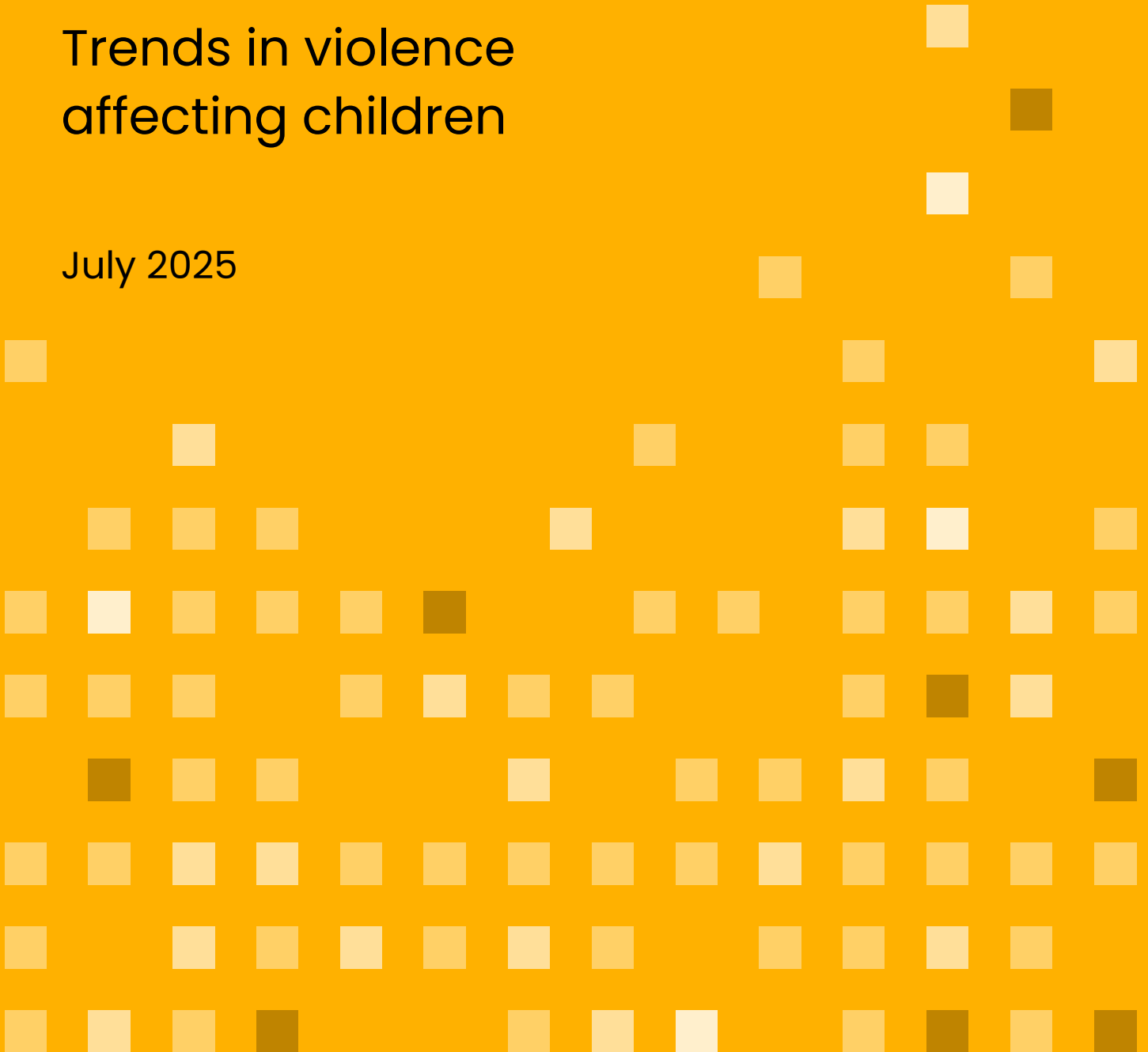


Beyond the Headlines

Trends in violence
affecting children

July 2025



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Part 1

Acknowledgements
and foreword



Acknowledgements

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All views expressed in this report are those of the Youth Endowment Fund.

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Foreword

Beyond the Headlines looks past the noise, beyond the media panic and beyond the political debate. It shows what is really happening to children's safety from violence in our society. It tells us that something is going wrong. Focusing on 2023/24, the latest year for which data is available, this essential report tells us that our society is struggling to fulfil its most precious promise: the one we make to all our children – to keep them safe

Beyond the headlines, we see a state that is struggling as many of our children's needs have risen. Compared to ten years ago, we can see that half the amount of money is spent on youth services, fewer crimes are being solved, more children are missing school, more are needing mental health services and more are going into care. This dismal decade has landed us with a year in which over 500 children were hospitalised with knife injuries and over 100 young people were murdered. It is the first year since COVID that these tragic numbers have risen.

Beyond the headlines, we see the remains of significant disproportionality by race. We know already that Black children are six times more likely to be murdered. This report highlights the high number of Black children in custody. It is obvious that if we want to reduce violence, we have to talk about and tackle this. That doesn't mean assuming that things always get worse. Whilst the share of Black children in the criminal justice system remains disproportionate, it has fallen every year since COVID. There is much to do, but it can be done.

Beyond the headlines, we see the final year of the last parliament. We see the urgent need for action that the last government described and the new government inherited. The Prime Minister has been clear – describing halving knife crime as a 'moral mission'. He believes change is possible. He is right;

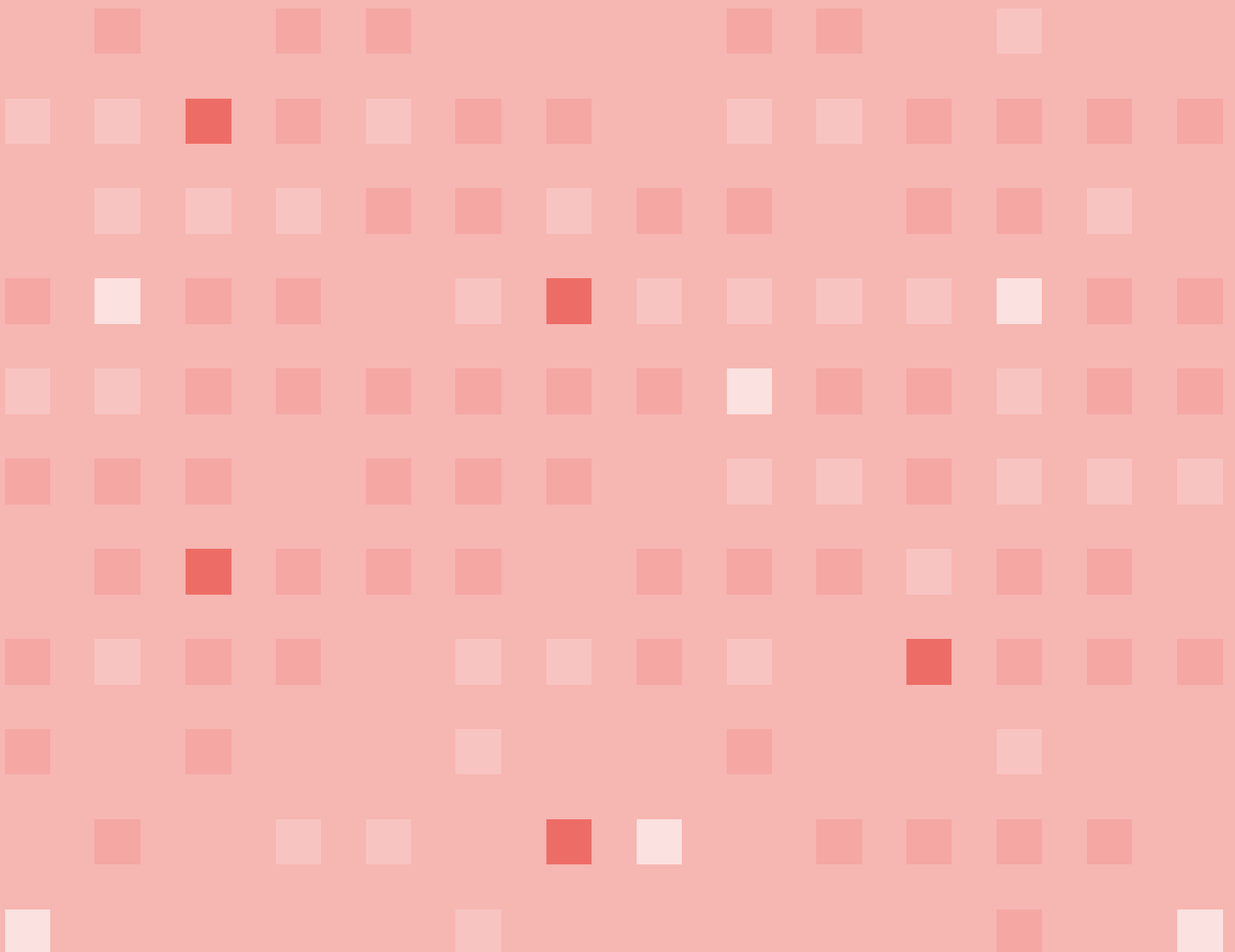
working at the Youth Endowment Fund, I see reason for hope every day. Working with teachers, police officers, social workers, youth justice workers, youth workers and mental health practitioners, we are learning more each day about what works to keep children safe – whether that's mentoring, therapy, or family support. Our children want to live in a safer world. It is up to us adults to give it to them



Jon Yates
Chief Executive Officer
Youth Endowment Fund

Part 2

Main findings
and summary



Main findings

Last year we launched a series of indicators we'll use to track key trends in violence affecting children and young people and in six of the sectors that are key to supporting those at risk. This report provides our latest annual update. It includes data for 2023/24, the final year of the last parliament.

Core indicators of violence have risen for the first time in recent years.

Last year, we said violence was broadly falling.

In the years following Covid-19, key measures of violence fell. Last year (2022/23), the number of 16-24-year-old homicide victims was 30% down from 2019/20 – the pre-Covid spike. Hospital admissions of children for knife assault had fallen for the fourth consecutive year. And proven violent offences by children fell for the fifth year in a row.

But in the latest data, more children were victims of serious violence.

In 2023/24, the number of children admitted to hospital following knife assault rose 9% compared to 2022/23 (509 vs 467), the first annual increase in 5 years. 105 young people aged 16-24 were victims of homicide, up 6% from 99 in 2022/23. Homicides of teenagers specifically rose even more – up 28% from 2022/23. Both hospital admissions and homicides are up from levels ten years ago (2013/14), by 58% and 9%, respectively.

And despite fewer children entering the justice system overall...

In 2023/24, 13,686 children were cautioned or convicted for any offence, down 0.4% from 2022/23 and down 67% from ten years ago (2013/14). The number of first-time entrants also fell, down 3% from 2022/23 and down 65% from 2013/14.

...more were committing violent offences.

In 2023/24, proven violent offences by children rose 9% from 2022/23, the first annual increase in 6 years. 46 children were convicted for homicide, 77% up on ten years ago (2013/14), compared to a 14% increase across all ages. Arrests of children for violent offences rose for the third consecutive year, up 5% on 2022/23.

Most sectors are experiencing serious challenges.

Some indicators showed improvements...

Police successfully investigated more crimes (up 0.6%pts on 2022/23), fewer children were persistently absent from school (missing 10% or more of possible lessons was down 1.3%pts from 2022/23) and fewer children were taken into care (down 0.2% from 2022/23).

...but most remain worse compared to ten years ago.

Despite improvements, in 2023/24 only 1 in 10 crimes had successful outcomes (down 15.8%pts from 2013/14), whilst 1 in every 5 children were persistently absent (up 9.3%pts from 2013/14) and 90,830 children were looked after by local authorities (up 21.9% from 2013/14). For the second year in a row, children's reoffending rate rose (up 0.3%pts from 2022/23).

And children may not be getting the support they need.

1.1 million children were referred to mental health services in 2023/24 – rising for the sixth year in a row – and the number accessing services remains less than half the number referred. Spending on youth services was down 0.3% from 2022/23 and remains half what it was ten years ago (2013/14). The number of children living in poverty rose again to over a quarter (26%) of all children.

Racial disproportionality in exposure to violence and access to services remains a concern.

The overrepresentation of Black children in the justice system is improving.

Black children made up 10% of arrests in 2023/24, down from 12% in 2022/23 and a peak of 16% in 2019/20. The share of Black children in custody fell by 2%pts from 26% in 2022/23 to 24% in 2023/24. Black children are the least likely to be persistently absent from school and in 2023/24 were less likely to be suspended (8%) compared to the rate for all children (11%).

But Black and Mixed race children are still disproportionately affected by violence.

In 2023/24, Black children and young people were still 4 times more likely to be in custody and 6 times more likely to be victims of homicide compared to their share of the population. The proportion of Mixed race children in custody rose to 18% – 3 times their population share.

And persistent inequalities are masked by looking only at race.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children were the most likely to be temporarily suspended (39%) from school in 2023/24. Whilst Black African children were less likely to be suspended (6%) than average (11%), Black Caribbean (16%) and mixed White and Black Caribbean (21%) children were the next most likely to be suspended after those from GRT backgrounds.

Core indicators dashboard

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)*	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)**
CHILDREN AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE					
Homicides 16-24-year-old homicide victims	<div>Mixed</div> <div>Previously: mixed</div>	105	+6%	-26%	+9%
Knife crime 0-17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife assault	<div>Mixed</div> <div>Previously: mixed</div>	509	+ 9%	- 8%	+ 58%
Justice system involvement Proven violent offences committed by children	<div>Mixed</div> <div>Previously: improving</div>	15,542	+9%	-26%	-38%
Disproportionality Proportion of Black children in custody	<div>Mixed</div> <div>Previously: mixed</div>	23.7%	-2.1%pt	-4.5%pt	+1.3%pt
SECTORS AND WIDER SOCIETY					
Policing Successfully investigated crimes	<div>Mixed</div> <div>Previously: worsening</div>	10.4%	+ 0.6%pt	- 0.5%pt	- 15.8%pt
Youth justice Children's reoffending rate	<div>Mixed</div> <div>Previously: mixed</div>	32.5%	+0.3%pt	-1.7%pt	-8.5%pt
Education Proportion of children persistently absent from school	<div>Mixed</div> <div>Previously: mixed</div>	20.0%	-1.3%pt	+9.1%pt	+9.3%pt

Health Referrals to mental health services	Worsening <i>Previously: worsening</i>	1,139,355	+ 3%	+ 49%	+ 105%
Children's services Children looked after	Mixed <i>Previously: worsening</i>	90,830	- 0.1%	+ 4.2%	+ 21.9%
Youth sector Local authority expenditure for youth services	Mixed <i>Previously: mixed</i>	£492m	- 0.3%	+ 8.1%	- 47.7 %
Poverty Proportion of children in households in absolute poverty	Mixed <i>Previously: mixed</i>	26.4%	+1.4%pt	+1.6%pt	-1.9%pt

**All figures are for the financial year ending March 2024 (2023/24), except for reoffending rates, which are for children in the criminal justice system in the 2022/23 financial year, and school absence rates, which cover the academic year September to August.*

***All figures are compared to the annual figure ten years ago (2013/14), except for referrals to mental health services, for which the available published historic data only extends back to 2016/17.*

How ratings have been assigned

For each of the indicators, we've compared the last available annual figures with three different time points: the previous year (2022/23), the year before the Covid-19 pandemic (2019/20) and ten years ago (or the longest available period if ten years of data is not available). We've assigned ratings as follows:

- Improving

For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has shown improvement.
- Worsening

For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has got worse.
- Mixed

For indicators where there is no clear trend based on the three time points (i.e. some point to improvement whilst others have worsened).

Executive summary

Every year, thousands of children are affected by violence. But is the situation improving – or getting worse? And how well are the systems that support children responding?

To help answer these questions, the Youth Endowment Fund created a [core indicators dashboard](#), tracking 11 key measures. It's designed to cut through complexity and offer a clear, data-driven picture of the trends that matter most.

This report is our first annual update since launching the dashboard last year. It includes the latest full-year data for 2023/24 – the final year of the last Parliament.

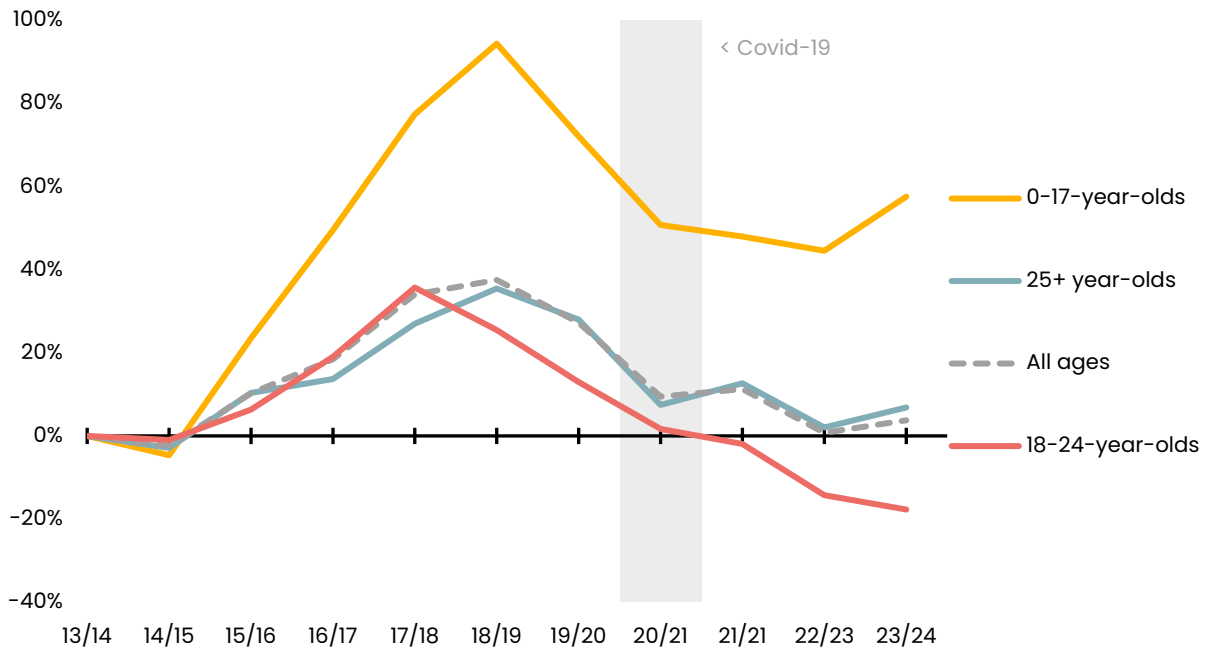
Here's what the data tells us ...

Core indicators of violence have risen for the first time in years.

Over the past decade – and especially in recent years – violence has worsened, with children and young people increasingly affected. In England and Wales, the total number of homicides was 10% higher in 2023/24 than in 2013/14. Among 13-19-year-olds, the increase was far steeper: up by 64%.ⁱⁱ

Hospital admissions of children due to knife assault increased for the first time in the past five years.

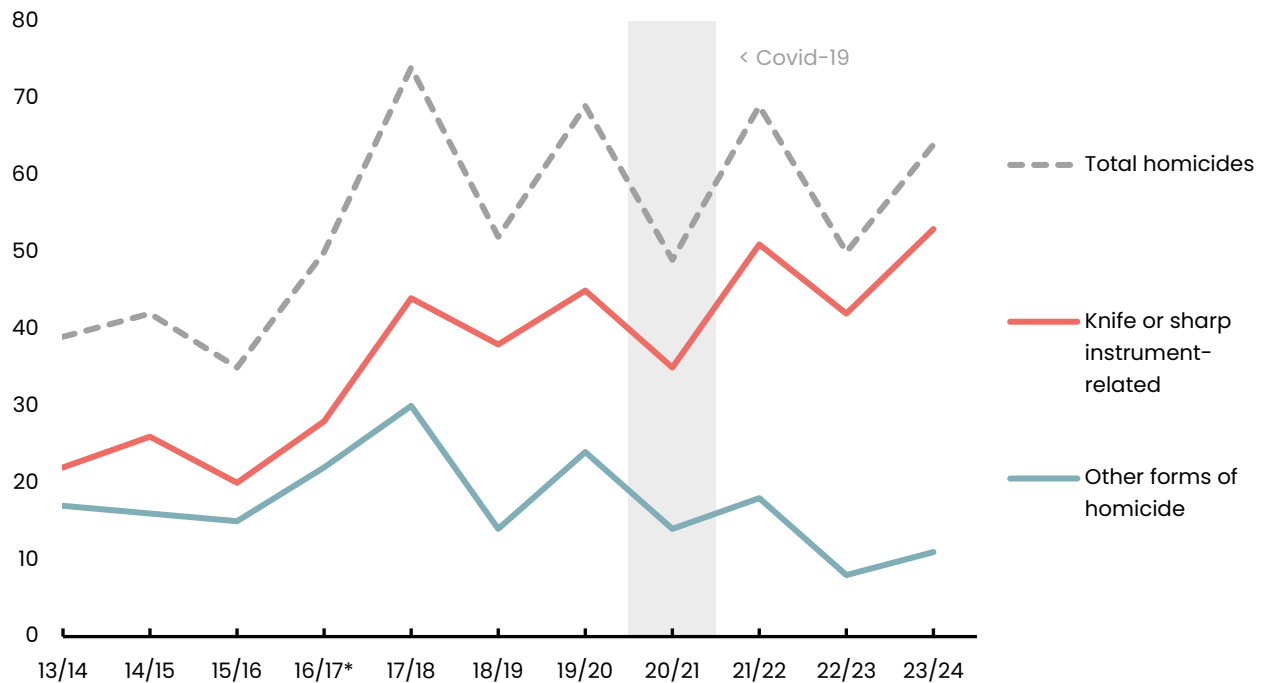
PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS FOR KNIFE ASSAULT SINCE 2013/14, BY AGE (ENGLAND)



Whilst overall knife-related hospital admissions have remained broadly stable over the last ten years (admissions were 4% higher in 2023/24 compared to 2013/14), admissions among 0-17-year-olds have surged by 58%. In 2023/24, they rose by 9% – the first annual increase since 2018/19.^{vi}

Knife deaths among young people have more than doubled in a decade.

