

Guidance for inspectors

What we inspect in youth work services for inspections from 2024



This guidance is also available in Welsh.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Contents	Page
Introduction to What we inspect	1
About the youth work provider	2
Overview	2
Recommendations	2
What happens next?	3
The evidence base of the inspection	3
Inspection areas	4
1 How does youth work help young people achieve their potential?	5
2 What young people can expect from youth work provision	7
3 Leading and improving	10

Introduction to 'What we inspect'

This handbook sets out what inspectors need to consider when evaluating the five inspection areas in youth work services. It explains 'What we inspect'. It should be read in conjunction with the document ['How we inspect'](#).

The guidance is essential reading for reporting inspectors and all other members of the inspection team, including the nominee. It may also be useful for providers to support their understanding of the inspection guidance. There is a separate handbook that explains the inspection process and methodology, ['How we inspect'](#).

The three inspection areas are set out below.

Inspection areas

1 – How does youth work help young people achieve their potential?

- 1.1 Educative
- 1.2 Expressive
- 1.3 Participative
- 1.4 Inclusive
- 1.5 Empowering

2 – What young people can expect from youth work provision

- 2.1 The quality of youth work
- 2.2 The Universal Offer (youth work provision for all young people)
- 2.3 Support for vulnerable young people

3 – Leading and improving

- 3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
- 3.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning
- 3.3 Professional learning
- 3.4 Safeguarding

Evaluating each inspection area (IA)

We will not give overall grades for each inspection area. However, we will make a robust and thorough evaluation of the provision and its impact on young people's learning, outcomes and wellbeing.

We will always include clear evaluations in relation to the reporting requirements in each inspection area, as exemplified in this handbook. However, what inspectors report on within each inspection area may differ depending on the relative significance of what they find in each provider. We may report 'by exception'. This means that we may report on some aspects only where there are particular strengths or areas for improvement. Where we identify serious shortcomings in one or more inspection areas, the provider will normally require follow-up activity. Our 'How we inspect' guidance provides more detail on the nature of follow-up activity in the sector

About the provider

This section of the report will be brief and contain only factual background information about the youth work provider (referred to as the provider from now on) and will not contain any evaluation of the provision. The reporting inspector normally agrees the content of this section with the nominee for the provider during the inspection and during the provider's factual check of the draft report prior to its publication. If there is disagreement about the content of this section, the reporting inspector will make the final decision about what to include in the report.

This section will contain brief information on:

- the size, nature and location of the provision
- Demographic information where relevant
- the nature and scope of the youth work provided
- the number of young people being engaged
- partner organisations involved in delivering provision
- any recent and important changes
- any other relevant factors

Overview

This section of the report should:

- contain a short overview of the main findings (200-300 words), outlining the key strengths and any important areas that require improvement
- make the link between young people's outcomes, the quality of provision and the effectiveness of leadership
- be consistent with the findings in the body of the report

Recommendations

The recommendations should:

- link closely to the main evaluation areas of the inspection guidance, with the weightiest recommendations reflected in the overview
- give the provider a clear and specific indication of the area(s) that require improvement
- help the provider to understand clearly what they should do to make the necessary improvements
- be written in order of priority, not in the order of the guidance

What happens next?

The 'What happens next' section will set out what the provider needs to do following the inspection. In all cases, leaders will need to respond to the recommendations by putting in place the actions required to make the improvements identified by the inspection team.

This section should exemplify any interesting or innovative practice case studies that we have invited leaders to share.

The section will explain whether the provider requires any level of follow-up activity by Estyn. The overview will make a brief explanation of the reasons for follow-up.

