - 'more offenders are caught, punished and stop offending and victims are better supported', and to the requirement to ensure that custodial and community sentences are more effective at stopping offending.

It also contributes to the achievement of Objective III, through our scrutiny of work to address drug and other substance misuse, and to other relevant CJS and Children's Services' objectives.

The purpose of the joint inspection is to report to the Secretary of State and, through him, Parliament and the public, on the effectiveness of the YOTs in fulfilling their statutory duties to prevent offending by children and young people, and thereby protect the public, whilst still safeguarding their rights and promoting their welfare.

The **aims** of the programme are to:

- ◆ assess the impact made by YOTs and partner organisations on the prevention of offending by children and young people through effective supervision
- ◆ appraise the work undertaken by YOTs and partner organisations to meet the needs of children and young people at risk of offending and enable them to lead law-abiding and constructive lives
- ◆ evaluate the role of the YOTs in safeguarding the rights and promoting the welfare of children and young people
- ◆ assess the extent to which the YOTs are meeting the required standards and targets set by the YJB
- ◆ promote good practice in the management arrangements of YOTs and service delivery to the courts and community
- ◆ identify underperformance and make recommendations to promote improvements
- ◆ evaluate the effective use of resources
- ◆ actively promote race equality and diversity as an integral part of the inspection process
- ◆ produce timely reports which contribute to improved performance by informing policy and practice.

Code of practice

Each inspection will:

- ◆ be undertaken with integrity in a professional, impartial and courteous manner
- ◆ enable the development of independent judgements, based on evidence
- ◆ seek to energise and engage with staff
- ◆ promote race equality and diversity throughout its processes
- ◆ be concluded with the timely publication of a report containing findings and recommendations for improvement.

Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within the remit of this inspection programme should write to:

*HM Chief Inspector of Probation
2nd Floor, Ashley House
2 Monck Street
London SW1P 2BQ*

Inspection arrangements

- ◇ The joint inspection programme started in September 2003, following two pilot inspections. All 155 YOTs in England and Wales are to be inspected over a five to six year cycle. As this was a long programme, we decided from the outset to break it down into three phases in order to ensure that the inspection retained its relevance and continued to address local and national concerns.
- ◇ The three phases are:
 - **from September 2003 to July 2004**, when the inspection concentrated on key issues, with emphasis placed on establishing benchmarks and the dissemination of good practice. Fifteen YOTs were inspected during this phase of the programme, all of whom were volunteers
 - **the current phase, up to September 2005**, when the inspection process will be based on the methodology established in the first phase. In so far as possible, fieldwork will be individually tailored to each YOT, informed by examination of the data available and the findings from other inspection programmes
 - **from September 2005 onwards**, when the YOT inspection methodology will be congruent with the five outcomes in the Children's Services inspection framework and complement that of the Joint Area Reviews in England. Although the YOT inspection will remain a separate process, inspections will run within a similar timeframe as the Joint Area Reviews where possible, so that areas of potential overlap and duplication can be reduced and rationalised. Findings from the YOT inspection will, therefore, inform not only the Joint Area Review but also the Annual Performance Assessment and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Work is currently being undertaken to ensure that this process is compatible with the different governance arrangements in Wales.
- ◇ The inspection will be carried out in line with the Government's commitment to proportionate and coordinated inspection in local government. It will:
 - be proportionate to risk, and fieldwork will only be undertaken where necessary to support findings or to disseminate good practice
 - complement, and be coordinated with other inspection programmes, including the Joint Area Reviews and comparable inspection processes in Wales
 - take account of YOTs' recent development as organisations.
- ◇ The standards and criteria developed for the first phase of the inspection have been slightly modified and focus on:
 - management and partnership arrangements
 - work with children and young people and their parents/carers
 - victims and restorative justice.