HOMICIDES OF 13–19-YEAR-OLDS BY SHARP INSTRUMENTS OR OTHER METHODS (ENGLAND AND WALES)

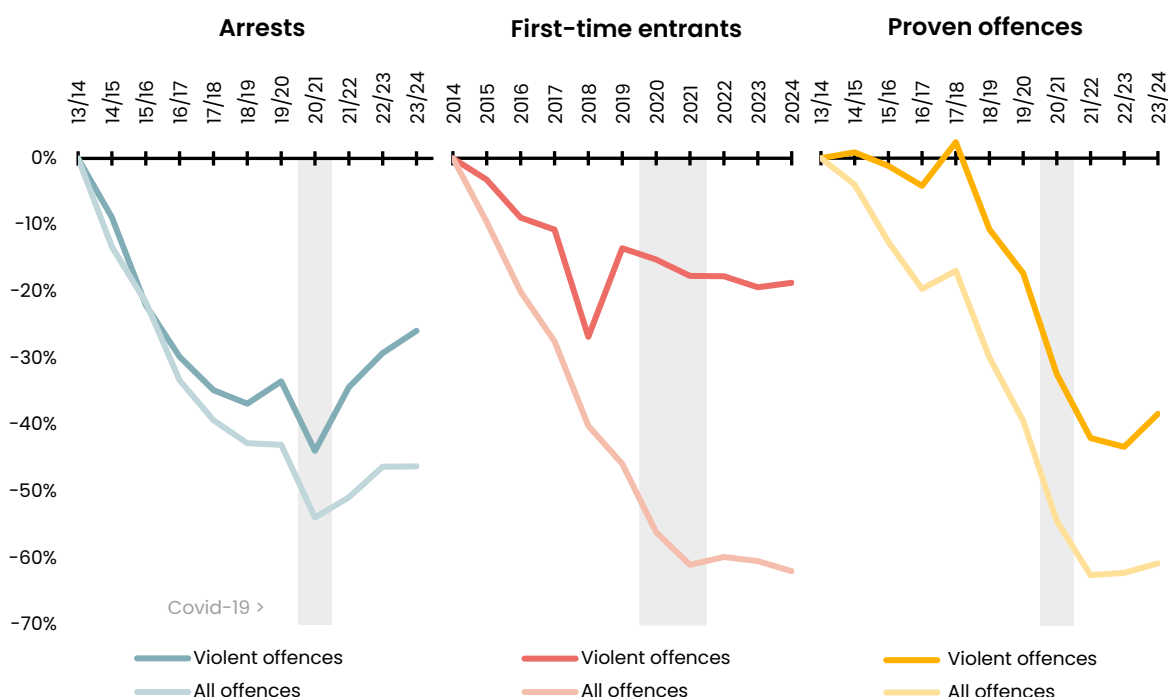


*The published figures for 2016/17 included victims of the Hillsborough disaster. To account for this, we've manually reduced the published figures based on [the age profile](#) of the victims.

Knife-related violence is having an increasingly devastating impact on young people and their families. The number of 13–19-year-olds who lost their lives to knives or other sharp objects has more than doubled since 2013/14 – up by 141%.ⁱⁱ This contrasts with other forms of homicide, which have followed a downward trend since 2017/18. Knife-related killings now account for 83% of all homicides in this age group – up from 56% a decade ago.

Arrests, first-time entrants and proven violent offences have all increased in recent years.

PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN ARRESTS, FIRST-TIME ENTRANTS AND PROVEN OFFENCES SINCE 2013/14, FOR 10-17-YEAR-OLDS (ENGLAND AND WALES)



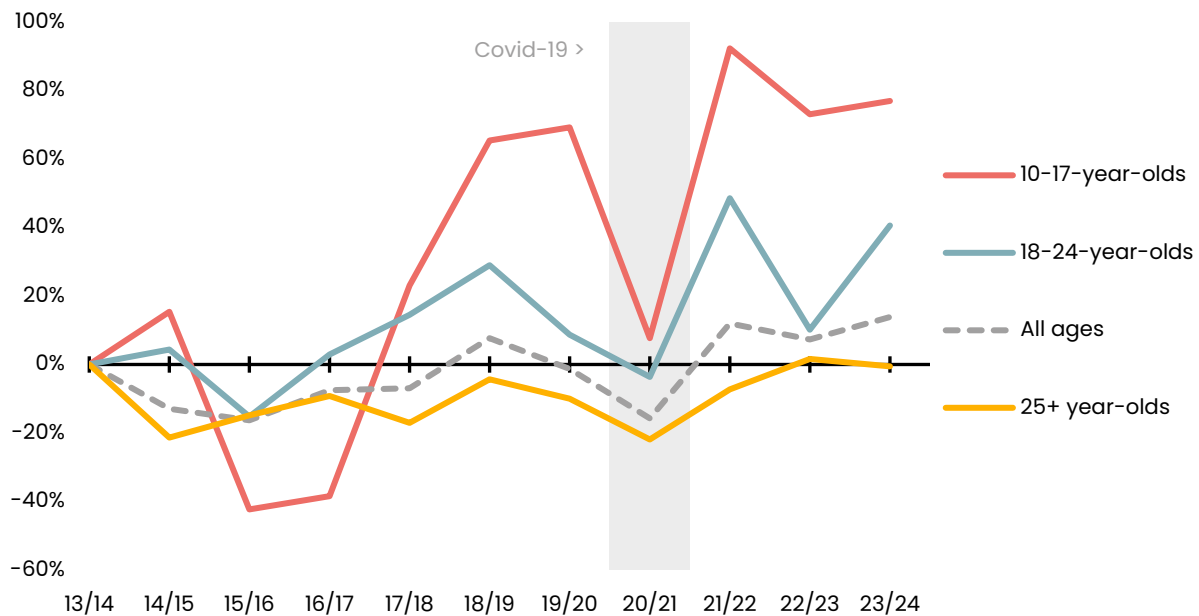
Whilst the overall number of children entering the justice system has fallen steadily over the past decade, that decline masks more troubling recent trends in violent offending.

The number of first-time entrants (FTEs) to the youth justice system was 62% lower in 2024 compared to 2014.^{xi} This sustained decline is partly due to the increased use of diversion – directing children who commit low-level or first-time offences away from the courts and towards support.

Yet since 2020/21, arrests of children for violent offences have risen by nearly a third (32%), compared to a 17% rise in arrests for all offences. In 2024, FTEs for violent offending rose by 1%, even as FTEs for any offending fell by 4%. And in the most recent year, the number of proven violent offences committed by children rose by 9% – more than double the increase seen across all offence types (4%).^{ix}

Convictions for the most serious violence have risen the most among young people.

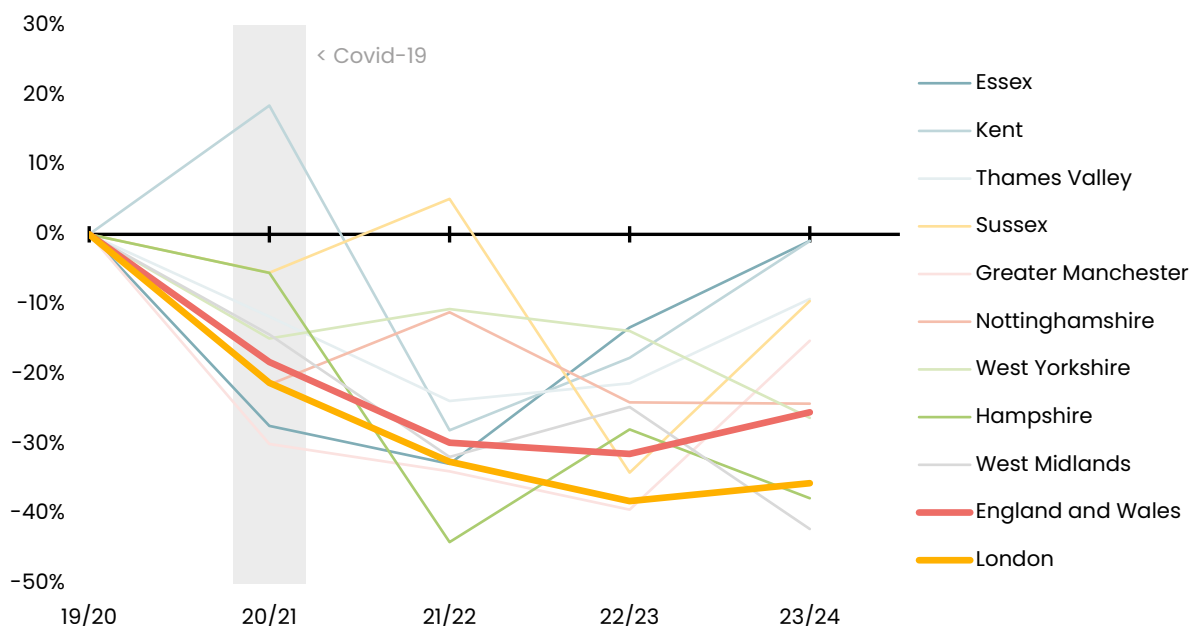
PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN CONVICTIONS FOR HOMICIDE SINCE 2013/14, BY AGE GROUP (ENGLAND AND WALES)



These patterns are echoed in the most serious outcomes. The number of 10-17-year-olds convicted of homicide rose by 77% in 2023/24 compared to 2013/14.^v Among young adults aged 18-24, convictions were up by 41% over the same period. In contrast, among adults aged 25 and over, the number of homicide convictions in 2023/24 was broadly similar to levels seen ten years ago – despite some significant fluctuations over the period.

London sees the highest volume of violence affecting children and young people – but slower post-pandemic growth than other areas.

PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN PROVEN VIOLENT OFFENCES BY CHILDREN SINCE 2019/20 FOR THE TEN POLICE FORCES WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF VIOLENT OFFENCES IN THE LATEST YEAR (ENGLAND AND WALES)



London continues to record the highest number of proven violent offences committed by children, averaging 2,703 incidents per year over the past three years (2021/22 to 2023/24).^{xix} West Yorkshire ranks second, with an average of 846 offences per year.

But when we account for population size, a different pattern emerges. Areas such as Nottinghamshire top the list, with 373 violent offences per 100,000 10-17-year-olds – making it the area with the highest rate of violence affecting children and young people. London and West Yorkshire still remain among the highest, but several smaller areas show higher rates relative to their youth populations.

Notably, London has seen a slower rebound in violence affecting children and young people since the pandemic. In 2023/24, the number of violent offences by children in the capital rose by 4%, but remained 36% lower than in 2019/20. In contrast, other areas have returned to – or neared – pre-pandemic levels. For example, Essex and Kent both recorded violence figures in 2023/24 that were close to their 2019/20 levels.

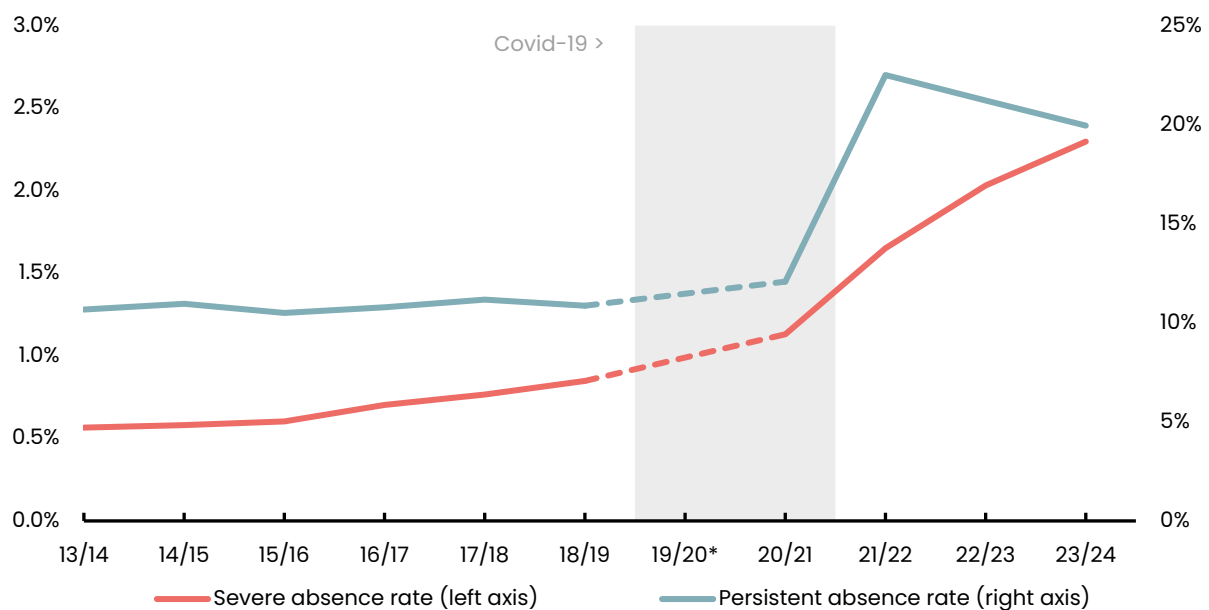
Most sectors that protect children are under strain.

Alongside tracking violence itself, we monitor trends in the services that support children – from education and youth services to policing and health. These sectors are critical to keeping children safe, but data from the last ten years shows many that are under serious and sustained pressure.

In the most recent year, there were small signs of progress in some areas. The proportion of crimes solved by police rose slightly, from 9.8% to 10.4% between 2022/23 and 2023/24.^{xix} Persistent school absence – defined as missing 10% or more of sessions – fell marginally from 21% to 20% between 2021/22 and 2022/23.^{xxvii}

Rates of severe school absence have surged since Covid – and continue to climb.

PROPORTION OF CHILDREN PERSISTENTLY AND SEVERELY ABSENT FROM PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS (ENGLAND)



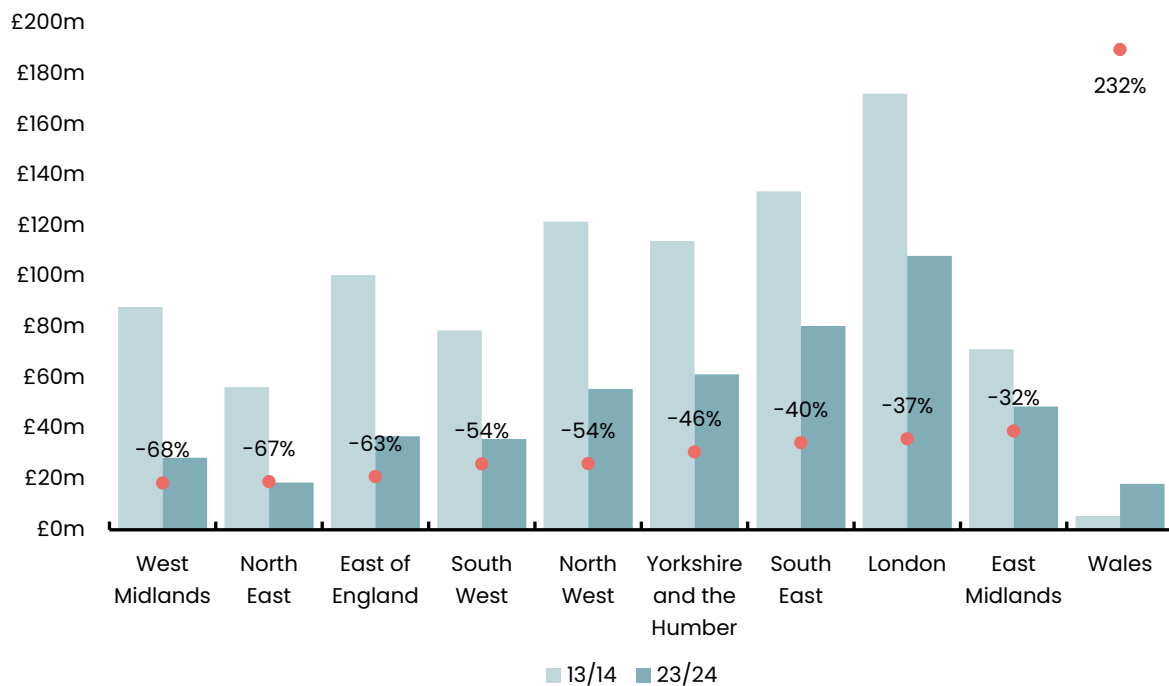
But these improvements don't outweigh the wider challenges. Police now solve just one in ten crimes – compared to three in ten a decade ago. Persistent absence from school remains double pre-pandemic levels, and the number of children severely absent (missing more than 50% of possible sessions) continues to rise.

Children's mental health also appears to be worsening, with growing demand not being matched by access to treatment.^{xxx} Since 2016/17 (the first year we have data for), the number of children referred to NHS-funded mental health services in England has more than doubled – up

105% by 2023/24. But in the latest year, fewer than half the number referred (46%) received support.

Total spending on youth services halved over the past decade.

TOTAL LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE ON SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BY REGION, REAL 2023/24 PRICES (ENGLAND AND WALES)

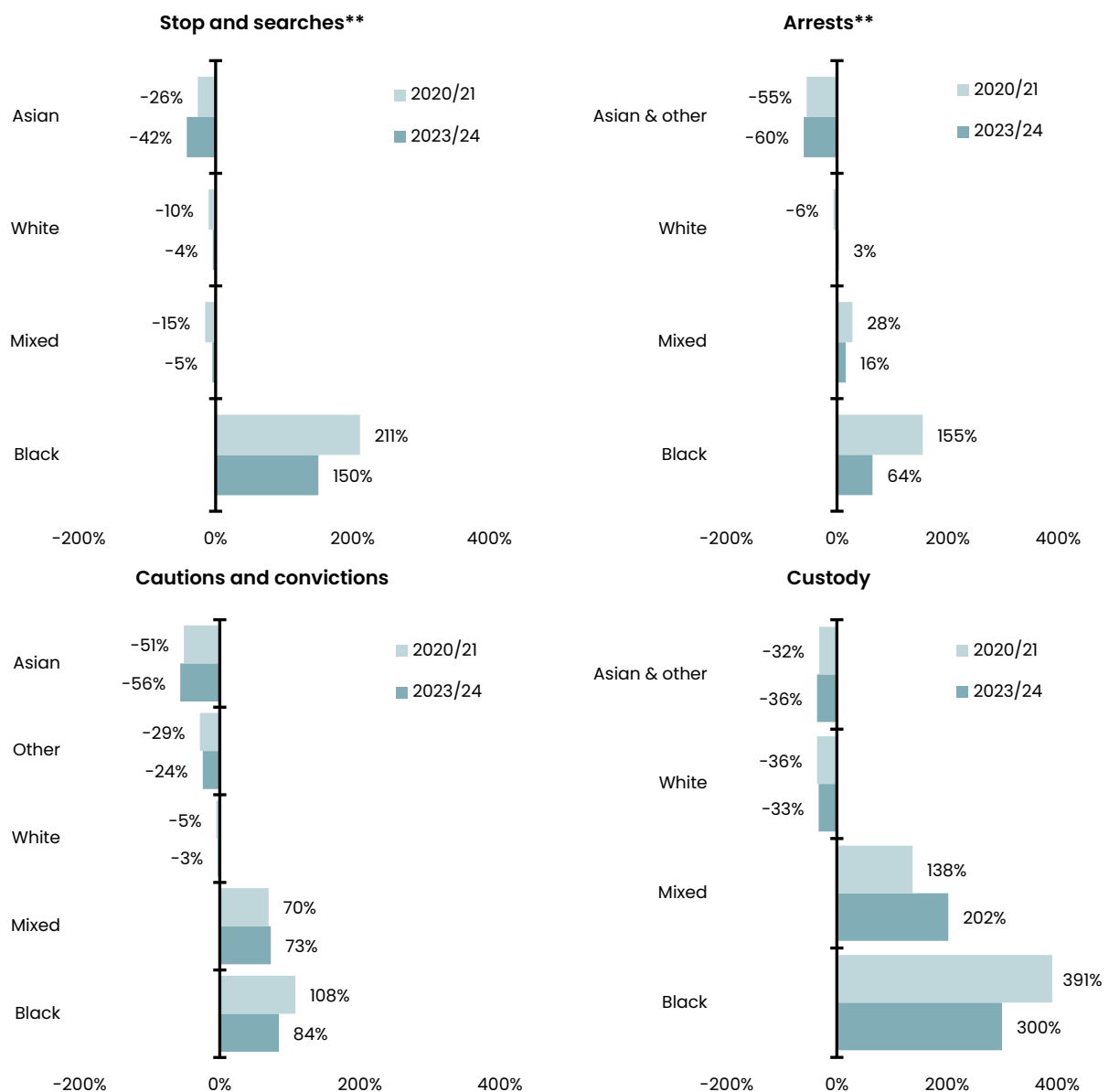


Meanwhile, investment in support for children has declined. Total real-terms spending on youth services has fallen by nearly half over the past decade – down 48% between 2013/14 and 2023/24.^{xlvii} Almost every region in England has seen substantial cuts, with reductions ranging from 32% in the East Midlands to 68% in the West Midlands. Wales is the only area to see spending rise – increasing by more than 2.5 times over the same period – but youth service spending per child in Wales remains lower than in most English regions.^{xlviii}

Racial disproportionality remains a serious issue.

Progress is being made on racial disproportionality in youth justice – but inequalities persist.

UNDER- AND OVERREPRESENTATION* OF CHILDREN RELATIVE TO THEIR POPULATION SHARES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM BY RACE, 2020/21 VS 2023/24 (ENGLAND AND WALES)



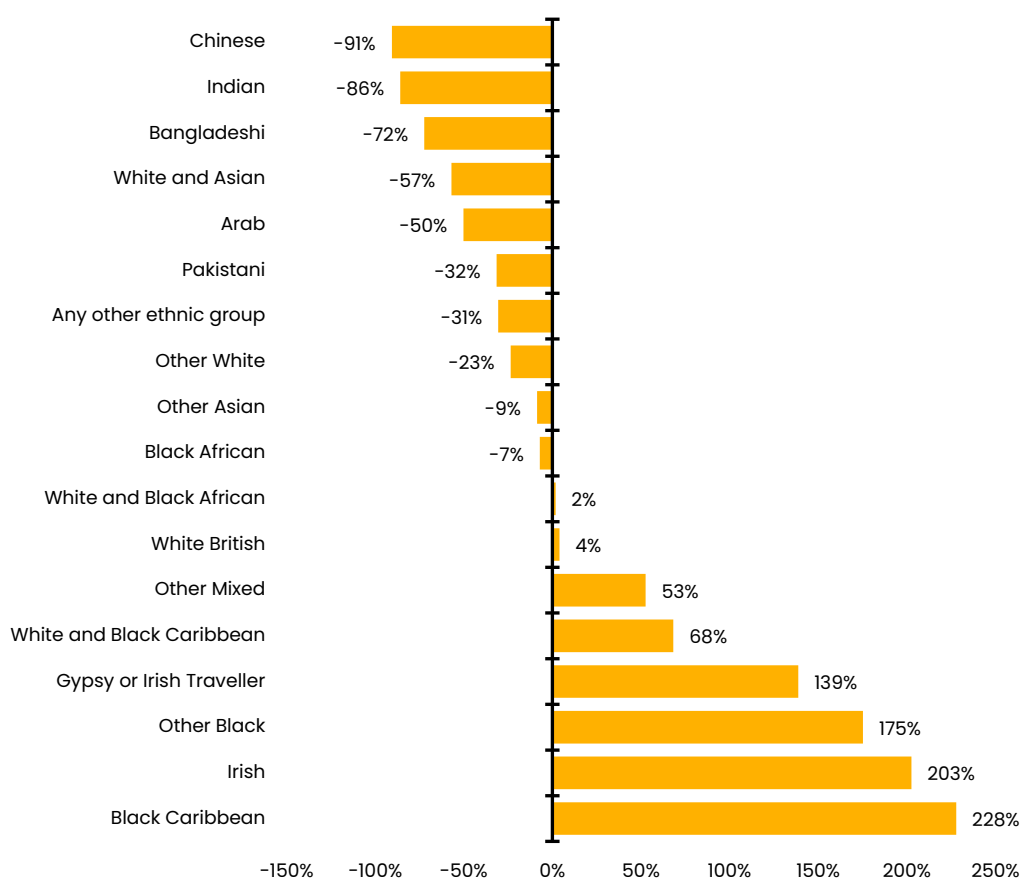
*Under- and overrepresentation calculated as the percentage difference between the observed and expected proportion accounted for by an ethnic group, using census 2021 population estimates.