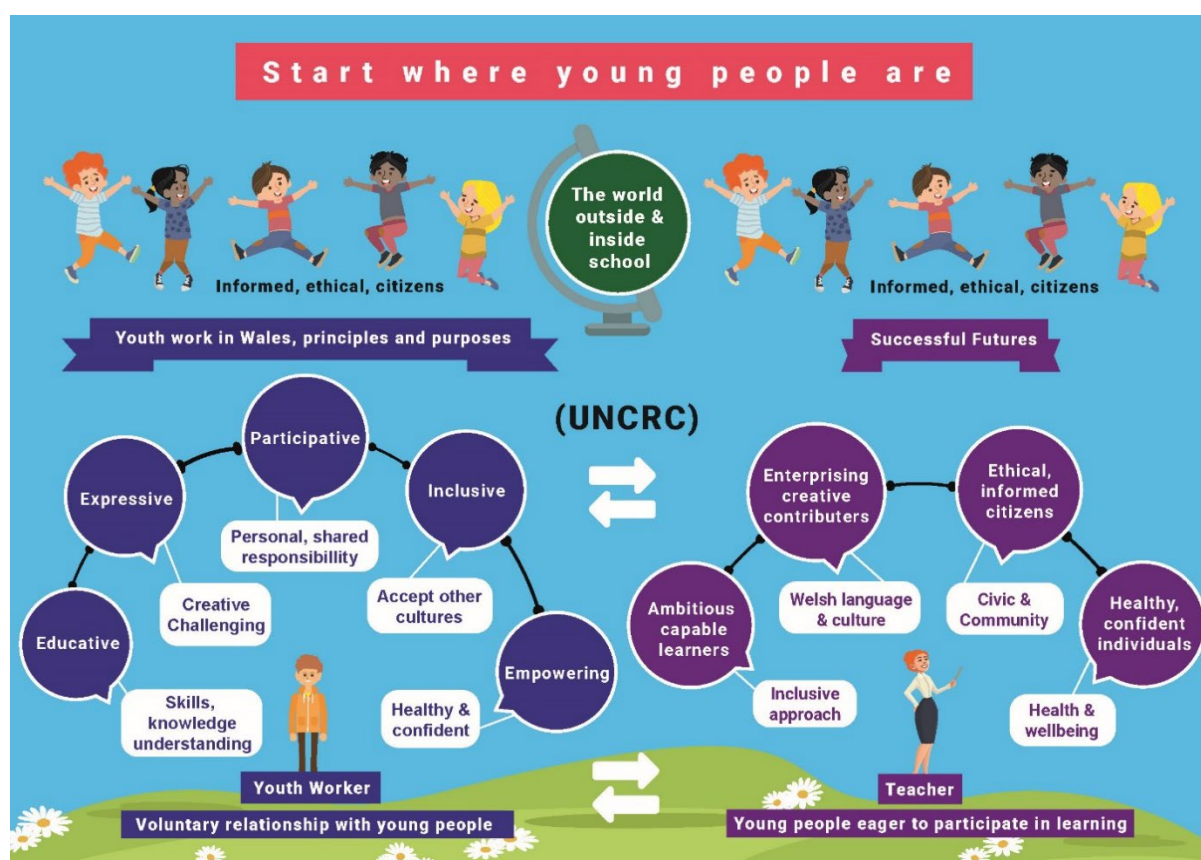
The evidence base of the inspection

We will use a wide range of evidence to make sure that their findings are valid, accurate and reliable. This section of the report will explain the sources of evidence that inspectors used as well as the range of activities that they carried out during their visit.

Inspection areas

Youth work' is a recognised methodology for working with young people, which is underpinned by National Occupational Standards (NOS), regulated professional qualifications, and has a defined ethical base. Youth work is a voluntary relationship between a young person and a youth worker. In the cases where young people are mandated to work with a youth worker, for example in some formal education or youth justice settings, the relationship will still be essentially voluntary, that is, the young person will agree to work with the youth worker. Youth work builds on the establishment of good working relationships with young people in which their needs are put first. The definition of young people is those between the ages of 11 and 25 years old.

There are important similarities between youth work skills and the new ways of working set out in the Curriculum for Wales 2022. This sets out an approach to education aimed at preparing young people for an uncertain future by giving them the skills to become independent learners and critical thinkers and apply their learning to new situations. It promotes the idea that education should be 'child centred' and based on responsiveness to the needs of the individual, helping young people to work creatively and collaboratively. The illustration below sets out the synergy between youth work principles as set out in The Principles and Purposes of Youth Work and the approach of the Curriculum for Wales.



Youth work has always focused on principles similar to the four purposes of The Curriculum for Wales. Youth work facilitates the development of young people's social and emotional skills, including self-determination, self-control, confidence, persistence, and self-motivation through informal activities. These skills help all young people improve their educational achievement and secure sustainable and rewarding employment. For the young people who struggle in the education system, the youth work approach can help remove barriers to learning, broaden horizons and give young people the confidence they need to engage and move forward.