- ◆ The fieldwork for each individual inspection will take place over two weeks, about two to three weeks apart. The first week will consist of a file reading exercise for which the YOT will be asked to identify a random sample of between 30 and 80 children and young people (dependent on the workload) who have been subject to some form of intervention in the previous months. The cases will cover most orders, including licences.
- ◆ These case files will be examined in detail. In half the cases selected, we will also undertake in-depth interviews with the case manager, any other person significantly involved in delivering the intervention and, where possible, the child or young person themselves and their parents/carers. Where appropriate, we also hope to meet and hear from victims of crimes by children and young people supervised by the YOT.
- ◆ In order to encourage self-assessment and increase ownership of the inspection findings, we are inviting YOTs to second a member of their staff, usually an experienced practitioner, to the inspection team for the duration of the file reading week. We have found this to be a positive way of developing mutual understanding and strengthening the links between inspection and practice.
- ◆ As before, the second week of the inspection will involve meetings with the Chief Executive, Management Board members, YOT Manager and staff. It will cover the management of the YOT, its performance and the contribution made by its partner organisations. Discussions will be informed by the findings of the examination of case files conducted in the first week of inspection.
- ◆ The inspection findings will be compiled in a report which will include recommendations for improvement. These recommendations will be designed to encourage the YOT in its work, to support good practice and to promote improvements.
- ◆ The report will be submitted to the Home Secretary, as the Secretary of State responsible for youth justice, with simultaneous copies to the Education and Health Secretaries, and where relevant, the Ministers for Education & Lifelong Learning, Finance, Local Government & Communities, and Health & Social Services in Wales. A copy will be sent to the YJB. Copies will also be made available to the press and placed on the website of HMI Probation at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/probation/inspprob>

Scoring approach

We have decided to continue a similar approach to scoring in phase two as in phase one, in order to allow some broad comparisons of performance, but with certain provisos. First of all, it should be noted that this second phase of the inspection covers only three core areas, rather than five as in the first phase. In addition, as part of our aim of continually improving performance, two of the categorisations, 'good' and 'good basis for development' (formerly described as 'satisfactory with good basis for development'), have been amended, and whilst exacting a more rigorous standard of performance from the YOT also, we believe, allow for better representation of their actual achievements.

The three sections of the inspection will be individually assessed against the relevant standards, using the supporting criteria. Judgements will be based on:

- ◆ information supplied by the YOT
- ◆ interviews with chief officers, managers and staff both from the YOT and other partner organisations
- ◆ examination of case files
- ◆ discussions with case managers and other people significantly involved in the supervisory process
- ◆ the perspectives of the children and young people, their parents/carers and, where possible, their victims
- ◆ other relevant inspection findings.

The judgements are defined as:

- ◆ **Fully met** – exceptional performance beyond the requirements of national standards and other relevant guidelines
- ◆ **Satisfactorily met** – a sufficient level of performance to assure the joint inspection team that the YOT is progressing satisfactorily
- ◆ **Partly met** – less than sufficient performance on the majority of items
- ◆ **Not met** – inadequate performance on most items.

Some discretion is allowed to lead inspectors for scores to be adjusted if this seems appropriate due to other findings or contextual evidence.

The overall assessment will be determined by the judgements of the individual sections. As in the first phase of the inspection process, no score or grading will be given during this second phase, but instead a general categorisation highlighting particular achievements as well as areas for improvement. This approach was initially adopted as we felt that a more rigid scoring mechanism would be inappropriate given the developmental nature of much of the work of the YOTs and their relatively recent inauguration as organisations.

The overall performance of the YOT will be assessed as:

- ◆ **Commendable** – there is strong management performance and exemplary work with both children and young people and in relation to victims and restorative justice. These YOTs will be setting a standard of excellence which will act as an example to others.
- ◆ **Good** – either the section relating to management or work with children and young people is fully met and the other sections are at least satisfactorily met. YOTs within this category will have addressed most, if not all, key areas of work and be achieving a high standard of performance.
- ◆ **Good basis for development** – the sections relating to management arrangements and work with children and young people are both assessed as satisfactorily met and work with victims and restorative justice is being taken forward. Although some key areas will still require attention, these YOTs will have demonstrated good potential and their work will be sufficient to promote confidence in their future development.
- ◆ **Requiring improvement** – either the section on management arrangements or work with children and young people is assessed as partly or not met. In these instances, the inspection will have revealed concerns about key aspects of the YOT's performance which need to be addressed.
- ◆ **Requiring significant improvement** – neither the section on management arrangements or work with children and young people is considered to have been satisfactorily met. YOTs within this category will need to take immediate action to address major concerns about core areas of work.

Next steps

- ◆ The YOT will be asked to send a response to the recommendations, to the lead inspector, together with an action plan within three months of the publication of the report. It is anticipated that the recommendations will normally be addressed within 12 months of publication to allow sufficient time for integration within existing developments.
- ◆ Implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by the YJB. The joint inspection programme does not normally include any follow-up action unless issues were to emerge during the course of the programme that were of such serious concern to require immediate attention. The inspection of the Merton YOS has not revealed any such concerns.
- ◆ In addition to the reports on individual YOTs, the joint inspection team will also publish periodic reports on findings across a number of teams. Such reports will include comments on race equality and diversity issues and other trend information. These reports will also include comparisons between the performance of YOTs with similar characteristics.