**For stop and search and arrest figures, we've used self-defined race. There's a large portion for whom race was not provided (19% and 16%, respectively). We've calculated proportions using the total number of children for whom their race is known.

There has been some progress in tackling racial disproportionality in the youth justice system. Between 2020/21 and 2023/24, the overrepresentation of Black children has declined across several measures. For stop and search, Black children went from being 3.1 times to 2.5 times as likely to be stopped and searched relative to their population share.^{xvii} In arrests, overrepresentation fell from 2.6 times to 1.6 times.^{xvii} The gap in cautions and convictions dropped from 2.1 times to 1.8 times, and in custody, it decreased from 4.9 times to 4 times.^{ix}

Some groups remain significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

UNDER- AND OVERREPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN ARRESTED RELATIVE TO THEIR POPULATION SHARE BY ETHNIC GROUP, 2023/24 (ENGLAND AND WALES)



But significant disparities remain – especially when looking beyond race. In 2023/24, children from Caribbean and Other Black backgrounds were 228% (3.3 times) and 175% (2.8 times) more likely, respectively, to be arrested than expected based on their share of the population.^{xvii} Children from Gypsy and Irish Traveller backgrounds were 139% more likely (2.4 times). In contrast, children from Black African backgrounds were slightly underrepresented.

Change is possible.

The data is clear: in the past year, more children have been harmed by serious violence, and the services meant to support them are under growing strain. But the evidence also shows that change is possible.

With the right support delivered at the right time, we can prevent violence and keep children safe. That's why the Youth Endowment Fund is committed to building the evidence on what works – and turning that knowledge into guidance that shifts practice and drives lasting change across the systems supporting children.

Using evidence to drive change.

The **YEF Toolkit** brings together the best available global research on what works to prevent children from becoming involved in violence. It helps policymakers and commissioners identify the most promising approaches based on strong evidence.



Visit the YEF Toolkit

Our **Practice Guidance** helps professionals put this evidence into action. Whether working in education, policing or youth justice, it shows how to apply effective approaches – backed by real-world case studies.



Download our Education Practice Guidance



Download our Focused Deterrence Practice Guidance



Download our Diversion Practice Guidance

We also publish **System Guidance** to inform reform across entire sectors. Frontline professionals don't always control the funding or policy decisions that shape their work. So alongside our practice tools, we provide policy recommendations to enable system-wide reform. We've started with youth justice and education – and more sectors will follow.



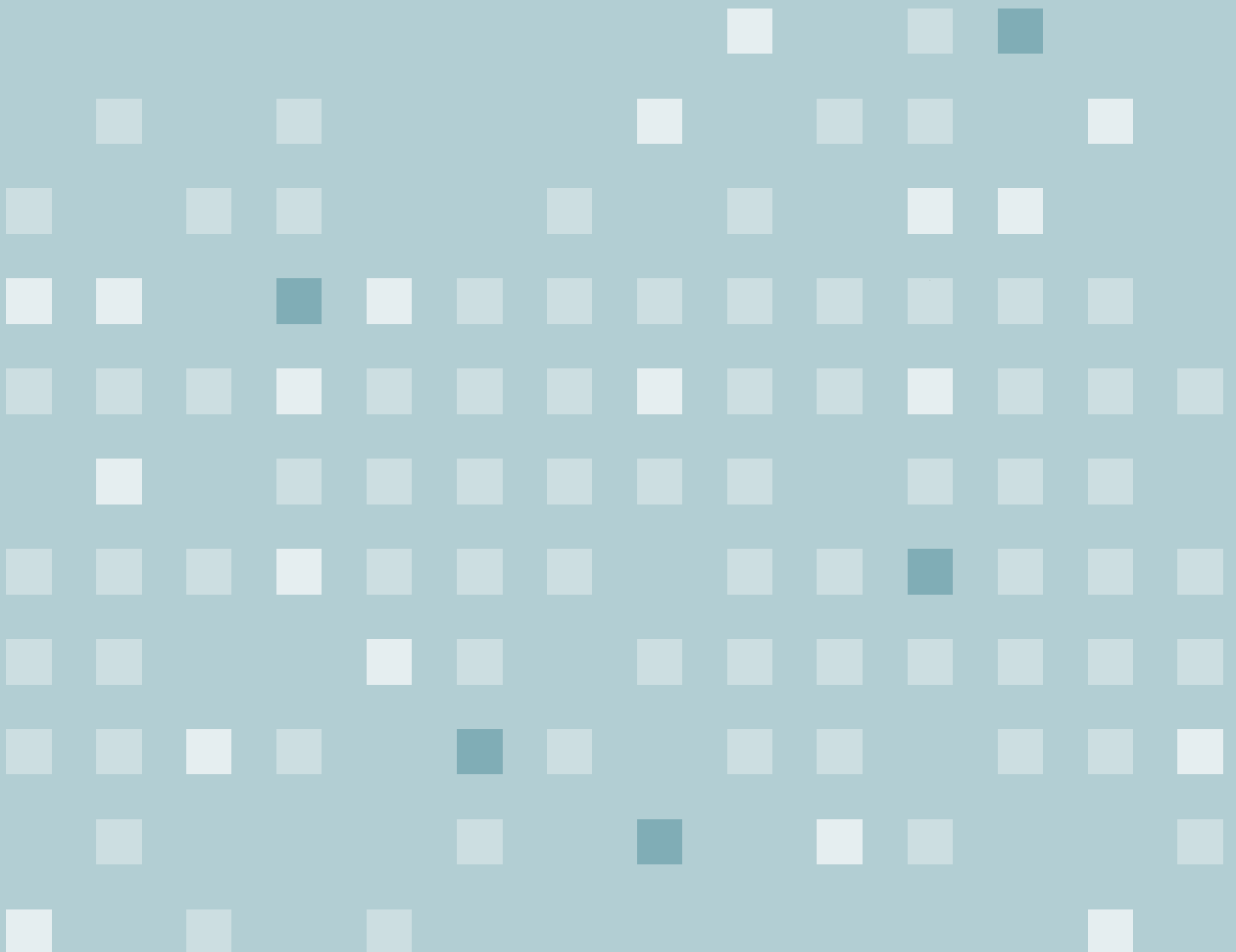
Download our Arrested
Children Systems Guidance



Download our Education
Systems Guidance

Part 3

Methodology



Background and approach

Last year we launched our [core indicators dashboard](#). This includes 11 indicators we'll use to track whether violence affecting children and young people is getting better or worse and how the sectors most important to supporting them are doing. The dashboard includes three core measures of violence affecting children and young people, a measure of racial disproportionality in the youth justice system, measures for six of our seven [sectors](#) of interest and a measure of poverty affecting children. The purpose of this is to provide a clear account of what's happening to violence affecting children and young people in England and Wales and the context shaping their lives. This report is our first full yearly update since we launched the dashboard. It summarises data for 2023/24, the final year of the previous parliament.

Background and purpose

Are crime and violence getting worse? Are more children and young people being affected? How is society equipped to support them? These are just some of the questions that, on the face of it, should be easy to answer. However, figuring out how children's involvement in violence is changing is no easy task. There are multiple different data sources of varying quality that sometimes provide competing accounts of what's going on. Our mission at the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is to prevent children from becoming involved in violence. For policymakers and practitioners to protect children and divert them away from violence, it's vital that we all have a clear picture of what's going on.

Last year, we launched our [core indicators dashboard](#). The purpose of this is to provide a clear and simple picture of how children and young people's involvement in violence is changing. Is it getting better or worse? And what's happening to the sectors that support them? We approached this by looking at the most reliable published data and selecting 11 key indicators, which we'll track over time. Four of the indicators relate to children's involvement in violence, including one focused on racial disproportionality. Six relate to the sectors that support them. One final indicator relates specifically to poverty.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SECTORS?

To help us make the biggest difference, at the YEF, we've identified seven sectors in which we'll use evidence to find out what works and what needs to change so that children are better supported and violence decreases. These sectors have been selected for a number of reasons. First, they align with the professions that work most closely with vulnerable children. Second, there are clear gaps in the evidence within these sectors, where research and funding can help. And third, we think changes in policies and practice in these areas could lead to lasting positive change for children and young people, their families and communities.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF YEF SECTORS

SECTOR	SUMMARY
Policing	How does policing best prevent violence – including through working with other organisations where the police are not the lead?
Youth justice	How do we best support arrested children to prevent them from becoming involved in violence?
Neighbourhoods*	How do we reduce crime and violence in specific neighbourhoods?
Education	What should happen in schools, colleges and alternative provision settings to prevent children from becoming involved in violence?
Health	How do we use therapy to support children’s mental health and keep them safe from becoming involved in violence?
Children’s services	How do we best support families facing challenges and help them create a safe, loving environment at home?
Youth	How do we use constructive activities such as sports, drama and employment to prevent children from becoming involved in violence? How can a trusted adult outside the family help to keep a child safe?

For each sector, YEF is funding programmes and research to build a better understanding of what works to prevent violence, making the evidence accessible and campaigning for change.

**No suitable measure could be found for neighbourhoods, so it was excluded from the dashboard.*

For each of these indicators, we’ve assigned a rating based on whether it’s improving, worsening or mixed. In addition to these core indicators, we’ve looked at a variety of other data sources to explore these issues in greater depth.

The YEF has a particular focus on racial disproportionality. As this report will go on to show, children from minority ethnic backgrounds are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, particularly Black children. What leads to this overrepresentation is a complex mix of individual, societal and system-level drivers. Biases in offending data, which typically reports only those who have been arrested or charged rather than underlying patterns of offending, can also compound the disproportionality seen. It is beyond the scope of this report to fully unpack the influence each of these factors plays. However, these influences must be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. In addition to racial disproportionality, we also consider other dimensions, such as gender and geography. Whilst these factors are often explored in isolation, it’s important to emphasise that many of the issues that put children most at risk of involvement in violence overlap. And the intersection of different forms of disadvantage – including poverty, racism and lack of access to support – can compound these risks.

This is our first annual update since we launched the dashboard. This report summarises the latest data for 2023/24 – the last year of the previous parliament – and what this tells us about trends in violence affecting children and young people and the sectors that support them.

Selection of measures

What indicators have we selected to measure the prevalence of violence affecting children and young people?

No single data source provides a complete picture of what's happening to children affected by violence. Police figures tell us what crimes get recorded, but many crimes go unreported or undetected. Data from the justice system tells us which children have been cautioned or convicted, which relies on someone being caught and charged. Other data, for example children who are treated in a hospital for knife assault, only focuses on the rarest and most extreme forms of violence.

To provide a comprehensive picture, we've therefore chosen three core measures of violence:

- The number of 16–24-year-olds who've been victims of homicide.
- The number of 0–17-year-olds admitted to a hospital due to assault with a knife or sharp object.
- The number of violent offences proven to have been committed by children.

In addition to these three measures, we've also selected an indicator that tracks disproportionality in youth offending outcomes. Here, we're using the proportion of children in custody who are Black.

What indicators have we selected to measure our sectors of interest?

The purpose of selecting indicators in the core sectors that the YEF works with is to try to understand what is going on for young people at a national level, what challenges the professionals and services supporting them face and how these have changed over time.

Measuring how well-equipped individual sectors are to support children and protect them from violence is challenging. In some cases, we only have figures for the number of children being supported, and in other cases, we have figures for how much money is being spent.

As with last year, one sector we haven't provided an indicator for is neighbourhoods. Our focus on neighbourhoods is about applying place-based approaches to addressing crime and violence by working with local organisations, systems and communities in specific local areas affected by violence. This hyper-local focus makes it difficult to choose one core indicator to track over time and summarise at a national level.

The table below summarises all 11 indicators and the data sources used.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF KEY INDICATORS

AREA/SECTOR	INDICATOR	SOURCE
1. Homicide	16-24-year-old homicide victims (England and Wales)	Home Office – Homicide index
2. Knife crime	0-17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife injury (England)	National Health Service Digital – hospital admitted patient care records
3. Justice system involvement	Proven violent offences committed by children (England and Wales)	Youth Justice Board – annual statistics
4. Disproportionality	Proportion of children in custody who are Black (England and Wales)	Youth Justice Board – annual statistics
5. Policing	Recorded crimes that were successfully investigated (England and Wales)	Home Office – crime outcomes in England and Wales
6. Youth justice	Proportion of 10-17-year-old offenders who re-offended (England and Wales)	Youth Justice Board – annual statistics
7. Education	Proportion of pupils persistently absent from school (England)	Department for Education – pupil absence in schools in England
8. Health	Referrals to secondary mental health services (England)	National Health Service Digital – Mental Health Bulletin
9. Children's services	Number of looked after children (England and Wales)	Department for Education and StatsWales – children looked after statistics
10. Youth	Local authority expenditure for youth services (England and Wales)	Department for Education and StatsWales – local authority and school expenditure statistics
11. Poverty	Children in households in absolute poverty (United Kingdom)	Department for Work and Pensions – households below average income

How ratings have been assigned.

For each of the indicators, we've compared the last available annual figures (2023/24) with three different time points: the previous year (2022/23), the year before the Covid-19 pandemic (2019/20) and ten years ago (or the longest available period if ten years of data is not available).

The first time point comparison provides a view of how the indicator has performed in the most recent period. The second provides a sense of how the measure has performed since the pandemic. Covid-19 had a significant disruptive effect on many areas of society, and how the indicator performs today relative to where it was before Covid-19 provides a sense of whether or not it has recovered or surpassed levels prior

to the pandemic-related disruption. The third comparison provides a view of how the indicator is currently performing against the longer-run trend.

We've assigned ratings as follows:

Improving

For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has shown improvement.

Worsening

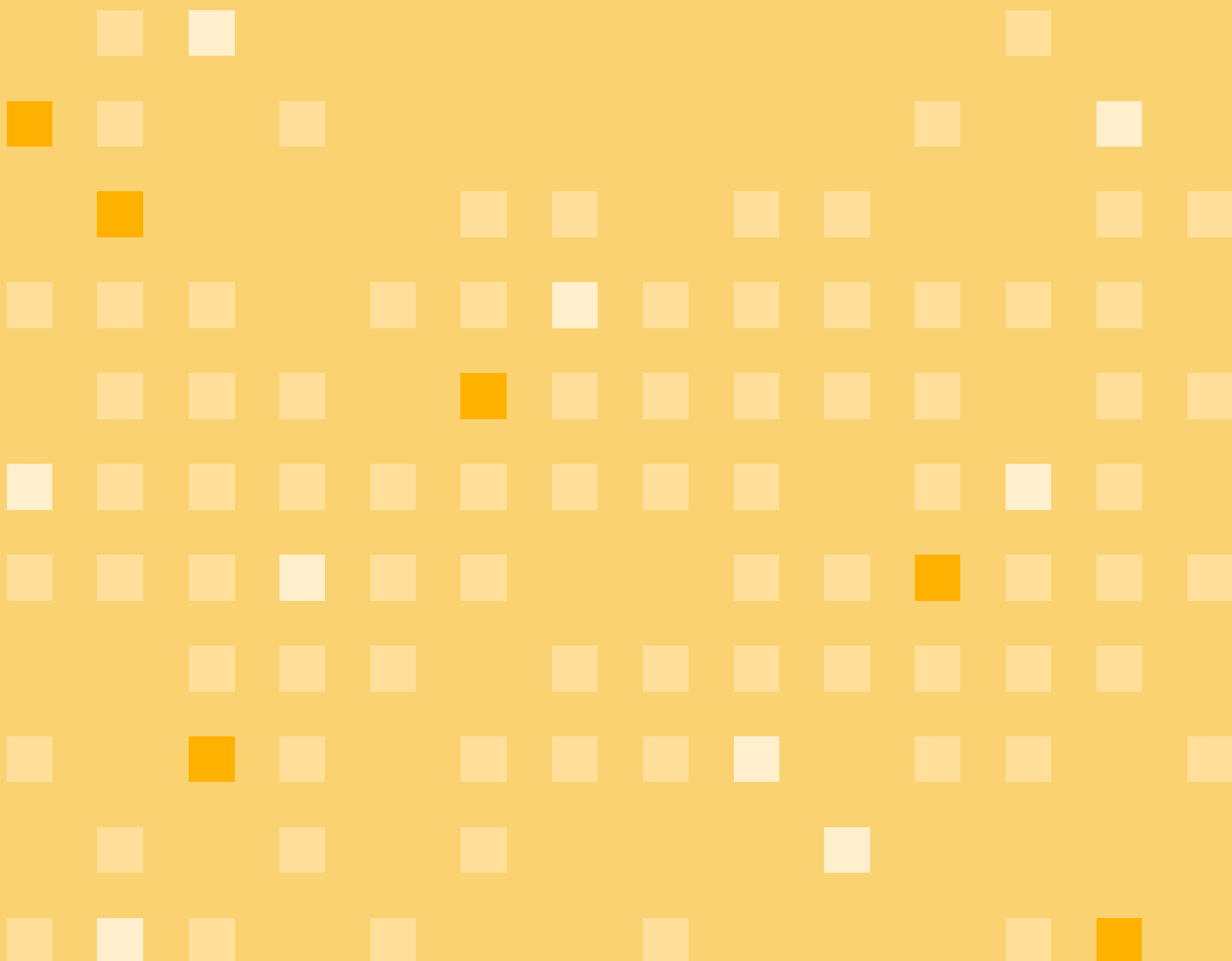
For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has worsened.

Mixed

For indicators where there is no clear trend based on the three time points (i.e. some point to improvement whilst others have worsened).

Part 4

Detailed findings



1. Homicides

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Homicides 16-24-year-old homicide victims	Mixed	105	+6%	-26%	+9%

COMMENTARY

In last year’s update, our homicide indicator had a **mixed** rating – the number of young people who were victims of homicide in 2022/23 was lower than in the previous year (2021/22) and the year before Covid (2019/20), but 14% up on ten years previously (2012/13). Whilst the latest figures still show a **mixed** picture, in 2023/24 the number of 16-24-year-old homicide victims up 6% compared to the previous year (2022/23). It also remains higher than it was ten years previously (2013/14). However, there were still 26% fewer young people who were victims of homicide than there were the year before Covid (2019/20).

HOW ARE WE MEASURING HOMICIDES?

Homicides provide a measure of the most extreme consequences of violence. We’re using the Home Office’s [Homicide Indexⁱⁱ](#) to measure how many 16–24-year-olds lose their lives from homicide each year. We’ve used data for 16–24-year-olds, as the published data isn’t broken down for 10–17-year-olds specifically (the age range we use across most other measures). Whilst there is data for 13–19-year-olds, due to the small numbers, this is highly variable year on year, so we’ve chosen not to use data for this age group as our core indicator.

Homicide figures are generally seen as one of the more accurate measures of violence, as the data isn’t typically affected by changes in reporting, with nearly all homicides being reported and recorded. Despite this, some events, such as acts of terrorism, can have a disproportionate impact on the figures in a single year. This, combined with the fortunately low numbers for younger age groups, means figures for individual years can be subject to volatility.

FINDINGS

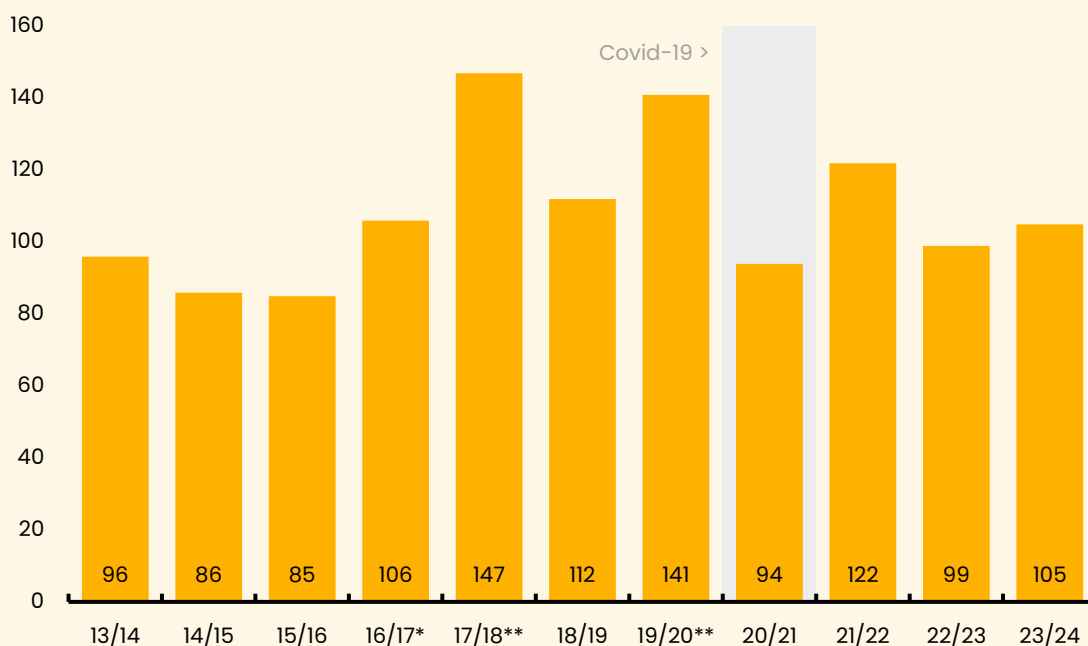
More young people were victims of homicide in the latest year, although homicides remain on a broadly downward trend.

Data from the Home Office's Homicide Index shows that the total number of homicides in England and Wales peaked in the early 2000s. In the years from 2004/05 to 2014/15, they fell by around a third, from a total of 778 homicides across all ages in 2004/05 to a low of 504 in 2014/15.