Youth work, wherever it is delivered, facilitates experience-based learning, encourages participation in learning and develops citizenship skills. It develops young people's confidence, decision-making skills, and practical collaborative skills and equips young people for work. Hence, youth work skills are therefore also important to the delivery of the Welsh Government's employability policies, such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (September 2022) and can support young people to remain engaged in education, employment and training, or re-engage where appropriate. Youth work in community and other settings also makes a wide range of qualifications available to young people across a variety of subjects and activities.

The following section explains what each inspection area covers and what inspectors need to consider when evaluating each one.

The inspection areas are numbered 1 – 3, but they are equally important. Within each inspection area, the report will not always cover the aspects in the order they appear in this handbook. Inspectors may choose to sequence the aspects differently in order to reflect their findings.

The report on each inspection area will normally be around 750 to 1000 words.

1 How does youth work help young people achieve their potential?

Inspectors should evaluate how well young people make progress towards and achieve their aims incorporated in the following principles and purposes of youth work (Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes of Youth Work in Wales Review Group, October 2022)

Inspectors should also consider the preventative nature of youth work whilst considering the extent to which young people reach their potential.

The following five key components of Youth Work have equal weighting. The first of these, Educative, contains the most guidance for inspectors reflecting the status of youth work as an education profession.

1.1 Educative

Inspectors should consider how well young people gain the skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values needed for their own personal development and fulfilment and as a means of contributing to society as members of groups and communities, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which young people develop their full potential, including through their education and training. They should evaluate young people's progress and success in achievement as they define it.

Inspectors' evaluation of young people's achievement and progress from their starting points should be based on session observations, assessment and development of skills, scrutiny of young people's output (including output generated digitally) and discussions with young people. Inspectors should evaluate how well young people recall previous learning, develop thinking skills, acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills, and how well they apply these to new situations. Inspectors should consider how well young people learn to evaluate and reflect on their own achievements and those of others.

Inspectors should evaluate how well young people develop and utilise their Welsh language skills from their starting points on the language continuum, and how they are developing skills in Welsh for future employment in Wales and for use in their communities and daily lives.

Inspectors should consider how well young people develop their general communication skills and digital competence, and where relevant their literacy and numeracy skills when engaging with youth work.

Inspectors should evaluate the progress of particular groups of young people, for example young people at different levels of their development, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those from minority ethnic groups and young people who do not have English or Welsh as a first language.

Inspectors should evaluate, where relevant, young people's progress towards and success in achieving qualifications. Inspectors should consider how well young people develop their personal, social and learning skills.

Inspectors should also consider how well young people develop skills in perseverance and resilience to continue and successfully complete activities when they encounter difficulties, including in other settings such as in school or elsewhere in the community.

Inspectors should report on relevant data but should remain outcome-focussed and not be overly driven by data given that outcomes in youth work are often less easily and less immediately measurable than in formal education settings.

1.2 Expressive

Inspectors should consider how effectively young people express themselves in Welsh and/or English. They should evaluate how young people convey their understanding and knowledge and their ideas, opinions, emotions and aspirations through a broad range of creative and often challenging opportunities.

Inspectors should evaluate how young people develop skills such as creative, artistic and sporting skills. They should also evaluate how young people express their views and understanding of contemporary issues such as the environment and artificial intelligence and become advocates for stimulating change to best meet their own needs and those of others.

1.3 Participative

Inspectors should evaluate how effectively young people (including those who might otherwise be under-represented and/or have vulnerable characteristics) become partners in, and share responsibility for, the opportunities, learning processes and decision-making structures which affect their own and other people's lives and environments, locally, regionally and nationally.

Inspectors should consider how well young people increase in confidence, becoming more politically and socially aware and able to articulate ideas, as well as developing their leadership skills and the ability to work co-operatively with others.

When evaluating participation and enjoyment in formal and informal activities, inspectors should consider the evidence from interviews with young people, observation of their engagement in sessions and, in discussion, their levels of aspiration, motivation and confidence.

1.4 Inclusive

Inspectors should evaluate how young people develop knowledge, understanding and positive attitudes and behaviour in relation to social, and cultural identity, language and diversity, including protected characteristics.

Inspectors should consider how effectively young people develop their understanding of heritage, locally, nationally and internationally. They should consider if young people recognise the value of their own and other people's languages, and respect other people's choices. Inspectors should evaluate how well young people develop as respectful, responsible and active citizens of Wales and the wider world who display high levels of understanding, compassion and sensitivity towards the rights and feelings of others.