However, homicides – along with other indicators of serious violence – rose sharply in the mid-2010s. The number of victims aged 16–24 increased by 73% between 2015/16 and 2017/18, up from 85 to 147 victims per year. It's important to note that the figure for 2017/18 is somewhat inflated due to the victims from mass casualty events, such as the Manchester Arena bombing. Since then, homicides have fluctuated year on year and have been broadly on a downward trend, including last year (2022/23) when the number of victims aged 16–24 years old fell by 19%.

The latest data for 2023/24 saw the number of 16–24-year-old victims increase by 6% year on year, from 99 victims in 2022/23 to 105 victims in 2023/24. This figure is higher than it was ten years ago (9% up on 2013/14) but remains significantly below where it was just before the Covid-19 pandemic (26% down from 2019/20).

FIGURE 1.1. NUMBER OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS AGED 16–24-YEARS-OLD (ENGLAND AND WALES)

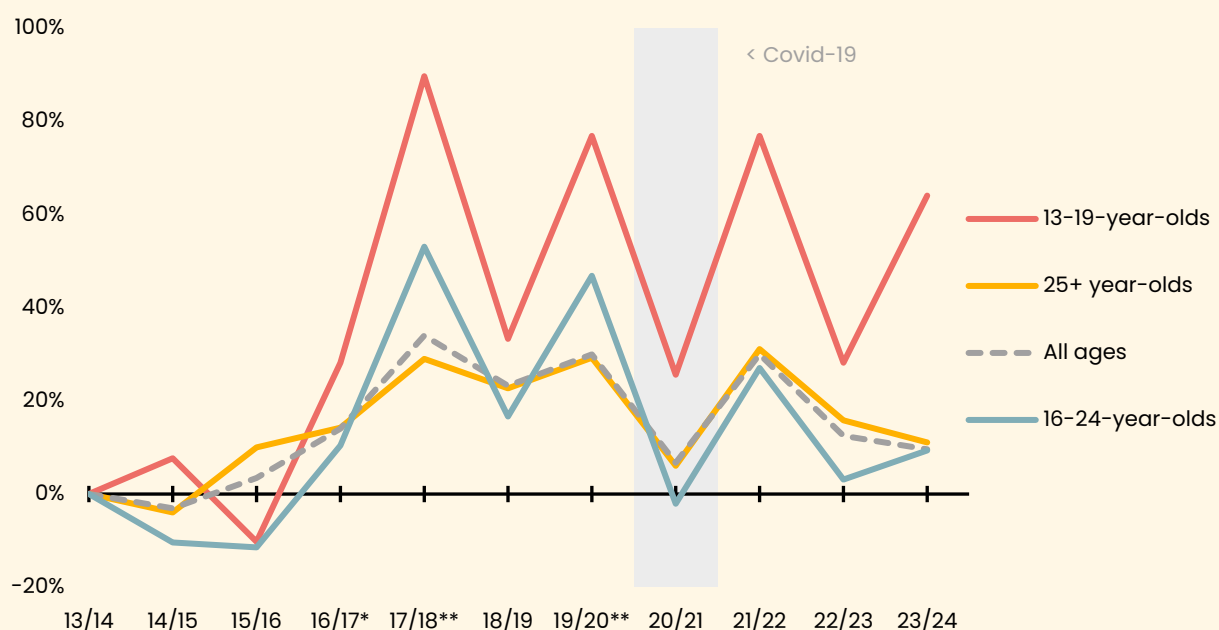


*Victims of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster are included in the published figures for 2016/17. To account for this, we've manually reduced the published figures based on [the age profile](#)ⁱⁱⁱ of the victims.

**Figures in these years were affected by several one-off events involving mass casualties, including the Westminster Bridge attack, the Manchester Arena bombing, the London Bridge attack and the human trafficking victims who were found dead in a lorry in Essex. Figures for these years have not been adjusted to take account of these incidents.

Published victims of homicide figures from the Homicide Index are not broken down for adolescents specifically. However, data is provided for 13–19-year-olds. There were 64 homicides of 13–19-year-olds in 2023/24, accounting for 11% of all homicides. It's important to remember that, whilst tragic, these numbers are low compared to other sources of fatalities. To put this in context, there were 158 road traffic fatalities^{iv} in Great Britain in 2023 in this age group. However, whilst low overall, following the jump in the mid-2010s, homicides have remained persistently higher for 13–19-year-olds compared to older age groups. In the latest 2023/24 figures, the number of victims aged 13–19 years old was 64% higher than a decade ago. This compares to 9% higher for victims aged 16–24 years old and 11% higher for victims aged 25 and over.

FIGURE 1.2. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS SINCE 2013/14, BY AGE GROUP (ENGLAND AND WALES)



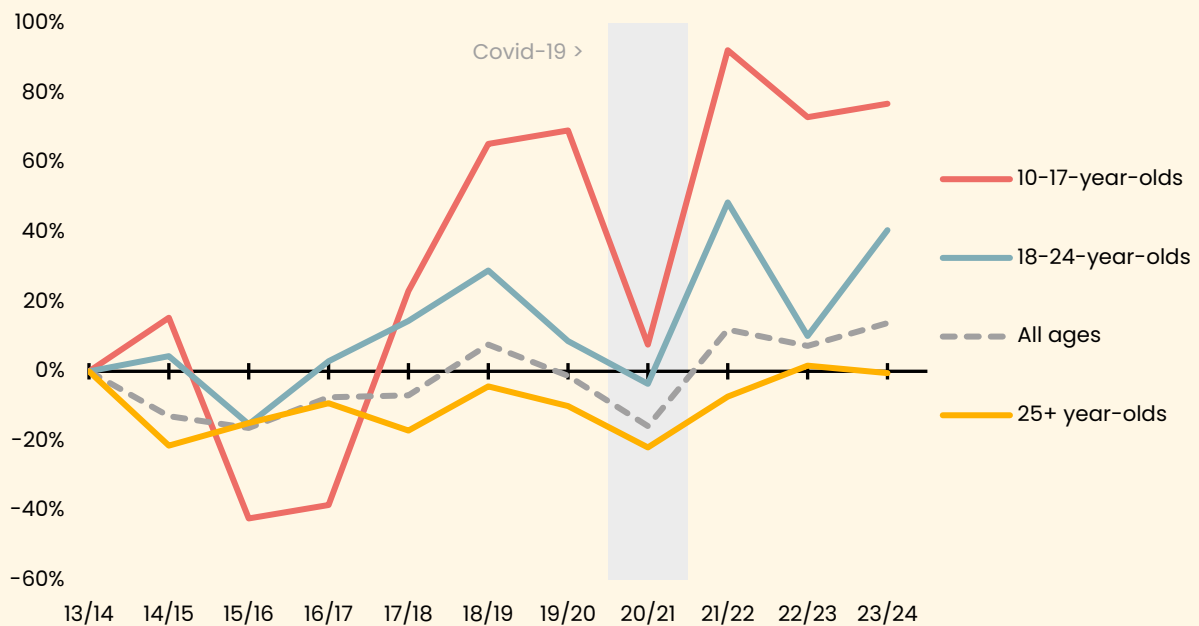
*The published figures for 2016/17 have been adjusted to take account of the victims of the Hillsborough disaster, who were reflected in Homicide Index figures in this year.

**Figures in these years were affected by several one-off events involving mass casualties. These have not been adjusted for.

More children were convicted of committing homicides.

Data on those convicted for homicide (defined as murder, manslaughter and infanticide) also shows that it's younger age groups for whom involvement has remained particularly high compared to historical levels. Latest figures from the Ministry of Justice^v show that the number of 10–17-year-olds convicted for homicide in 2023/24 was 77% higher than ten years ago (from 26 in 2013/14 to 46 in 2023/24). For young adults aged 18–24, the number of convictions for homicide is up 41% compared to a decade ago – 194 in 2023/24 compared to 138 in 2013/14. For older adults aged 25 and over, the number of convictions for homicide has remained relatively stable, with 368 in 2023/24 compared to 370 in 2013/14.

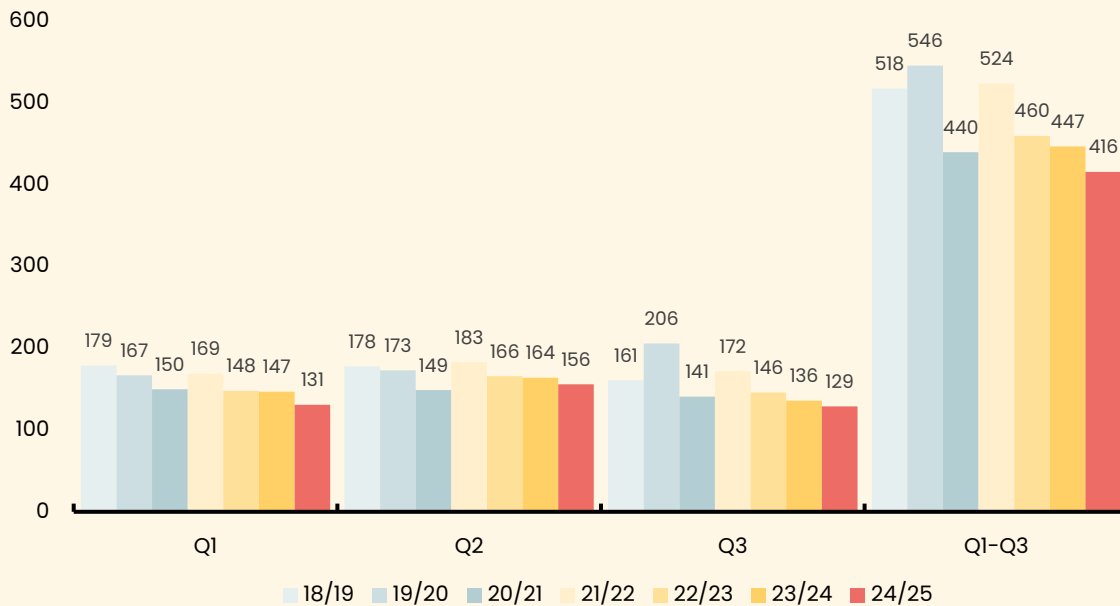
FIGURE 1.3. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN CONVICTIONS FOR HOMICIDE SINCE 2013/14, BY AGE GROUP (ENGLAND AND WALES)



Partial year data for 2024/25 shows total homicides may be falling, but not for younger perpetrators.

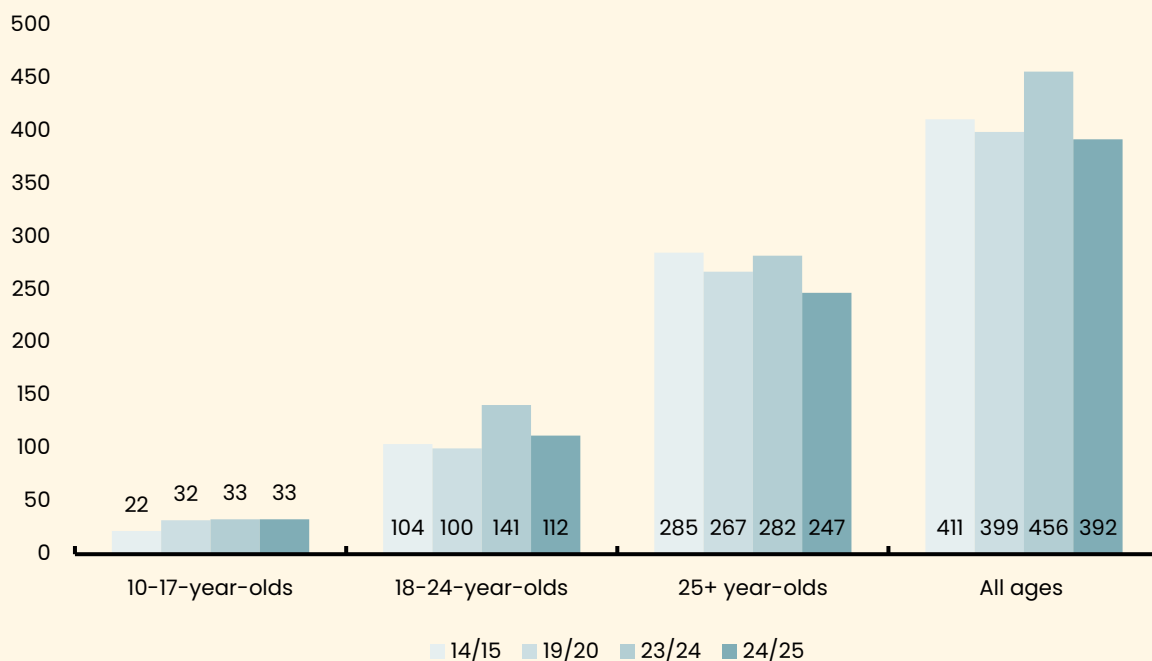
Full-year data has not yet been published for 2024/25. However, some data has been published which covers nine months of the year, from April to December. Notably, this data is for police-recorded crime and Ministry of Justice convictions. Police-recorded figures point to a drop in the total number of homicides in 2024/25. Figures in each of the three quarters for which data is available show a fall compared to the same periods in 2023/24. This makes police-recorded homicides 7% lower in the period from April to December 2024, compared to the same nine-month period in 2023.

FIGURE 1.4. TOTAL POLICE-RECORDED HOMICIDES BY QUARTER (ENGLAND AND WALES)



However, as with previous years, the pattern in 2024/25 may not be the same for all age groups. When we look at homicide convictions data (which also has published figures covering the first three quarters of 2024/25), we see that whilst total convictions for homicides are down 14% from the same period the previous year, homicide convictions remained flat for younger perpetrators (those aged 10-17).

FIGURE 1.5. CONVICTIONS FOR HOMICIDE FROM APRIL TO DECEMBER, BY AGE (ENGLAND AND WALES)



2. Knife crime

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Knife crime 0-17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife assault	Mixed	509	+ 9%	- 8%	+ 58%

COMMENTARY

In last year's update, our knife crime indicator had a **mixed** rating – the number of children admitted to hospital was lower than in the previous year (2021/22) and the year before Covid (2019/20) but 47% up on ten years previously (2012/13). The latest data shows that the picture is still **mixed**. The number of admissions in 2023/24 was up compared to the previous year (2022/23) – the first year-on-year increase since 2018/19. However, admissions remain below the levels just before Covid-19 (2019/20). Other indicators also point to knife crime worsening in 2023/24, with increases in police-recorded knife-enabled crimes and homicides involving knives.

HOW ARE WE MEASURING KNIFE CRIME?

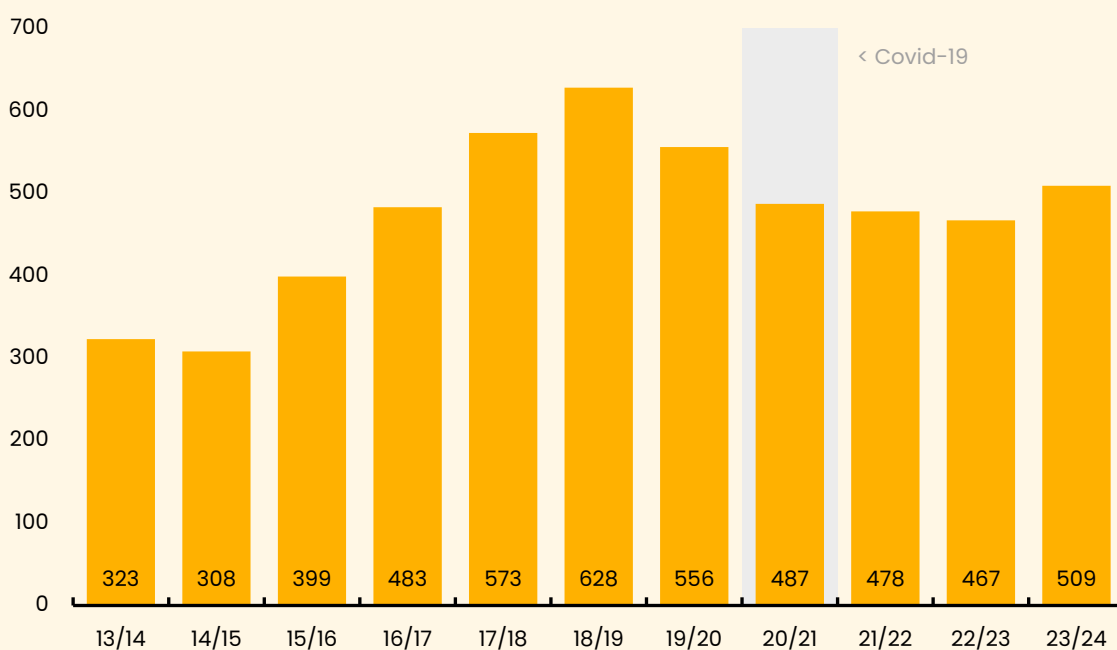
To measure changes in knife crime affecting young people, we use the number of 0-17-year-olds admitted to hospital^{vi} per year in England, where the cause for admission was assault with a sharp object. Hospital admissions data can be viewed as a more reliable guide to trends in knife violence than police (e.g. reported crime) or justice (e.g. sentencing) figures, as hospital admissions data is less susceptible to changes in levels of activity by the police or the courts or changes in recording, reporting or sentencing practices over time compared to these other sources. These figures are for England only, as equivalent data is not available for Wales.

FINDINGS

Knife crime was up in the latest year.

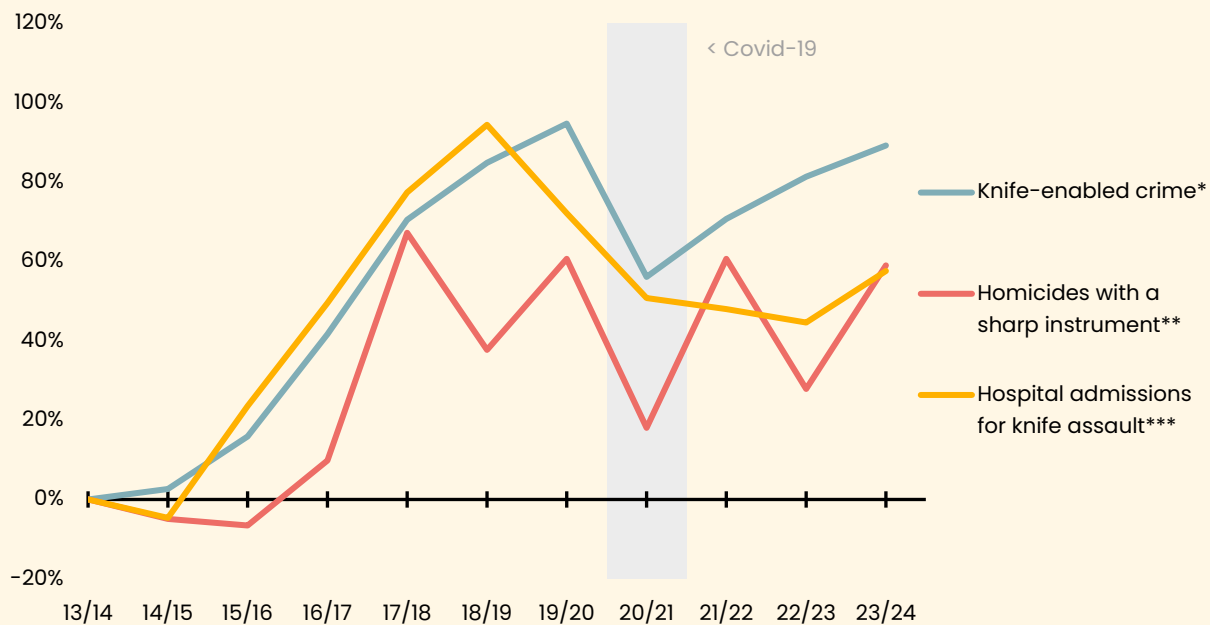
In line with other forms of serious violence (such as homicides), the number of hospital admissions for knife assault in England rose sharply in the mid-2010s. The number of children admitted to hospital with knife-related injuries peaked in 2018/19 at 628 and has since been falling. However, following a period of sustained year-on-year decreases between 2018/19 and 2022/23, admissions increased in the latest figures. In 2023/24, 509 children aged 0-17 were admitted to hospital for knife assault – 9% up on the year before.

FIGURE 2.1. HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS OF 0-17-YEAR-OLDS FOR KNIFE ASSAULT (ENGLAND)



It's not just hospital admissions that have increased. Other measures of knife-related violence also rose in 2023/24. Police-recorded knife-enabled crime^{vii} increased by 4% year on year. Homicides involving knives^{viii} increased by 24%. All three measures – hospital admissions, knife-enabled crime and homicides involving knives – are now considerably higher than they were ten years ago. However, none have reached or exceeded the highs seen before the pandemic.

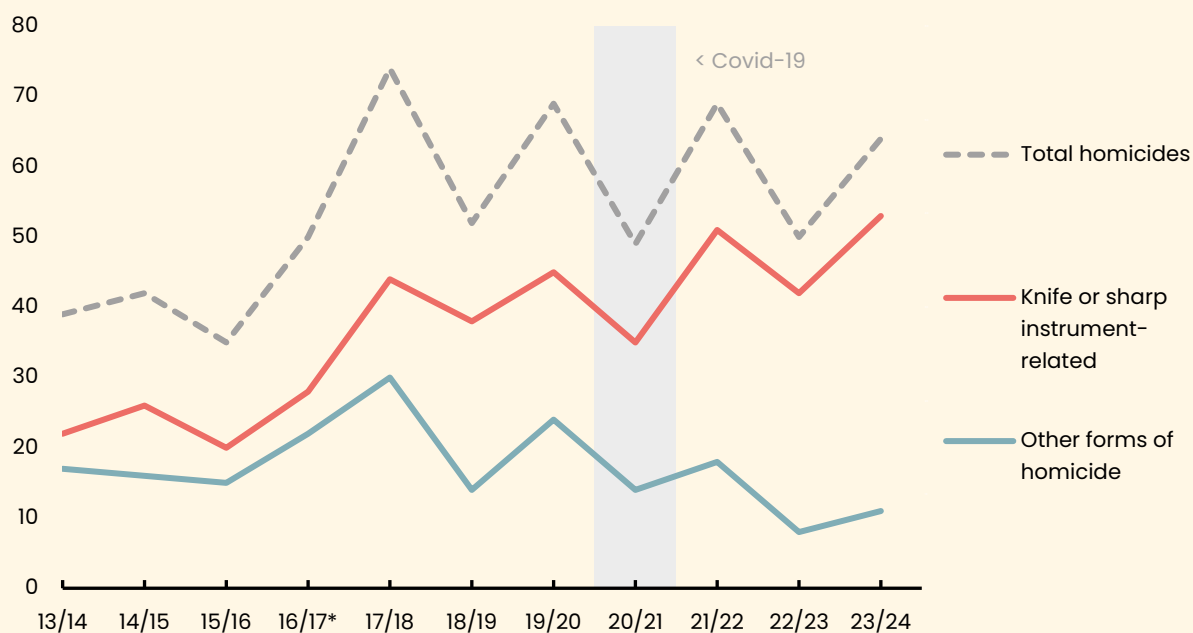
FIGURE 2.2. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN KNIFE-RELATED HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS, KNIFE-ENABLED CRIMES AND KNIFE-RELATED HOMICIDES SINCE 2013/14 (ENGLAND AND WALES)



*All ages, England and Wales, **0-24-year-olds, England and Wales, ***0-17-year-olds, England.

Knives are the leading cause of homicide amongst teenage victims.

The number of homicide victims aged 13-19-years-old who were killed by knives or other sharp objects has more than doubled over the past decade. Between 2013/14 and 2023/24, it increased by 141%, up from 22 to 53 victims in a year, and has remained on a broadly upwards trajectory. This contrasts with homicides for other reasons, which have been on a broadly downward trend since 2017/18. The proportion of homicide victims aged 13-19 killed by knives or sharp instruments now stands at 83%, up from 56% in 2013/14. In contrast, knives and sharp instruments accounted for 39% of homicides of adults aged 25 and above in 2023/24.

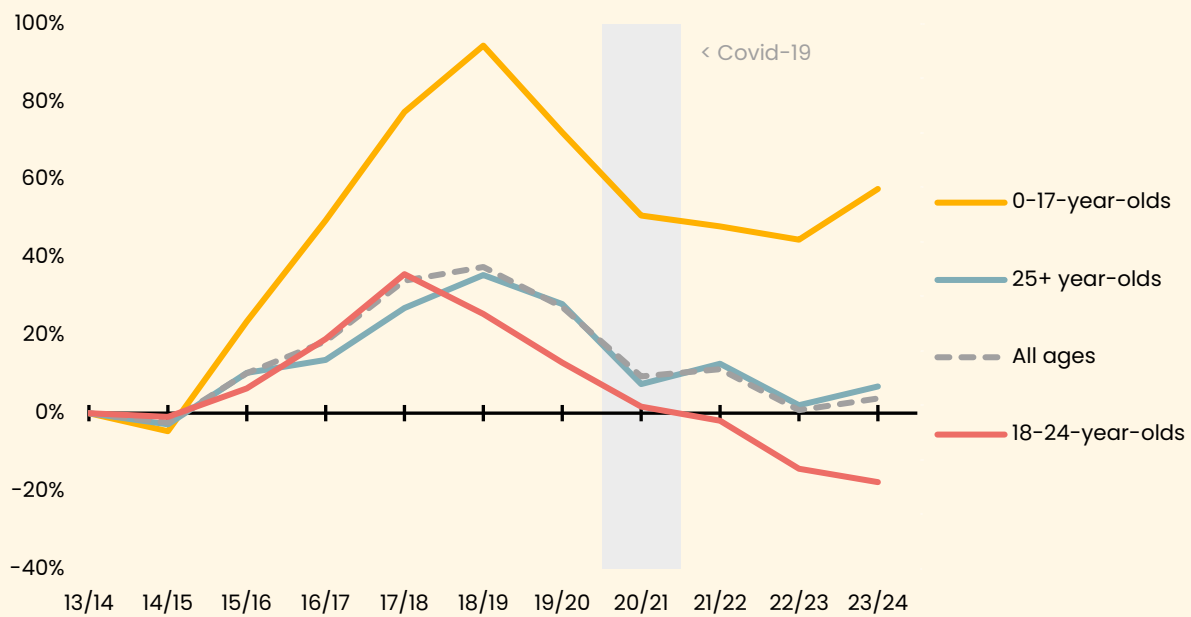
FIGURE 2.3. HOMICIDES OF 13–19-YEAR-OLDS BY KNIVES AND SHARP INSTRUMENTS OR OTHER METHODS (ENGLAND AND WALES)

**The published figures for 2016/17 have been adjusted to take account of the victims of the Hillsborough disaster, who were reflected in Homicide Index figures in this year.*

Children have been particularly affected by increases in knife crime.

Children and young people are making up an increasing proportion of those affected by knife-related violence. In 2023/24, knife-related hospital admissions for 0–17-year-olds were 58% higher than they were compared to ten years ago (2013/14). In contrast, hospital admissions of 18–24-year-olds for knife assault have fallen by 18% compared to levels in 2013/14. This means that children are making up an increasing share of victims, growing from 9% in 2013/14 to 13% in 2023/24. Of the 112 additional hospital admissions for knife assault in 2023/24 compared to the previous year, 38% of these were accounted for by victims aged 0–17 years old.

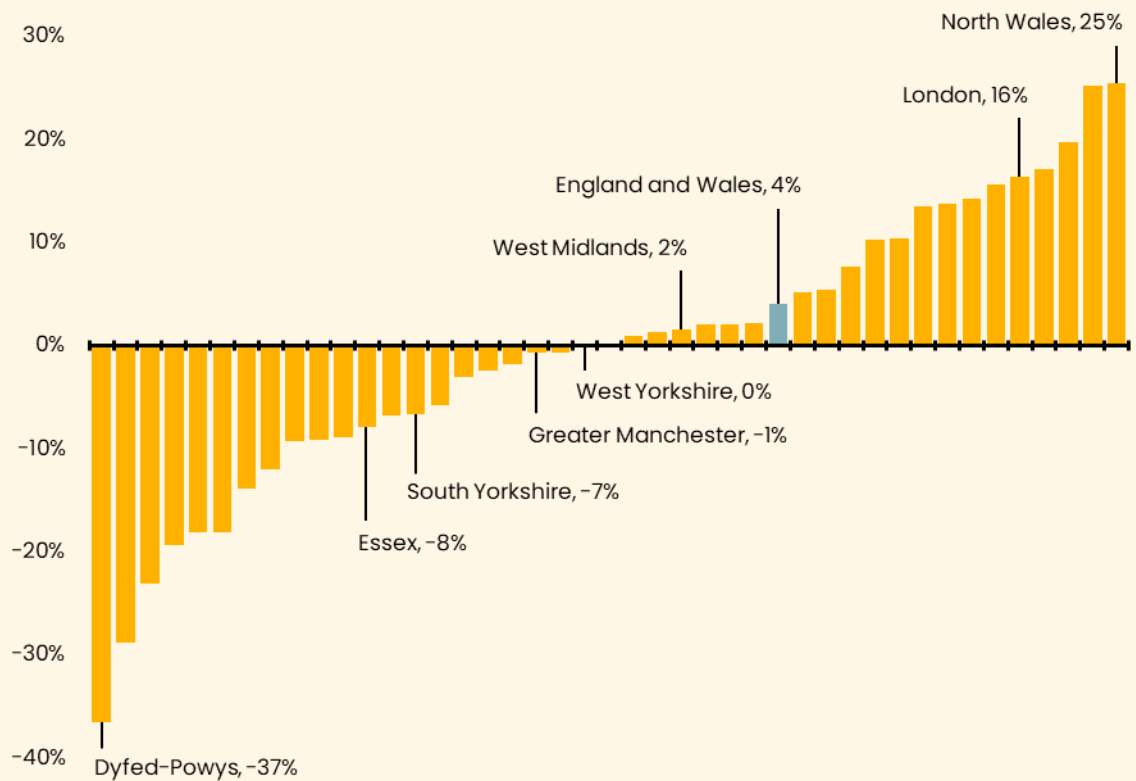
FIGURE 2.4. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS FOR KNIFE ASSAULT SINCE 2013/14, BY AGE (ENGLAND)



Half of all police forces recorded a fall in knife offences in the latest year.

Though national measures of homicides, hospital admissions and police-recorded crime all pointed to a rise in knife crime in the latest year, not every area saw an increase. Half (50%) of all police forces recorded a fall in offences involving knives in 2023/24. London, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, and Avon and Somerset were the five areas with the highest absolute numbers of knife-related offences recorded by the police. Avon and Somerset (25%) and London (16%) showed relatively large increases from 2022/23 to 2023/24, whilst Greater Manchester showed a small decrease (-1%).

FIGURE 2.5. POLICE-RECORDED KNIFE-RELATED OFFENCES, PERCENTAGE CHANGE FROM 2022/23 TO 2023/24, BY POLICE FORCE AREA (ENGLAND AND WALES)



3. Justice system involvement

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Justice system involvement Proven violent offences committed by children	Mixed	15,542	+9%	-26%	-38%

COMMENTARY

In last year's update, our justice system involvement indicator had an **improving** rating – the number of proven violent offences by children was lower than in the previous year (2021/22), the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2012/13). The latest data shows the picture is now **mixed** – the number of convictions and cautions for violent offences was up compared to the previous year (2022/23). This is the first year-on-year increase since 2017/18. However, it remains lower than levels in the year before Covid (2019/20) and the levels ten years previously (2013/14).

How are we measuring justice system involvement?

In this measure, we wanted to get a sense of the scale of violence conducted by children and young people who become involved in the criminal justice system. To do this, we've used the total number of proven violent offences by 10-17-year-olds^{ix} from data published by the Youth Justice Board. In this measure, we've included the following offences: violence against the person (including offences such as assault and homicide), robbery (which is theft with the use or threat of force) and sexual offences (including rape and other sexual offences). Proven offences are those that resulted in a caution or conviction.

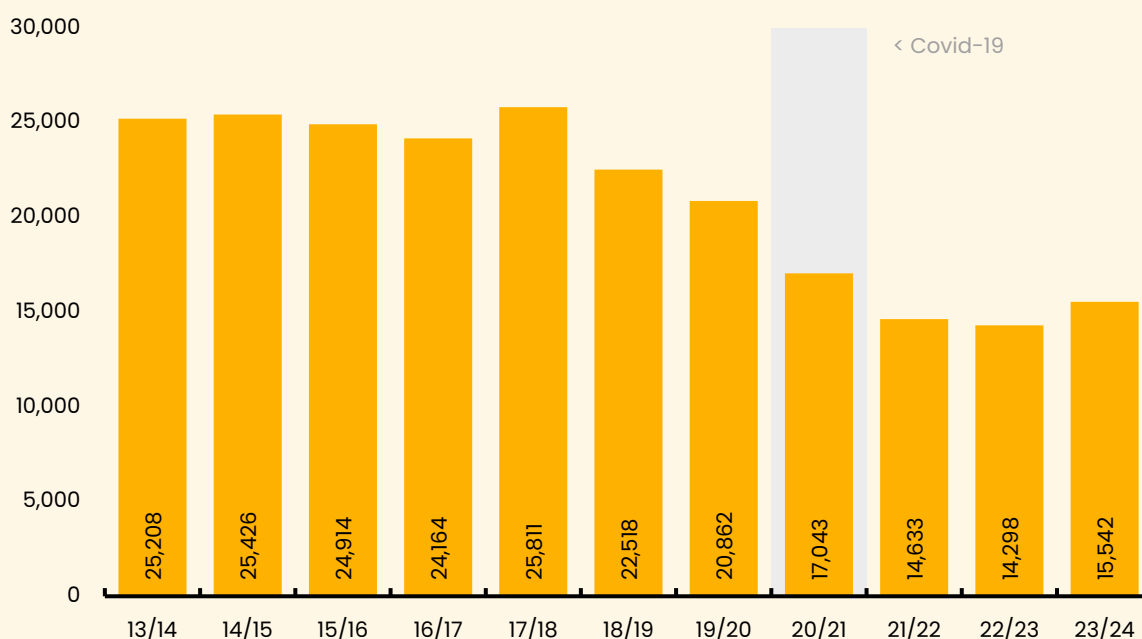
It's important to bear in mind that other factors – such as how readily crimes are reported, the priority the police give to prosecuting certain types of offences and how successful they are at identifying and charging suspects – will affect the number of children with proven offences. This indicator may, therefore, not provide a fully accurate measure of the underlying amount of violent crime and how it has changed over time.

FINDINGS

The number of proven violent offences by children rose for the first time in six years.

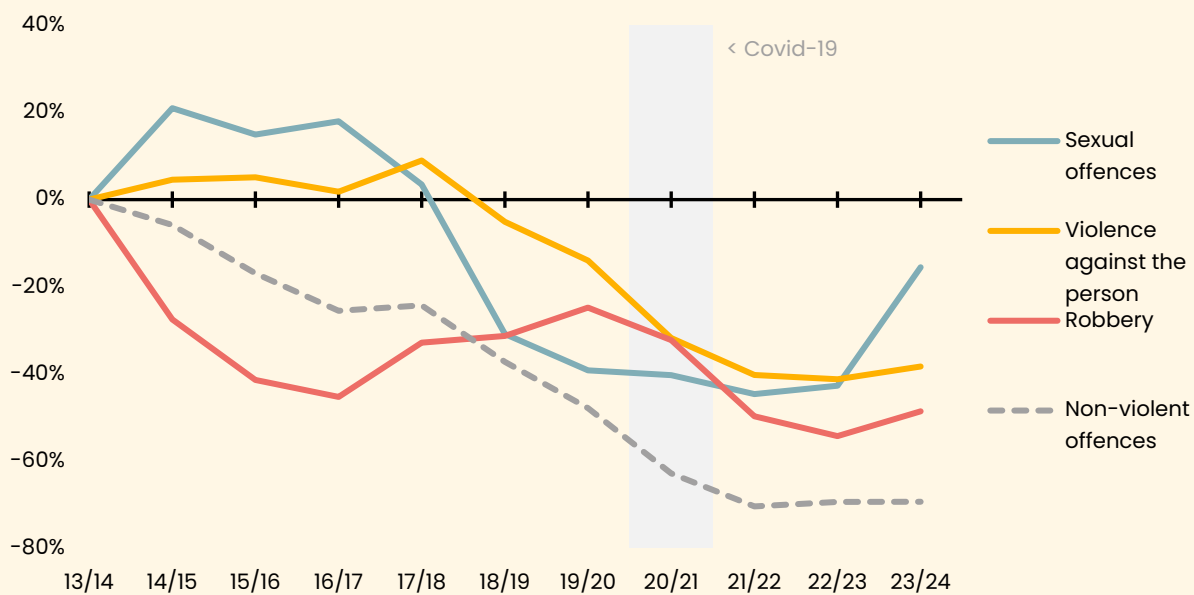
In 2006/07, the number of cautions and convictions of children for violent offences peaked – with a high of over 64,911 proven violent offences^x committed by children. Since then, numbers have been on a consistent downward trend, falling by 76% between 2006/07 and 2023/24. In the last year (2023/24), children were convicted or cautioned for 15,542 violent offences. This is up by 9% on the previous year – the first annual increase since 2017/18.

FIGURE 3.1. NUMBER OF PROVEN VIOLENT OFFENCES BY 10-17-YEAR-OLDS (ENGLAND AND WALES)



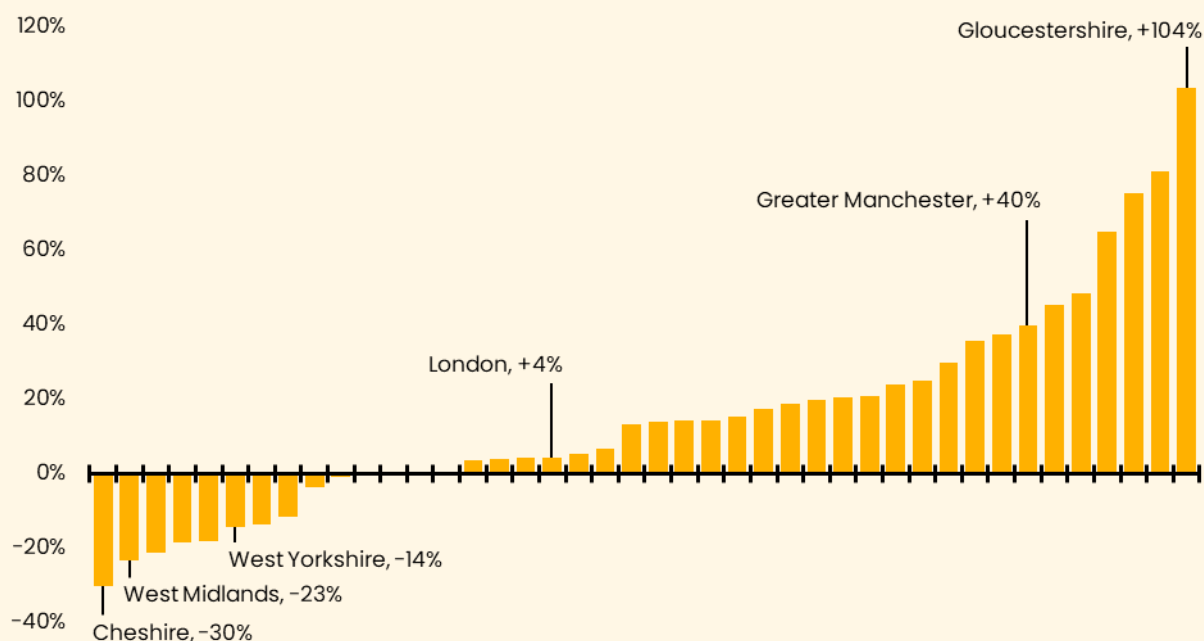
Sexual offences made up the smallest share of our measure of violent offences (9%) but experienced the biggest annual increase – up by 47% in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23. It's the only measure of violent offending that now exceeds the levels before Covid-19, though it remains below the levels ten years ago. Due to the nature of the crime, sexual offences are particularly impacted by changes in reporting. Robberies made up 12% of our measure of violent offences. They showed an annual increase of 12% but remain around half the level they were ten years ago and a third of their level in the year before Covid-19. Violence against the person made up the majority (79%) of our measure of violent offences. In 2023/24, they increased by 5% year on year but remain 38% below their level ten years ago and 28% below their level in the year before Covid-19. In contrast, when we look at all other non-violent offences by children (which made up around 56% of the total proven offences by children), there was no real change year on year. Levels of non-violent offending remain 69% below their levels ten years ago and 41% below their levels before Covid-19.

FIGURE 3.2. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN PROVEN VIOLENT OFFENCES BY CHILDREN SINCE 2013/14 (ENGLAND AND WALES)



Most police force areas have seen increases in proven violent offences by children.

Last year (2022/23), half of all police force areas recorded increases in violent offences by children. This year (2023/24), the majority (71%) of police force areas experienced an increase. Gloucestershire recorded the biggest increase – more than double the number of offences over 2022/23. Cumbria, Lancashire, and Avon and Somerset recorded the next biggest increases, rising by more than half year on year. Greater Manchester saw the number of violent offences by children rise by 40%, making it the area with the second-highest number after London. London saw a relatively small increase – up by 4% from 2022/23. But not everywhere saw an increase – 12 of the 42 forces with available data recorded falls in the number of proven violent offences by children. Most notably, West Yorkshire and West Midlands – the areas with the third- and fourth-highest numbers of offences overall – recorded falls of 14% and 23%, respectively, in 2023/24.

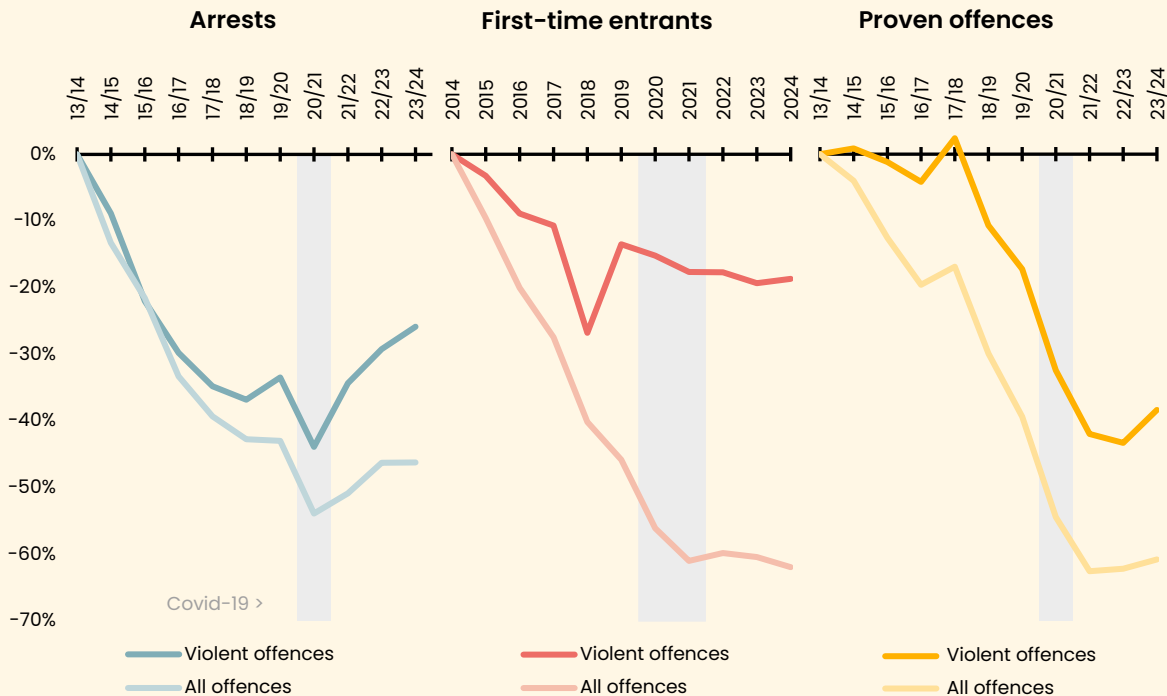
FIGURE 3.3. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN VIOLENT OFFENCES BY CHILDREN FROM 2022/23 TO 2023/24, BY POLICE FORCE AREA (ENGLAND AND WALES)

Whilst the total number of children in the criminal justice system is down, violent offences have increased.

The total number of children entering the justice system has been falling consistently for the past two decades. In 2023/24, the Youth Justice Board recorded that 13,686 children received a caution or sentence. This number is slightly down from the previous year (by 0.4%), down 35% from the year before Covid-19 (2019/20) and down 67% compared to ten years ago (2013/14). The most recent data available on first-time entrants (FTEs) indicates that the number of children entering the justice system for the first time has also fallen.^{xi} According to Ministry of Justice data for the 2024 calendar year (Jan-Dec 2024), the number of FTEs fell by 4% from the previous year (2023), bringing it to 62% down from where it was ten years ago (2014).

These falls may reflect fewer children engaging in offending behaviours but may also reflect an increased use of diversion^{xii} (diverting children who have committed low-level or first-time offences away from the criminal justice system, rather than taking them to court, in order to protect them from future involvement in crime). Implementing and recording diversions is inconsistent across England and Wales, meaning it's difficult to track the use of diversions nationally; however, evidence suggests that the sharp decline in FTEs^{xiii} over the past decade can in part be attributed to the increased use of diversions.