1.5 Empowering

Inspectors should evaluate how young people develop the understanding and skills to enable them to exercise their rights including: recognising that all young people have rights and respecting the rights of others; carrying out their responsibilities as citizens and members of their communities, including for example by volunteering; engaging with the personal, social and political issues which affect their lives and the lives of others and to develop qualities of leadership.

Inspectors should consider how young people gain in confidence and independence and demonstrate the skills needed to make choices.

2. What young people can expect from youth work provision

2.1 The quality of youth work

Inspectors should evaluate how well youth workers establish good working relationships with young people in which their needs are put first.

Inspectors should consider how effectively youth work, wherever it is delivered, facilitates experience-based learning, encourages participation in learning and

develops citizenship skills. Inspectors should consider how it develops young people's confidence, decision-making skills, critical thinking and practical collaborative skills and equips young people for work. Inspectors should evaluate how the provision promotes young people's emotional intelligence, empathy and responsibility for their own actions.

Inspectors should evaluate the expectations of Youth Workers working with young people with additional learning needs where relevant. They should consider how well their planning meets the needs of the young people. They should consider the extent to which youth workers have clear objectives for young people's personal development and learning and how effectively they use a range of approaches and resources to engage young people's interest and to challenge them to achieve as well as they can. They should consider the extent to which they make their sessions, including online delivery, stimulating and engaging so that young people of all abilities and backgrounds, can learn and/or engage productively.

Inspectors should evaluate how well youth workers manage young people's participation in sessions, including those delivered online, to ensure all young people have the opportunity to participate fully. Inspectors should consider how providers find out why certain young people do not access youth work activities and adapt provision to fit the need. For example, utilise online and digital delivery to engage hard to reach young people, such as young people in rural areas, those who are isolated through family circumstances, young carers and those who have become reclusive.

Inspectors should consider the quality of youth work based on their impact on outcomes for young people. Inspectors may consider how well the provider enables young people to participate effectively in education and training, take advantage of opportunities for employment and participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.

Inspectors should evaluate the effectiveness of outreach and detached youth work programmes and consider the opportunities that are provided for young people to review and evaluate the quality of their youth work experiences and suggest how these can be improved.

Inspectors should consider, where appropriate, how youth workers assess young people's achievements, including for named awards where relevant; how they ensure that young people understand the purpose of the assessment and are fully involved in the process and whether young people's achievements are celebrated, publicly.

The main evaluations, context and summary should not report directly that the provider has achieved any named awards, including those that are publicly funded. However, there may be references to named awards in the evidence base, particularly where the award has had an impact on improving standards or provision.

2.2 The Universal Offer (youth work provision for all young people)

Inspectors should consider the extent to which the provision meets the needs of all young people, including the range and breadth of provision, the geographical location

and timing of provision, and the opportunity to access provision remotely, if appropriate.

Inspectors should consider how well the provider supports access to impartial information and guidance for young people, whether pastoral or educational.

Where relevant, inspectors should evaluate provision targeted at educational and behavioural support and provision aimed at supporting young people into further and higher education and the world of work. Inspectors should evaluate how well the provider offers specialist support when appropriate, such as for mental health or employment opportunities.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which young people, part-time staff and volunteers are involved in the design of the provision offer.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the youth work activities and experiences stimulate and challenge young people so that they engage fully in their learning and interactions with youth workers and peers and make the best possible progress. Inspectors should consider how the provision encourages young people to take an active part in the life of their community and participate in decision making processes relevant to them.

Inspectors should consider the ways in which the provider develops a programme of activities that reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of Wales and helps young people understand about community and employment opportunities in Wales.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent and quality of the provision for the development of Welsh language skills from their starting points. They should consider how well young people are made aware of the advantages of learning Welsh and becoming bilingual. Inspectors should comment on the arrangements that providers have to support young people's Welsh language skills development.

Overall, inspectors should consider if the activities are, purposeful, stimulating and fun for young people.

2.3 Support for vulnerable young people

Inspectors should consider how well the provision caters for specific groups of young people, for example those with additional learning needs (ALN), LGBTQ+ young people, or those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or vulnerable in other ways such as those educated at home. Inspectors should evaluate how well the provider plans for and creates an inclusive environment where young people are supported to meet their full potential.