FIGURE 3.4. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN ARRESTS, FIRST-TIME ENTRANTS AND PROVEN OFFENCES SINCE 2013/14, FOR 10-17-YEAR-OLDS (ENGLAND AND WALES)



Whilst fewer children involved in the justice system may be good news, these figures could be masking some more worrying trends in relation to violent offending specifically. Over the past decade, there's been a 46% reduction in the number of children arrested for any offence. For children arrested for violent offences, the reduction has been significantly less – 26%. Over the past three years, since 2020/21, arrests for any offences are up 17%, compared to 32% for violent offences. There's a similar pattern for FTEs – whilst the number involved in any offence has fallen by 62% since 2014, the number entering the justice system for violent offending is down only 19%. In the latest year (2024), FTEs for violent offending have increased by 1%, compared to a 4% fall for any offending. These changes also map onto the number of proven offences by children – all proven offences fell by 61% over the past decade, whilst violent offences only fell by 38%.

4. Disproportionality

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Disproportionality Proportion of Black children in custody	Mixed	23.7%	-2.1%pt	-4.5%pt	+1.3%pt

COMMENTARY

In last year's update, our disproportionality indicator had a **mixed** rating – the proportion of children in custody on an average month who were Black was lower than in the previous year (2021/22) and the year before Covid (2019/20) but higher than ten years previously (2012/13). This latest data shows the picture is still **mixed** – the proportion of Black children in custody was down again compared to the previous year (2022/23) and the year before Covid (2019/20) but remained higher than ten years previously (2013/14).

What is our core measure of disproportionality?

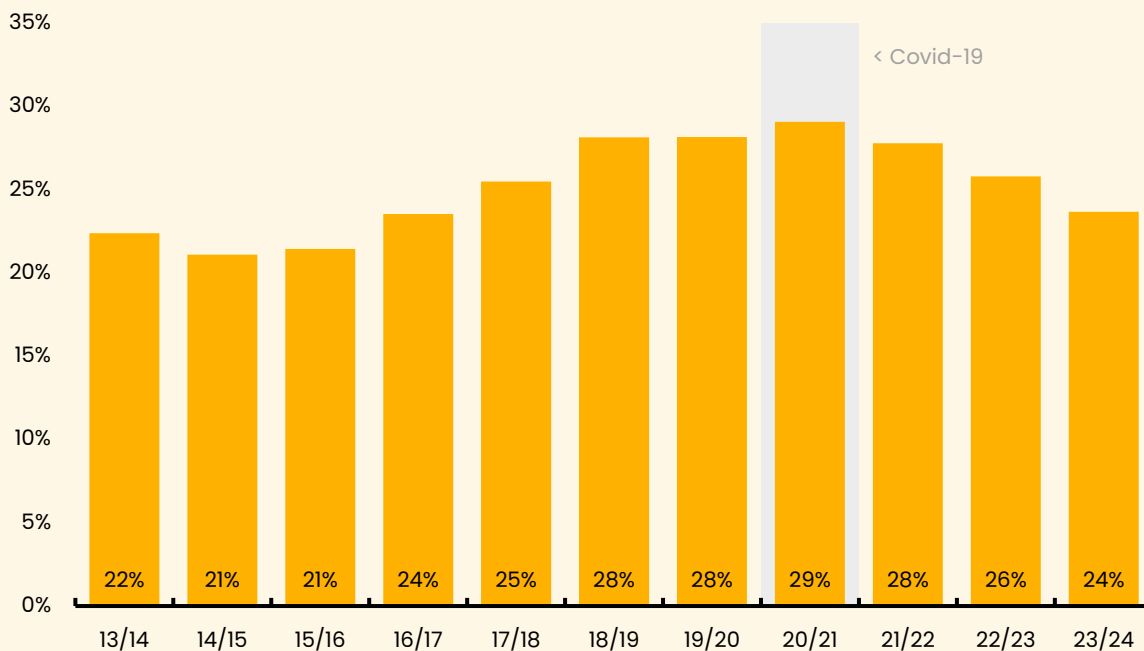
It's widely accepted that there are significant racial disparities in the youth justice system and who's affected by violence, particularly when it comes to Black children. It's important that this remains central to our thinking about violence. For this reason, one of our core focuses is racial disproportionality. One of the areas where this disproportionality is most stark is among children serving custodial or prison sentences. To track this, we've used the proportion of [children in custody](#)^{xiv} on an average month who are from any Black background. For a more in-depth look at racial disproportionality in violence affecting young people, see our [recent report](#).^{xv}

FINDINGS

Fewer Black children are in custody ...

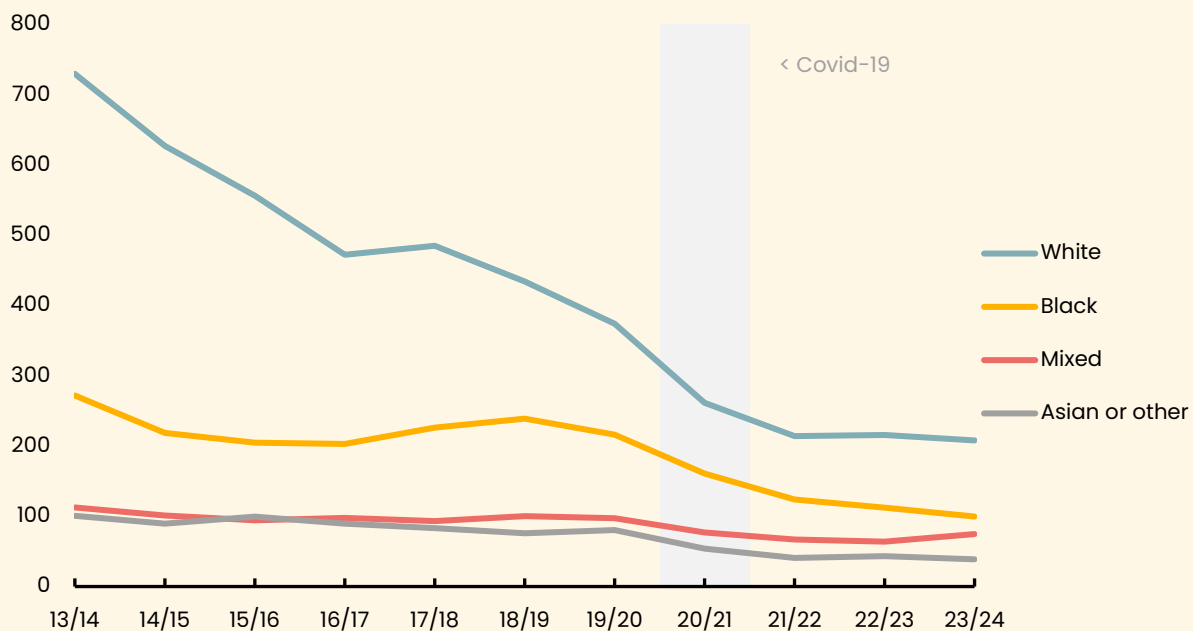
Over the past decade, the total number of children serving custodial sentences has fallen, but this hasn't impacted children of all races equally. From 2013/14 to 2020/21, the number of White children in custody on an average month fell by 64%. In comparison, the average number of Black children in custody fell by only 41%. This led to the share of Black children in custody rising to 29% in 2020/21, despite Black children accounting for only 6% of 10–17-year-olds in England and Wales. Since then, the absolute number and the share of Black children in custody have fallen, and in the latest year (2023/24), it fell again. But Black children remain significantly overrepresented. In 2023/24, the number of children in custody on an average month was 430. Of these, 100 were Black children, making up 24% of those whose race was known – still 1.3pts up from a decade ago and four times their [population share](#).^{xvi}

FIGURE 4.1. PROPORTION OF THE AVERAGE MONTHLY CHILD CUSTODY POPULATION WHO ARE BLACK (ENGLAND AND WALES)



... but children from Mixed race backgrounds are increasingly overrepresented.

Whilst the proportion and number of children in custody who are from Black backgrounds has fallen recently, the proportion of Mixed race children has been increasing. In 2023/24, Mixed race children were the only group to show an increase in the total number of children in custody – up by 17% from 2022/23. They now account for 18% of the average monthly custodial population, despite making up only 6% of all 10–17-year-olds in England and Wales. In 2023/24, the number of children in custody who are from White, Asian or Other backgrounds remained broadly the same as the year before.

FIGURE 4.2. AVERAGE MONTHLY CHILD CUSTODY POPULATION BY RACE (ENGLAND AND WALES)

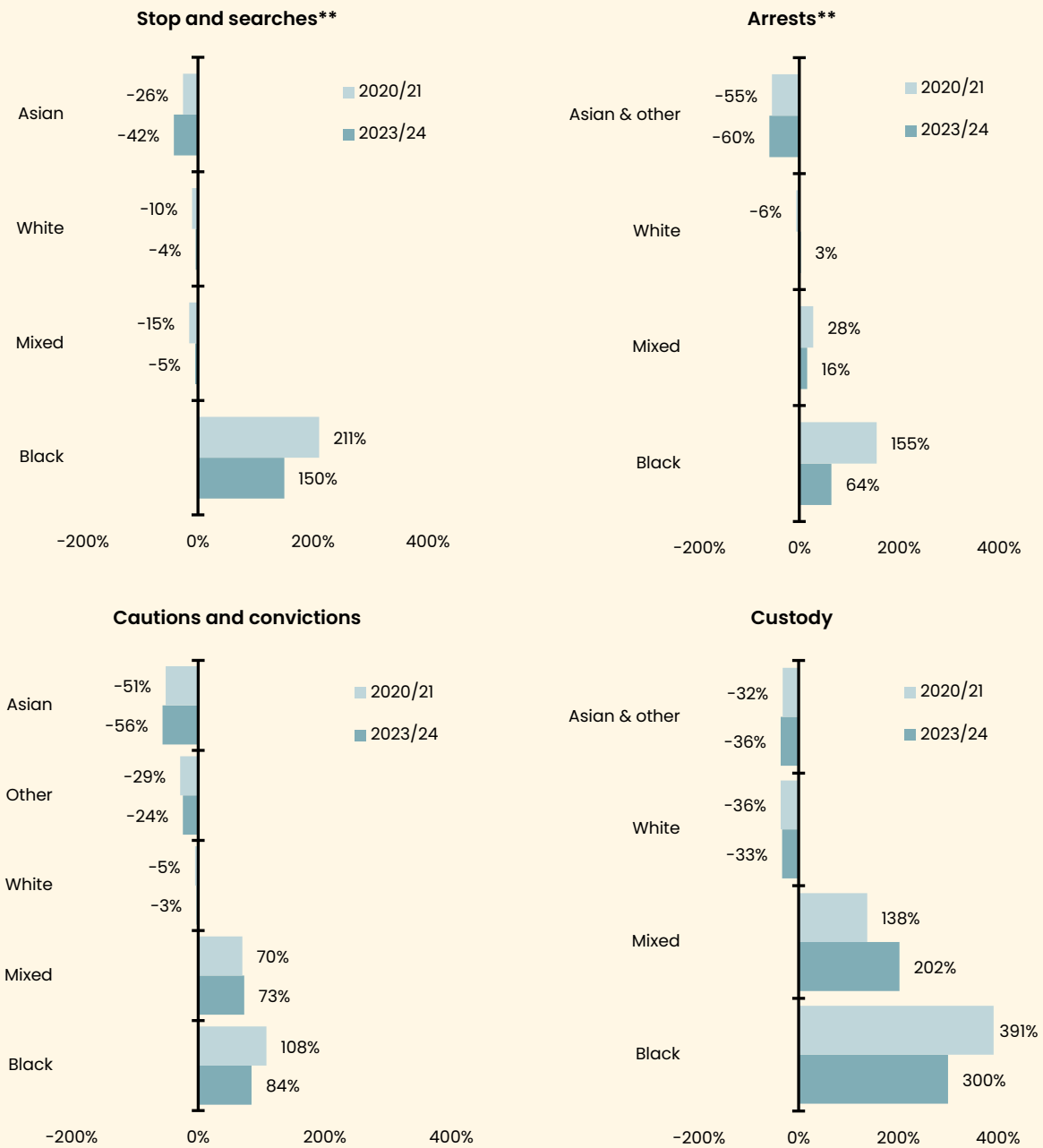
Disproportionality in stop and search and arrests has shown some improvement.

Black and Mixed race children are also overrepresented at all stages of the youth justice system. Over the past four to five years, this disproportionality has improved somewhat, particularly in terms of stop and search and arrests of Black children. In 2020/21 (the earliest year for which we have stop and search data by age and race), 18% of children stopped and searched self-defined as Black, making them over three times as likely (+211%) to be stopped and searched compared to their population share.^{xvii} In the latest year (2023/24), this has fallen slightly – to 15% of all stops and searches. Whilst this indicates some improvement, Black children remain 2.5 times as likely (+150%) to be stopped and searched as their population share.

Arrests have shown more consistent improvement over the past four years. In 2020/21, Black children made up 15% of children arrested; in 2023/24, this had fallen to 10%¹ – making them 64% more likely to be arrested compared to their population share. Whilst this overrepresentation is still concerning, it is the lowest it's been since 2010/11.

¹ In the same period, the proportion of arrested children who didn't provide their race rose from 13% to 16%. This could account for some of this fall but not all of it.

FIGURE 4.3. UNDER- AND OVERREPRESENTATION* OF CHILDREN RELATIVE TO THEIR POPULATION SHARES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM BY RACE, 2020/21 VS 2023/24 (ENGLAND AND WALES)



*Under- and overrepresentation calculated as the percentage difference between the observed and expected proportion accounted for by an ethnic group, using census 2021 population estimates.

**For stop and search and arrest figures, we've used self-defined race. There's a large portion for whom race was not provided (19% and 16%, respectively). We've calculated proportions using the total number of children whose race is known.

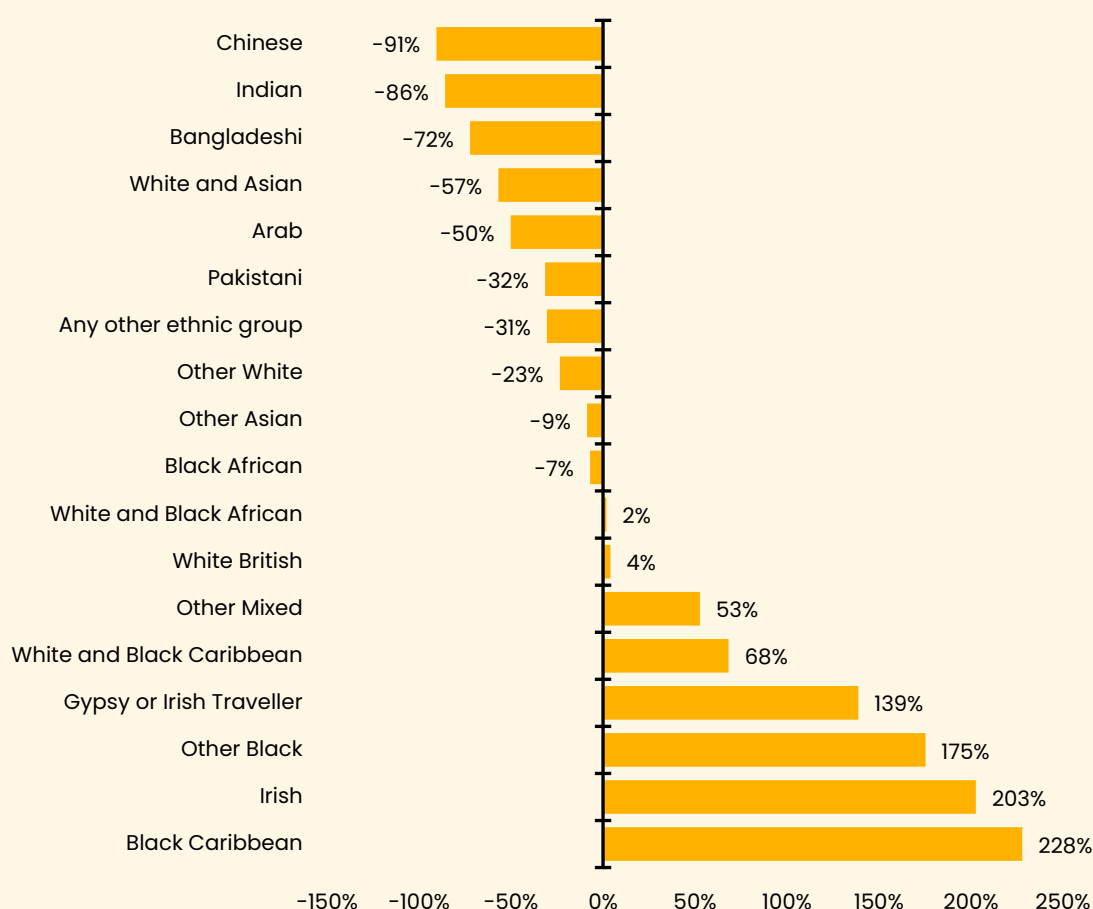
Black children and young people remain over six times more likely to be victims of homicide.

In 2023/24, 34% of homicide victims aged 16–24 were Black – over six times their population share (5% of 16–24-year-olds in England and Wales). This is a slightly smaller share than in the previous year (36%) but represents the same number of young people losing their lives – 35 Black 16–24-year-olds were victims of homicide in each of 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24. The proportion of homicide victims who were Black only decreased because the number of victims from Asian, Mixed and other minority ethnic backgrounds increased. In 2023/24, there were 27 16–24-year-old homicide victims from Asian, Mixed and other minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to 19 the year before.

Looking only at race masks underlying differences.

It's important to emphasise that considering racial disproportionality by looking only at race (i.e. Black, White, Asian, etc.) masks the underlying patterns of violence and justice system involvement experienced by specific communities and groups of children. Below are the figures for arrests – one set of figures published with a breakdown by ethnic groups.

FIGURE 4.4. UNDER- AND OVERREPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN ARRESTED RELATIVE TO THEIR POPULATION SHARES BY ETHNIC GROUP, 2023/24 (ENGLAND AND WALES)



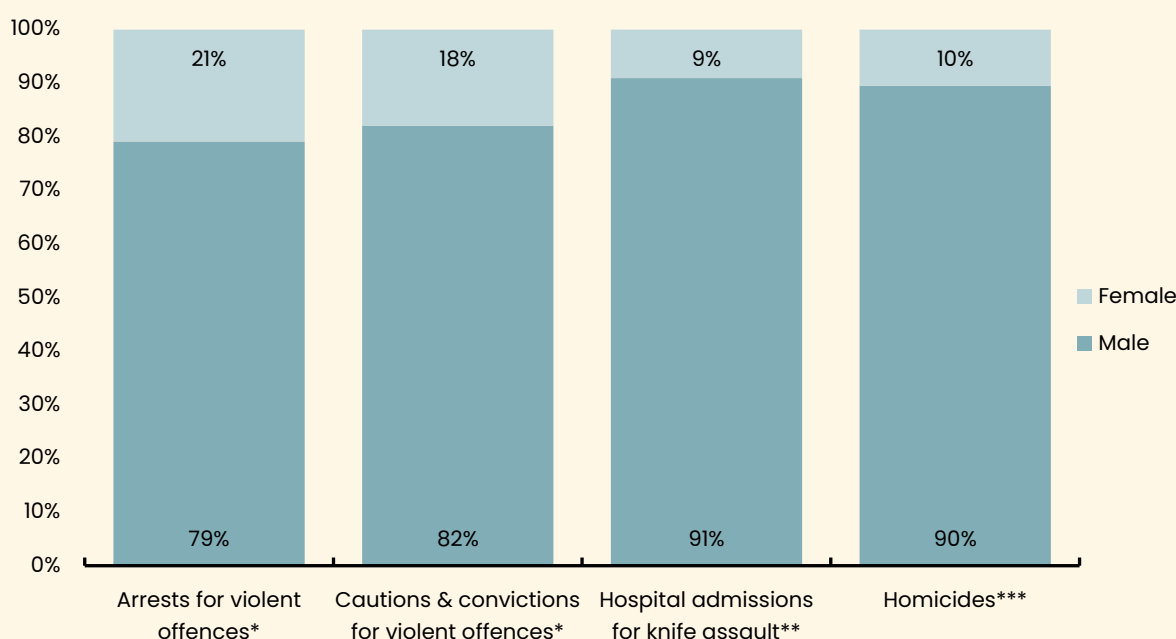
The disproportionate representation of Black children in arrests is particularly driven by the overrepresentation of those from Black Caribbean and Other Black backgrounds – who were 228% and 175%, respectively, more likely to be arrested in the latest year (2023/24) compared to their population share. In comparison, Black African children were slightly underrepresented in arrests in the same year.

There is also significant overrepresentation in some smaller groups that can be overlooked when examining differences by race. For example, children from Gypsy and Irish Traveller backgrounds are 139% more likely to be arrested compared to their share of the population. And the [2023/24 inspection survey^{xviii}](#) of children in custody found that 7% of respondents identified as being from a traveller community, despite them making up less than 1% of the child population in England and Wales.

Experiences also differ significantly by gender ...

Boys are more likely than girls to be affected by violence as victims and perpetrators, as recorded in police and justice statistics. This gender disparity is particularly stark when it comes to knife crime and homicide. For example, in 2023/24, 82% of children convicted or cautioned for violence and 91% of children hospitalised following a knife assault were boys. 96% of young people (aged 10–24) convicted for homicide were male.

FIGURE 4.5. INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENCE, BY SEX, 2023/24 (ENGLAND AND WALES)



10–17-year-olds, England and Wales, **All ages, England, * 16–24-year-olds, England and Wales.*

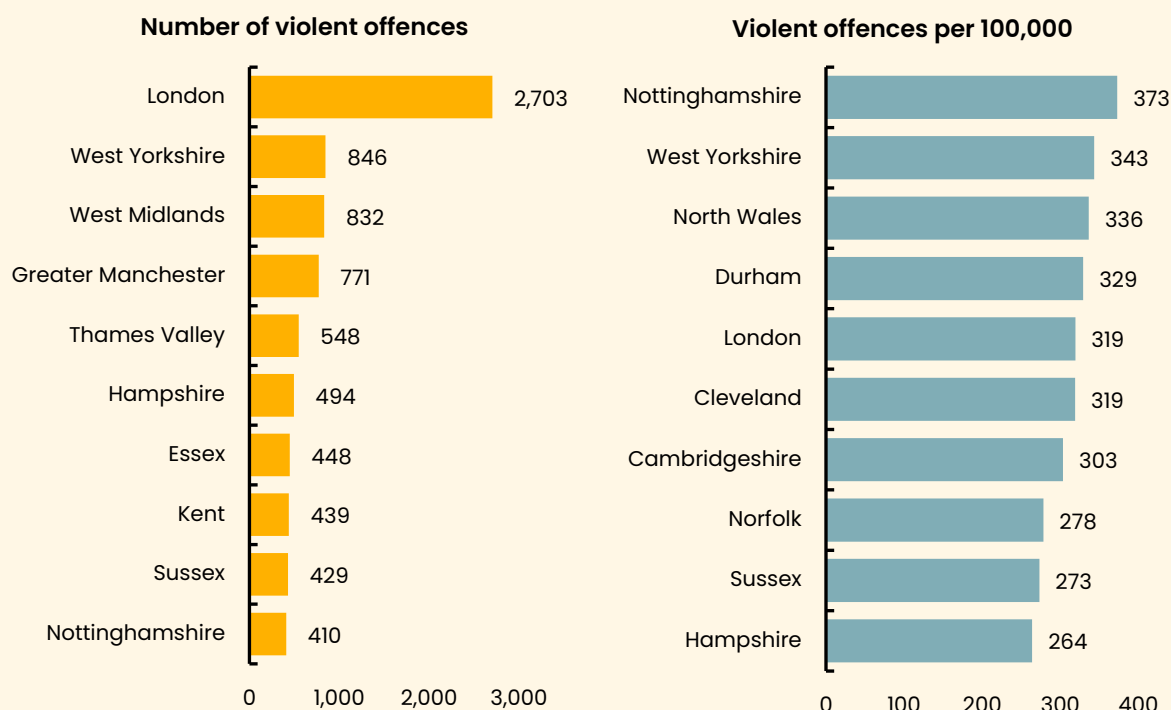
The gender gap for the most extreme consequences has become more pronounced over the past decade – in 2023/24, male 16–24-year-olds made up 90% of 16–24-year-old homicide victims, compared to 75% in 2013/14. This is primarily due to increases in knife-related homicides. Cautions and convictions for violent offences, on the other hand, have shown the opposite pattern – girls made up a greater share of children proven to have committed violence in 2023/24 (18%) than they did ten years ago (11% in 2013/14).

Whilst girls are less likely to be victims and perpetrators of serious violence, violence against women and girls remains a serious problem. Whereas men are more likely to be hospitalised for knife assaults, women are more likely to be hospitalised for injuries related to sexual assault. 73% of hospital admissions for sexual assault in 2023/24 were female. Across all ages, female homicide victims are more likely to have been acquainted with the suspect (67% of all victims) compared to male victims (38%). A partner or ex-partner was the principal suspect for over a third (37%) of female victims of homicide, compared to 2% of male victims in 2023/24. In contrast, male homicide victims were more likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance (23%) or a stranger (20%) compared to women (3% and 4%, respectively). In the last ten years, the number of women killed by a partner or ex-partner has fallen – a decade ago, it accounted for 46% of women’s deaths by homicide (2013/14). But in that time, the proportion of offences where no suspect was charged has more than doubled. This makes it difficult to know what’s happened to the pattern of domestic homicide affecting women. Comparable data isn’t published specifically for younger women and girls.

... and where children live can be an additional source of disparity.

Certain areas of England and Wales consistently experience the highest levels of violence. London, West Yorkshire, West Midlands and Greater Manchester police forces report the highest absolute numbers across multiple measures of violence, including proven violent offences by children, police-recorded violence and knife-enabled crime.

FIGURE 4.6. TOP TEN POLICE FORCE AREAS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF VIOLENT OFFENCES COMMITTED BY CHILDREN AND THE RATES PER 100,000 POPULATION – 2021/22-2023/24 AVERAGE (ENGLAND AND WALES)

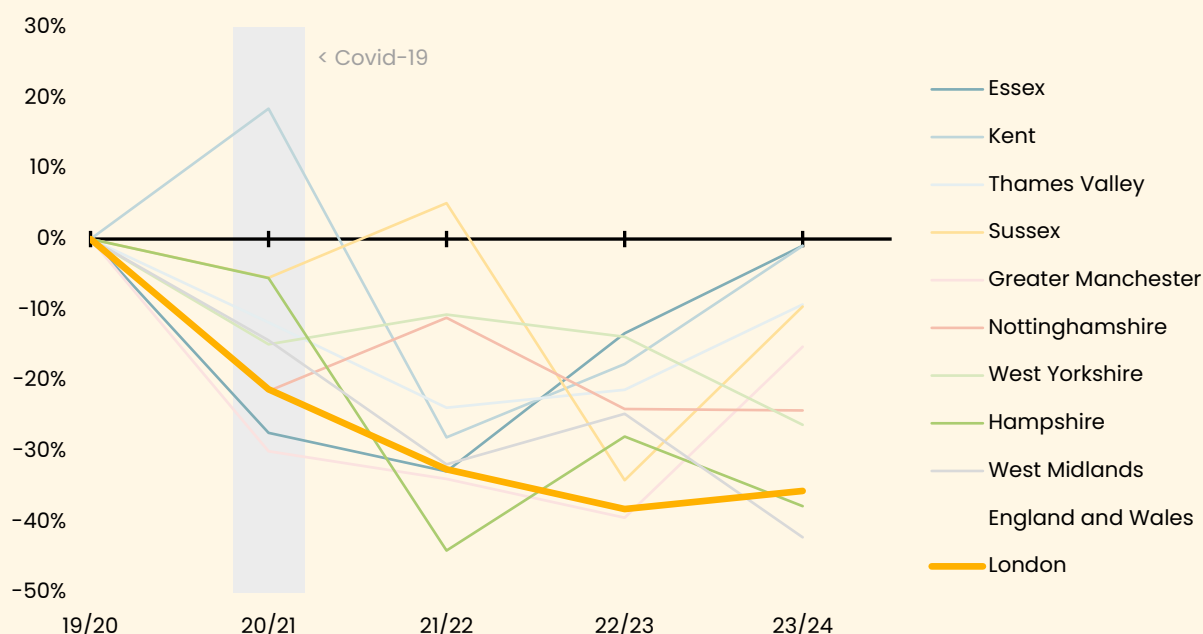


However, when we take the population of each area into account, we see a different pattern. Looking at the average violent offending rate across the past three years (2021/22–2023/24), London and West Yorkshire are still in the top ten police forces, but other areas have higher rates. Nottinghamshire has the highest rate, with 373 violent offences committed by children per 100,000 of the 10–17-year-old population.

London continued to show slower growth in violent offending than other areas.

Despite consistently reporting the highest absolute numbers of violent offences committed by children, London continues to show slower growth in violent offending than other areas. In 2023/24, the number of violent offences committed by children in London rose by 4% but was still 36% below where it was before the pandemic (2019/20). In contrast, other police forces have seen greater rebounds since Covid. For example, in 2023/24, both Essex and Kent were almost at the numbers seen in 2019/20.

FIGURE 4.7. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN PROVEN VIOLENT OFFENCES BY CHILDREN SINCE 2019/20 FOR THE TEN POLICE FORCES WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF VIOLENT OFFENCES IN THE LATEST YEAR (ENGLAND AND WALES)



5. Policing

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Policing Successfully investigated crimes	Mixed	10.4%	+ 0.6%pt	- 0.5%pt	- 15.8%pt

COMMENTARY

In last year's update, our policing indicator had a **worsening** rating – the proportion of recorded crimes that resulted in a successful outcome was lower than in the previous year (2021/22), the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2012/13). The latest data shows the picture is now **mixed** – the proportion of successful outcomes in 2023/24 was up compared to the previous year (2022/23) but remains down compared to the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2013/14).

What is this sector, and how are we measuring it?

The police aim to prevent and solve crimes, provide support to victims, administer out of court disposals and collaborate with other organisations to provide targeted support where necessary. We use the proportion of crimes that are successfully investigated by the police^{xx} as our core measure for policing. We consider a crime to be successfully investigated if it resulted in (1) a charge or summons, (2) a formal or informal out of court disposal, (3) a diversionary activity (i.e. Outcome 22) or (4) being taken into consideration by a court.² This year, we've updated our definition of a successful outcome to include offences taken into consideration by a court and diversion under Outcome 22. Outcome 22 isn't formally recorded as a positive outcome by the police, but evidence suggests that pre-court diversion can reduce reoffending and violence^{xx}, and YEF believes it should be considered a positive outcome for children^{xxi}. However, we know that diversion practice varies considerably. Depending on various factors, children are likely to experience different consequences and opportunities for support.

It's important to remember that this indicator can be affected by changes in the way crimes and outcomes are reported.

² When someone convicted of an offence admits to other similar offences, which are then taken into consideration at sentencing.

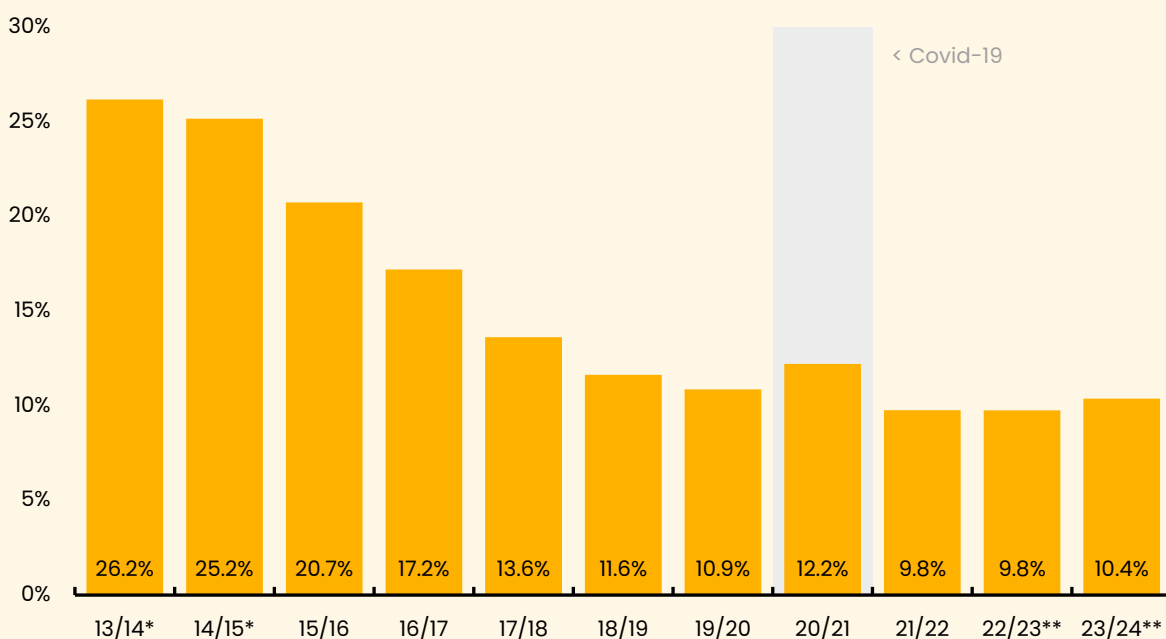
FINDINGS

The proportion of crimes successfully investigated by the police increased in the past year, but it remains low.

Over the past decade, the number of crimes recorded by the police annually has risen, whilst the total number of those crimes that are successfully investigated has fallen. As a consequence, the proportion of crimes successfully investigated by the police has also fallen. However, this pattern reversed slightly in the last year. In 2023/24, the total number of police-recorded crimes fell, whilst the total number that were successfully investigated rose. This meant that the proportion of police-recorded crimes with successful outcomes rose by 0.6%pts – from 9.8% to 10.4%. But this improvement is modest and the total proportion of successful outcomes remains low.

Violent crimes show a similar pattern to that of all offences. In 2023/24, 9.2% of violence against the person crimes recorded by the police had successful outcomes, up from 8.8% in 2022/23. Robberies and sexual offences were even less likely to result in a successful outcome. In 2023/24, it was 7.1% for robberies (vs 7.2% in 2022/23) and 5.2% for sexual offences (vs 4.7% in 2022/23).

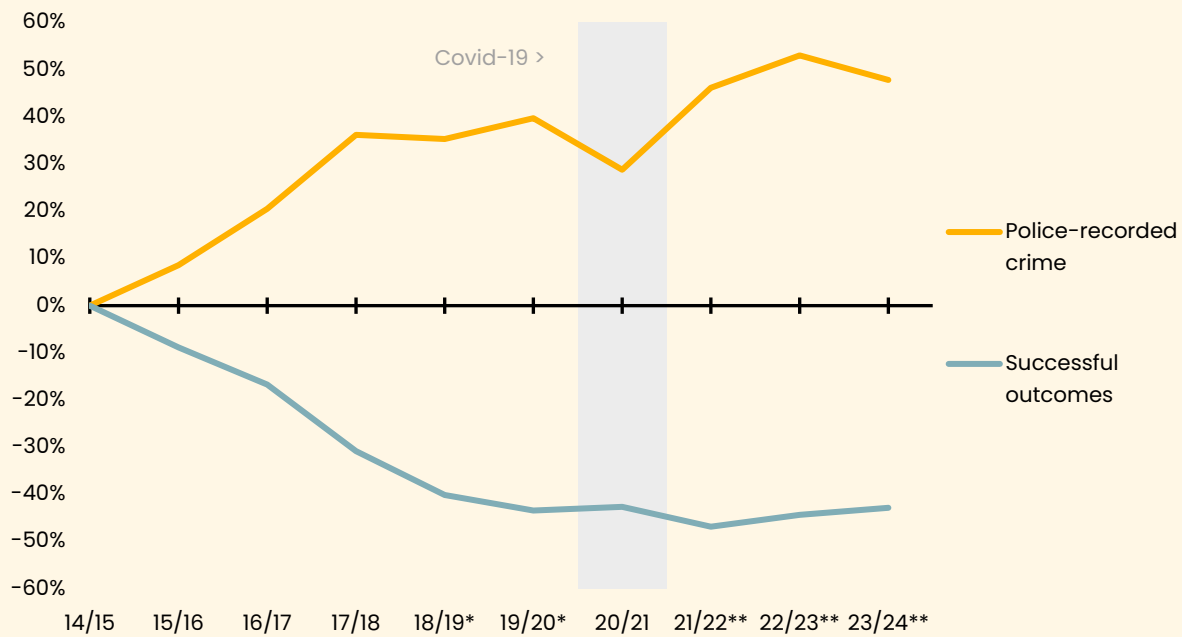
FIGURE 5.1. PROPORTION OF POLICE-RECORDED CRIMES WITH SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES (ENGLAND AND WALES)



* Based on data from 38 out of 43 forces, ** Excluding data from Devon & Cornwall police.

Despite this improvement, the amount of time it takes for a crime to reach an outcome increased again in the latest year. In 2023/24, the median number of days for any offence to be assigned an outcome was 16, up from 14 days the year before (2022/23) and ten days the year before the pandemic (2019/20). But there was some improvement at the most extreme ends; of all offences recorded in 2023/24, 16% took more than 100 days to reach an outcome, down from 20% the year before.

FIGURE 5.2. POLICE-RECORDED CRIMES AND SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES, PERCENTAGE CHANGE SINCE 2014/15 (ENGLAND AND WALES)

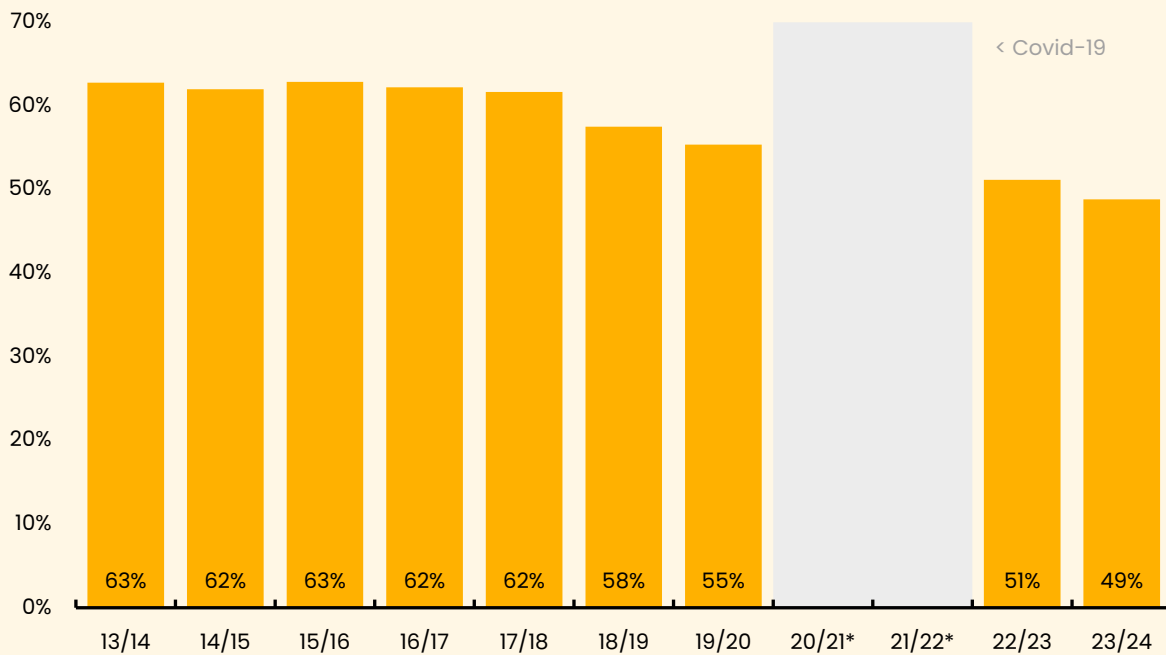


* These years exclude data from Greater Manchester Police, ** These years exclude data from Devon and Cornwall

Public trust in the police is still falling.

According to the [Crime Survey for England and Wales^{xxii}](#) (CSEW), public perceptions of the police are the worst they've been since the Office for National Statistics (ONS) started asking about this in 2005. Ten years ago, in 2013/14, perceptions were at a high, with 63% of respondents aged 16 and over agreeing that the police were doing a good or excellent job. 61% agreed the police could be relied on when needed. And 66% believed the police would treat them fairly. In the years before Covid, perceptions had started to worsen. The CSEW was paused for two years due to Covid, but when collection was resumed, ratings had fallen even further. In the latest year (2023/24), they fell again, with less than half (49%) now agreeing that the police do a good or excellent job and 50% agreeing they can be relied on when needed.

FIGURE 5.3. PROPORTION OF PEOPLE AGED 16 AND OVER WHO THINK THE POLICE DO A GOOD OR EXCELLENT JOB (ENGLAND AND WALES)



*CSEW collection suspended due to Covid-19 pandemic

YEF's violence and vulnerability survey (2024)^{xxiii} (a nationally representative survey of over 10,000 teenagers across England and Wales) showed that children hold mixed views of the police. 54% agreed that the police do a good job in their local area, 50% agreed that the police only use force when necessary, 47% agreed that the police would be there when needed and 45% agreed that the police treat everyone fairly. Children who'd had direct contact with the police over a suspected offence were more likely to respond positively, but approval remained fairly low. For example, 59% agreed that their local police do a good job, compared to 53% of those with no police contact.

6. Youth justice

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2012/13)
Youth justice Children's reoffending rate	Mixed	32.5%	+0.3%pt	-1.7%pt	-8.5%pt

COMMENTARY

In last year's update, our youth justice indicator had a **mixed** rating – children's reoffending rates were up on the previous year (2020/21) but down compared to the year before Covid (2019/20) and 2012/13. This latest data shows the picture is still **mixed** – children's reoffending rates are up again compared to the previous year (2021/22) but remain lower than the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2012/13).

What is this sector, and how are we measuring it?

The aim of the youth justice system in England and Wales is to prevent children from offending and reoffending. One of the main predictors of a child becoming involved in violence is being arrested for lower-level offences. But what happens to children after the point of arrest – including whether they're diverted away from formal court processes and what forms of support they're given – can significantly affect whether children go on to reoffend.

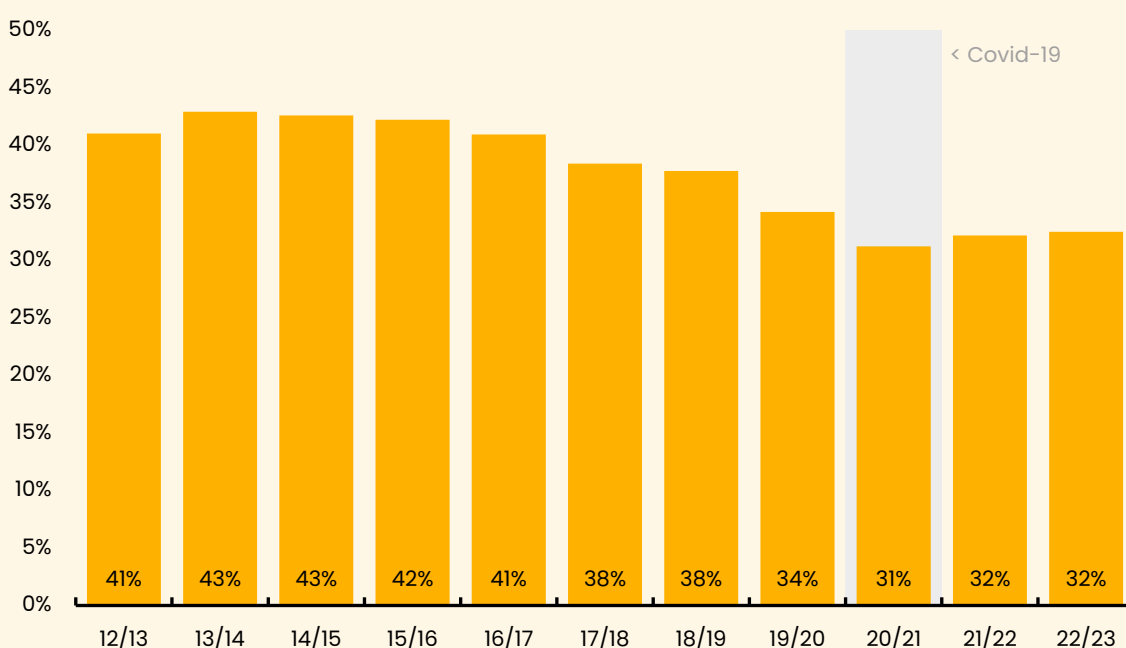
We've used children's reoffending rates^{xxiv} as our core measure to track the youth justice sector. An offence is considered as reoffending if it leads to a caution or conviction within 18 months of a previous offence (at the point either when a caution or conviction was served or a period in custody ended). It's important to note that measures of reoffending, particularly when split by type of offence or reoffender characteristics, are affected by the functioning of the police and the justice system.

FINDINGS

The proportion of children who reoffend rose for the second consecutive year.