Inspectors should evaluate the effectiveness of the provision for personal and specialist support for young people. This will include the availability and signposting to specialist agencies, especially for young people who face considerable barriers to their personal development and learning, including personal, financial, domestic, transport, health and family care responsibilities. Inspectors should assess the extent to which the provider identifies and supports marginalised and vulnerable young people using appropriate engagement strategies.

Inspectors should evaluate the provider's arrangements for promoting healthy lifestyle choices, for example in relation to healthy eating and drinking, substance misuse, online safety, mental health issues and work-life balance. Inspectors should evaluate how well the provision develops young people's practical skills, self-reliance, resilience, financial planning and consideration for others. Inspectors should consider the guidance and other support provided to safeguard the welfare of young people and promote their personal development.

3 Leading and improving

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Inspectors should evaluate how the provider listens to the voice of young people and how they are effectively engaged in the governance and management of provision.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the leaders of the provider, whether paid officials, trustees or volunteers have established and communicated a clear vision and appropriate aims, strategic objectives, plans and policies. They should evaluate how effectively the provider plans and works with all partners, and other agencies for example, other youth organisations, housing charities, social services and schools and the private sector, to contribute to the provision. They should also consider the extent to which partners work collaboratively to meet the needs of all young people and their communities.

Inspectors should reflect on how well the leadership at all levels set high expectations for young people, paid or unpaid staff and themselves. They should consider how well leaders develop an effective and engaged body of staff and volunteers. They should consider to what extent leaders model and promote professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to effective collaboration between staff, including volunteers, across the provider and with partnership organisations. Inspectors should consider how well staff at all levels, and volunteers, understand and carry out their roles and responsibilities and how well they collaborate in driving forward strategic priorities for the provision and for improvement. Inspectors should evaluate how effectively staff and volunteers are deployed and supervised and where relevant how the provider recruits, trains and retains the involvement of paid staff and volunteer staff.

Inspectors should consider a wide range of evidence when evaluating the quality of leadership and management, taking into account the size, type and funding of the organisation, for example, minutes from a range of recent meetings, interviews with staff, improvement action plans and reports on their implementation, self-assessment reports from leaders and the analysis of information on young people's development. Inspectors should evaluate how well the provider shares information with partners working with young people and collaborates with them to provide relevant activities and support for young people.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders act in accordance with the principle of sustainable development and impact on future generations and how well they make decisions and set priorities for improvement that balance immediate, short-term needs with the long-term needs of young people, their community and Wales.

Inspectors should look at the extent to which the leadership of the provider sustains high quality or improves weak aspects of provision. They should consider how well leaders prevent problems from occurring in the first place and how quickly they bring about any remedial action required both within the provider and in partner organisations.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which leaders are purposeful and successful in meeting national, regional and local priorities as appropriate to the provider.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders share positive features of provision with staff and volunteers across the provider and with partnership organisations and collaborate with other education partnerships and partners within the sector to achieve improvements. Inspectors should focus on how well the provider uses strategic alliances and collaboration with other agencies to help to build its capacity for continuous improvement and to reduce the impact of poverty on personal and social development and attainment.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the provider's spending decisions, contract management, and broad financial planning link appropriately to its strategic priorities and its improvement planning. In relation to spending decisions, inspectors should consider how well the provider balances its short-term needs alongside the long-term needs of young people utilising the funding streams that are available effectively.

Inspectors should consider whether the provider uses its accommodation and IT infrastructure effectively and efficiently, and the extent to which this supports and extends engagement with young people. Inspectors should consider whether young people have good access to a full range of activities appropriate to their needs.

Inspectors should consider the priority that leaders across the provision have given to ensuring that all staff and volunteers understand and promote the provider's safeguarding culture.

3.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning

Inspectors should evaluate how accurately leaders across the provider know the provision's strengths and areas for improvement. They should consider how well leaders gather and analyse first-hand evidence of outcomes. Inspectors should evaluate how well the provision is reviewed in response to feedback and consultation with young people and other stakeholders. Inspectors should consider how well the provider self-assesses at delivery and management levels.

Inspectors should consider the impact of improvement planning and how well identified priorities for improvement link to the outcomes of the provider's self-evaluation. Inspectors should consider how well leaders ensure that priorities are supported by the allocation of resources, for example through appropriate use of youth work grant funding. They should evaluate how well leaders define relevant and measurable actions for improvement in specified and realistic timescales and allocate responsibility for their delivery.

Inspectors should take into account the provider's track-record in making improvements and the extent to which they have led to a positive impact on young people. Where appropriate, inspectors should consider how well the provider has responded to recommendations from previous Estyn inspections.

3.3 Professional learning

Inspectors should evaluate to what extent leaders across the provider have created a culture and ethos to support the development and professional learning of all staff, and volunteers, including the arrangements to support the active engagement of all of the workforce in increasing their professional knowledge, understanding and skills. They should consider the extent to which staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences, appraisal and performance management. Inspectors should evaluate if paid and volunteer staff have meaningful opportunities to participate in such professional learning opportunities with others, for example teachers, educational psychologists, sports leaders, artists, musicians and digital champions etc. Inspectors should consider if staff and volunteers, where appropriate, have access to professional learning to gain relevant accredited qualifications to improve their youth work skills and enhance their employability options where relevant

Inspectors should evaluate the impact of leaders in the way they manage the performance of staff and volunteers in order to improve their practice. They should also judge whether leaders address issues of underperformance robustly and directly where necessary. Inspectors should consider the opportunities for leaders to undertake senior leadership programmes alongside others.

They should consider professional learning undertaken by staff and its impact on young people's outcomes and wellbeing and their own practice. They should look at how well senior leaders have identified good practice across the provider and ensured that other staff, including those in partner organisations, may benefit from it.

3.4 Safeguarding

Inspectors will evaluate to what extent the provider's safeguarding arrangements promote the protection of young people.

Inspectors will report on whether the provider's arrangements for safeguarding young people meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Where arrangements are a serious cause for concern, inspectors should include a recommendation in the report, and we will send a wellbeing letter to the provider asking them to outline how they will address the shortcoming(s). If a health and safety concern is identified, this will be reported to the local authority or to the voluntary service provider.

Inspectors should also consider the provider's approach to safeguarding, and how well leaders promote and support a culture of safety and well-being on-site, off-site or online.

When evaluating the impact of the care, support and guidance of the provider on safeguarding young people, inspectors should consider how well the provider:

- responds to, records and manages any alleged incidents relating to prejudice-related bullying, harassment and discrimination, whether by staff or by young people, including onward referral and reporting where appropriate
- develops young people's knowledge and understanding of emotionally damaging or unsafe behaviours, for example grooming, harassment, discrimination, bullying and extremism
- protects young people from radicalisation and exploitation
- promotes an anti-bullying culture and a positive approach to managing young people's behaviour
- records and addresses poor behaviour and specific types of bullying, included those involving protected characteristics, and how well leaders use the records to improve the provision

When considering **child protection** arrangements, inspectors should consider:

- the identification and support provided for young people who are being harmed, or are at risk of being harmed, and those young people who are looked after by the local authority
- whether staff and leaders at all levels know what to do if they have concerns about a young person, or an adult's behaviour towards a young person
- whether the provider has robust procedures to ensure the suitability of staff and others who are in contact with young people and maintains a current record of these checks

When evaluating the **impact of leadership** on safeguarding, inspectors should consider:

- how well leaders, staff and the managers promote a positive safeguarding culture
- the effectiveness of the provider's own evaluation of its safeguarding arrangements, and any actions planned or taken to address any identified shortcoming
- whether all staff, including the designated lead officer, have received a suitable range of safeguarding training at the appropriate level
- whether young people feel safe during their time in the youth setting, and how well they believe that the provider's leaders will take seriously any concerns they have about their safety; this should include considering how well the provider keeps young people safe from the dangers of radicalisation and exploitation, including appropriate training for staff and regular updates in relation to this and other risks to young people's safety
- the general security of the provider's buildings and site, and how well leaders promote an awareness of risks to young people's well-being
- whether the provider has appropriate policies, procedures and reporting arrangements in relation to physical interventions and any areas used for withdrawal
- how well the provider uses its intelligence about safeguarding matters across all its partners
- whether all staff know what to do to respond to safeguarding issues

Inspectors should evaluate how well the provider uses its intelligence about safeguarding matters across all its partners, and how well reporting processes are used to quality assure safeguarding by senior leaders.