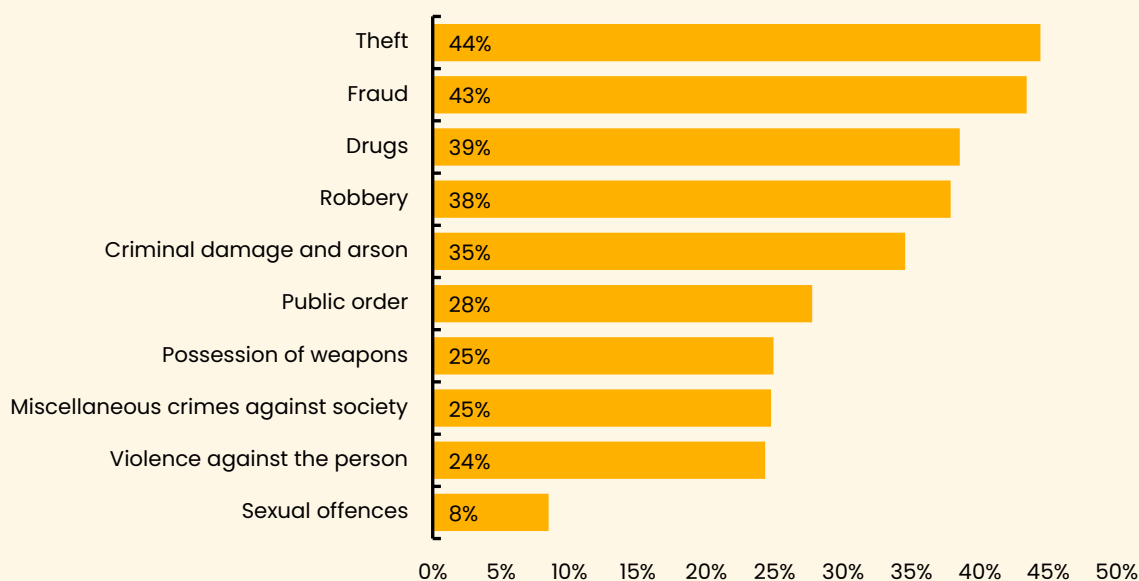
Children's reoffending rates fell between 2014/15 and 2020/21 – down from 43% to 31%. In 2021/22, they increased by 1%pt. In the latest year (2022/23), they rose again slightly, by 0.3%pts to 32.5%. This represents 4,649 children who've reoffended, compared to 4,447 the previous year (2021/22) and 26,374 children ten years ago (2012/13). In addition, those children who have reoffended have committed more reoffences on average. The average number of reoffences increased to 4.34 per person in 2022/23, compared to 4.07 in 2021/22 and 3.25 in 2012/13.

FIGURE 6.1. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN WHO REOFFENDED (ENGLAND AND WALES)



Children whose original offence³ is theft are the most likely to reoffend, with a reoffending rate of 44%. Robbery is also associated with a higher reoffending rate of 38%, whereas other violent offences are associated with much lower reoffending rates. Sexual offences – which very few children are cautioned or convicted for to begin with – are associated with the lowest reoffending rate (8%). Almost a quarter (24%) of those cautioned or convicted for violence against the person – the offence with the second-lowest reoffending rate – go on to reoffend. In terms of outcomes, children who receive a caution for their index offence are the least likely to reoffend (22%), whilst those who receive a custodial sentence are the most likely (66%).

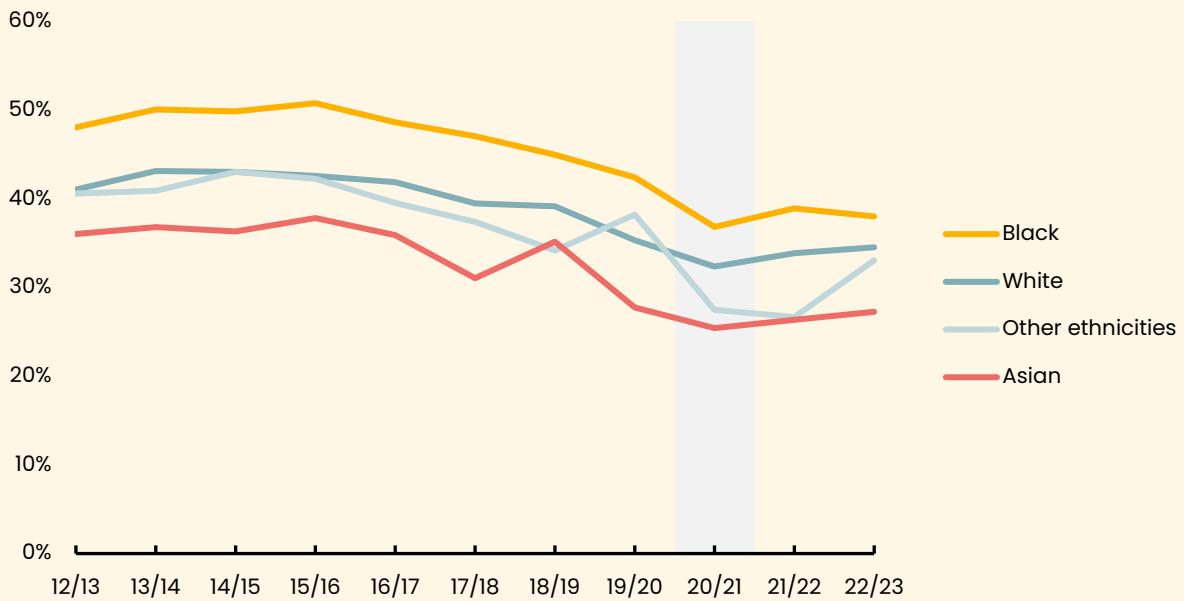
³ This is measured by the 'index offence'. An index offence is the offence a child was convicted or cautioned for at the start of the 18-month reoffending period that led to them being included in the offender cohort.

FIGURE 6.2. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN WHO REOFFEND, BY INDEX OFFENCE (ENGLAND AND WALES)

Black children have the highest reoffending rates, but this is falling.

Rates of reoffending are higher among Black children compared to children of all other races. In 2022/23, the reoffending rate was 38% among Black children, compared to 35% among White children, 27% among Asian children and 33% among children of all other ethnicities. This fits with the racial disproportionality we see at all stages of the justice system, whereby Black children are disproportionately more likely to be stopped and searched, arrested, cautioned or convicted, and given a custodial sentence than children from other racial groups. [Recent research^{xxv}](#) published by YEF also shows that whilst diversion is associated with lower reoffending, Black children and young people are less likely to be diverted away from formal criminal justice proceedings than White children and young people, even when controlling for the seriousness and frequency of offending. This disparity likely contributes to the higher reoffending rates. However, Black children have also seen the greatest reduction in reoffending over the past ten years; in 2022/23, the rate was 10%pts down compared to 2012/13. They were also the only ethnic group to see reoffending decrease in the latest year, down by 0.9%pts from 2021/22.

FIGURE 6.3. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN WHO REOFFEND BY RACE (ENGLAND AND WALES)



7. Education

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2018/19)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Education Proportion of children persistently absent from school	Mixed	20.0%	-1.3%pt	+9.1%pt	+9.3%pt

COMMENTARY

In last year’s update, our education indicator had a **mixed** rating – the proportion of children persistently absent was down from the previous year (2021/22) but up compared to the year before Covid (2018/19) and 2012/13. This latest data shows that the picture is still **mixed** – persistent absence fell again compared to the previous year (2022/23) but remains higher than the year before Covid (2018/19) and ten years previously (2013/14).

What is this sector, and how are we measuring it?

Schools and other education settings aim to provide a safe and positive place for learning and to help children realise their potential. Absence from school (missed attendance, as well as temporary suspension and permanent exclusion) not only impacts students’ attainment but is also associated with involvement in violence.^{xxvi} This impact, combined with the stark increase in absence since the pandemic, makes absence a priority for the sector.

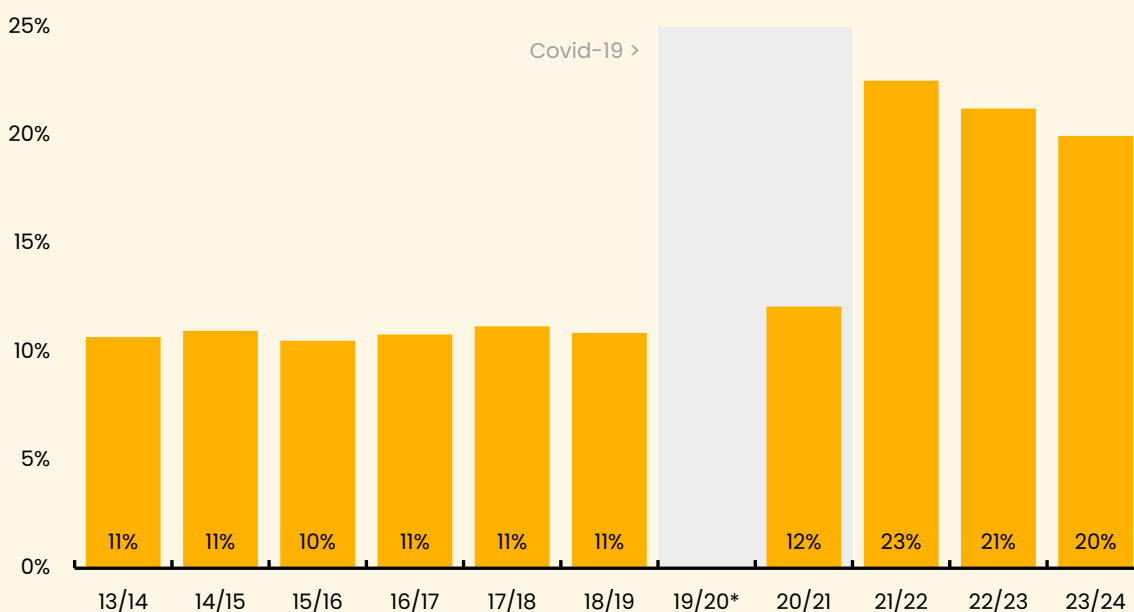
We’re using Department for Education (DfE) data on the proportion of children persistently absent from school.^{xxvii} in primary, secondary and special schools in England as our core indicator for the education sector. A child is considered persistently absent if they miss 10% or more of possible lessons. Due to differences in how these measures are reported, we have only included data for England, not Wales.

FINDINGS

The proportion of children persistently absent has fallen for the past two years but remains high.

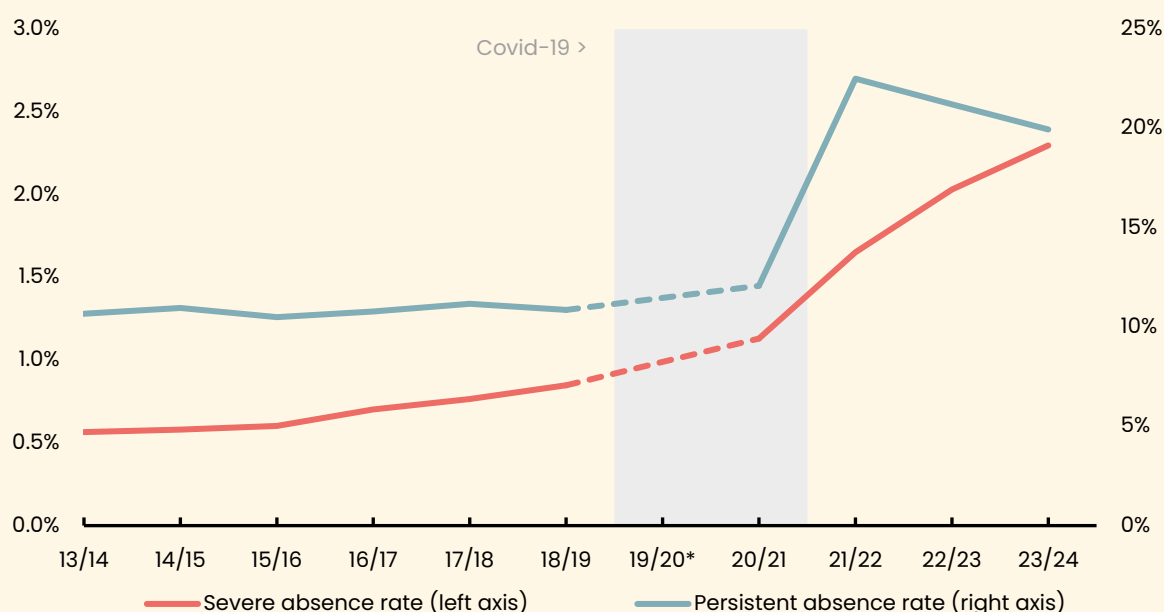
Prior to Covid-19, the proportion of children persistently absent was fairly stable year on year. However, after the pandemic, rates of absence in England reached record highs – jumping from 11% in 2018/19 to 23% in 2021/22. In 2023/24, the rate fell by 1.3%pts, the second annual fall in a row. But it still stands at 20% – up by 9.1%pts compared to the year before Covid-19. In alternative provision settings, such as pupil referral units, the rate now stands at 83% persistently absent, down by 0.4%pts from the previous year but up from 75% before Covid.

FIGURE 7.1. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN PERSISTENTLY ABSENT FROM PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS, BY ACADEMIC YEAR (ENGLAND)



**Data not reported due to Covid-19*

Whilst the proportion of children persistently absent from school has been falling recently, the proportion of children severely absent (missing 50% or more of possible sessions) has continued to increase. The overall rate is low – 2.3% of pupils in primary, secondary and special schools in England in 2023/24 – but it's up from 2% the year before and more than double the 0.8% rate prior to Covid-19. In alternative provision the severe absence rate is now 39.2%, compared to 29.9% pre-Covid (2018/19).

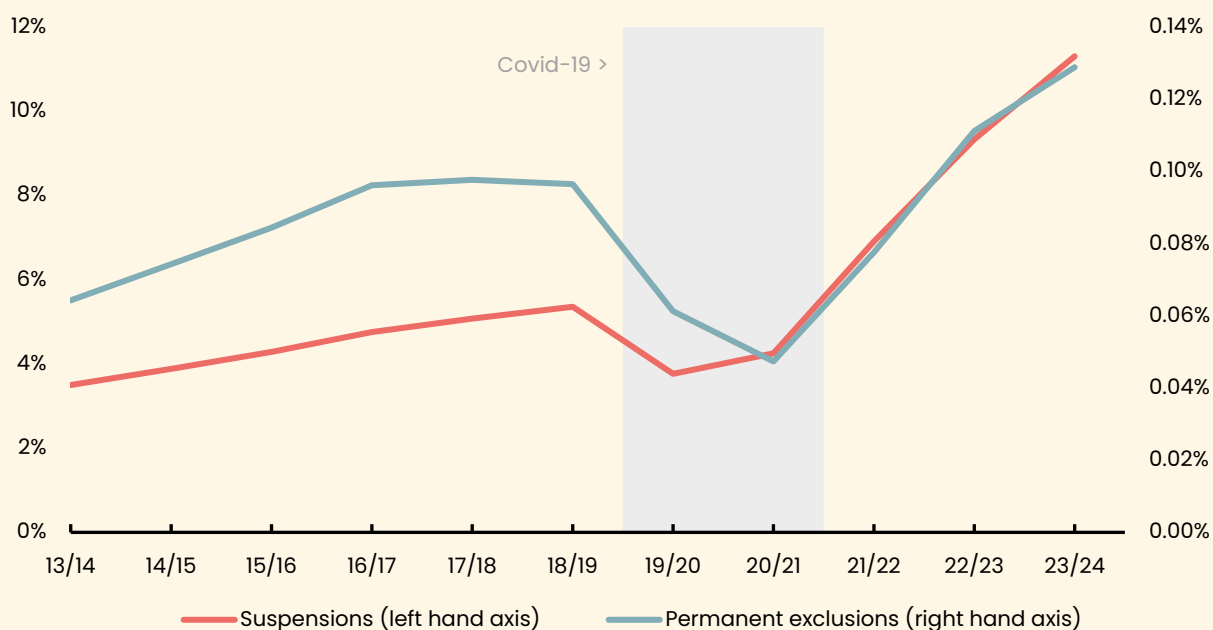
FIGURE 7.2. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN PERSISTENTLY AND SEVERELY ABSENT FROM PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS (ENGLAND)

*Data not reported due to Covid-19

Exclusions and suspensions from school are now at record highs.

Since 2012/13, the rate of both temporary suspensions and permanent exclusions has been growing. Following a dip during Covid, they rebounded immediately and now exceed their pre-Covid highs. In the 2023/24 academic year, 10,885^{xxviii} children were permanently excluded from state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in England, representing 0.13% of all pupils. This is a significant jump from 0.11% the previous year (2022/23) and up on the pre-Covid high of 0.10% (2018/19). In 2023/24, 954,952 children were temporarily suspended, representing a record 11.3% of pupils in England. This compares to 9.3% the year before (2022/23) and 5.4% before Covid (2018/19).

The current rates for both permanent exclusions (0.13%) and suspensions (11.3%) are now higher than the levels in 2006/07, where they stood at 0.12% and 5.7% respectively. 2006/07 represents the earliest year for which published figures are available at the previous highest rates prior to the Covid pandemic.

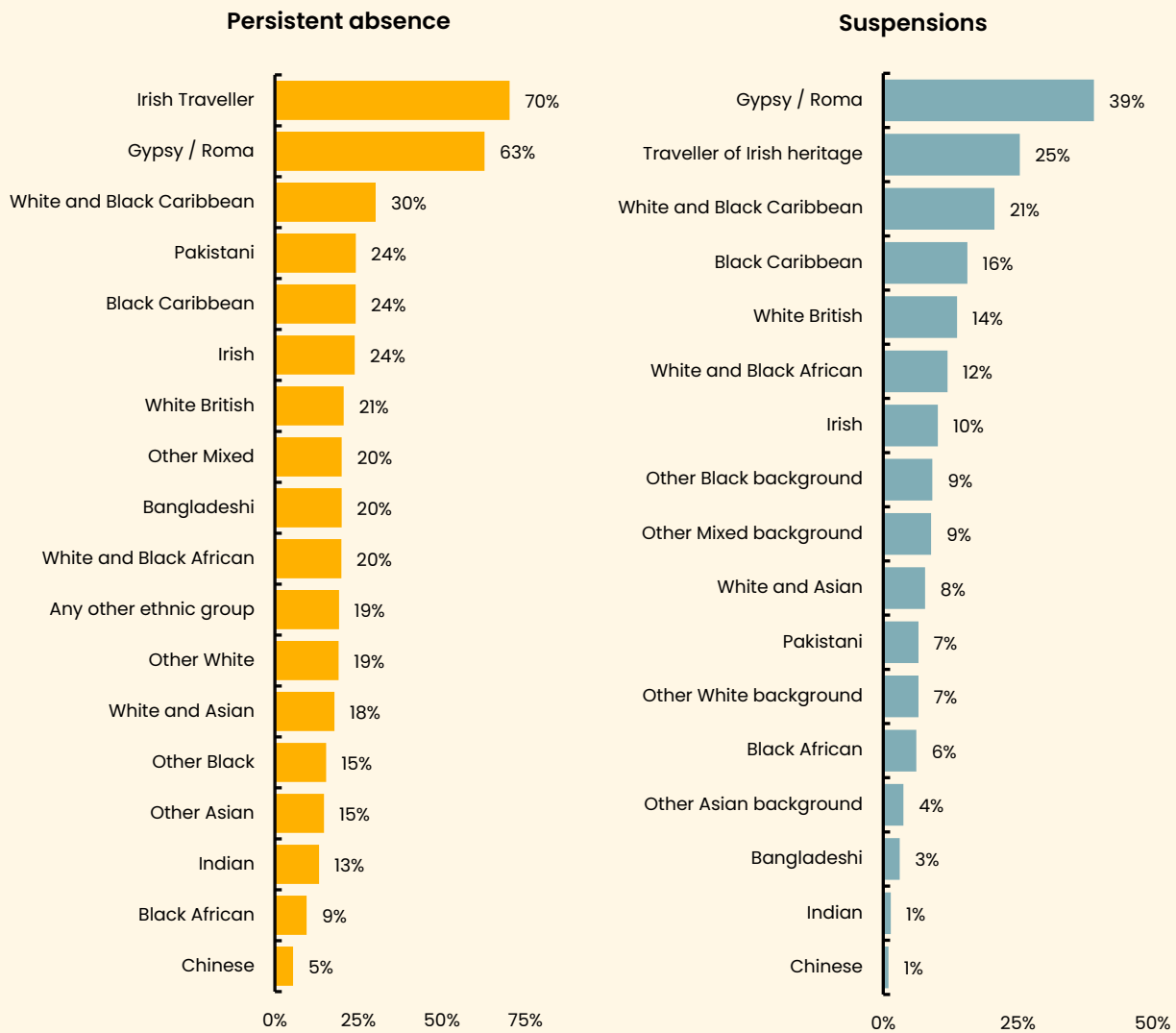
FIGURE 7.3. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN SUSPENDED AND PERMANENTLY EXCLUDED FROM PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS (ENGLAND)

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children experience the highest rates of absence and suspensions.

In 2023/24, White (21%) and Mixed (22%) race children were the most likely to be persistently absent from school. Black children had the lowest persistent absence rates (12%). However, as with other indicators, looking at differences in absence rates by race masks important differences. Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children were the most likely to be persistently absent from school – 63% and 70%, respectively, in 2023/24. Mixed White and Black Caribbean children were the next most likely, at 30%. And whilst Black children on the whole were the least likely to be persistently absent, this was mainly driven by lower absence rates for Black African children – 9% of whom were persistently absent in 2023/24 – whilst Black Caribbean children had fairly high absence rates (24% in 2023/24).

Suspensions follow a similar pattern. Whilst suspension rates rose for all children in 2023/24, the increase was much smaller for Black children. They're now much less likely to be suspended (8%) compared to White (13%) and Mixed (12%) race children. However, when we look at ethnic groups, we see that Black Caribbean children are among the most likely to be suspended (16%). As with absence, Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children are the most likely to be suspended, followed by Mixed White and Black Caribbean children.

FIGURE 7.4. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN PERSISTENTLY ABSENT AND SUSPENDED FROM PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN 2023/24, BY ETHNIC GROUP (ENGLAND)



8. Health

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Earliest data (2016/17)
Health Referrals to mental health services	Worsening	1,139,355	+ 3%	+ 49%	+ 105%

COMMENTARY

In last year’s update, our health indicator had a **worsening** rating – the number of children referred to mental health services was up compared to the previous year (2021/22), the year before Covid (2019/20) and five years previously (2016/17). This latest data continues to show the picture to be **worsening** – the number of referrals in 2023/24 was up again compared to the previous year (2022/23), as well as the year before Covid (2019/20) and six years previously (2016/17).⁴

What is this sector, and how are we measuring it?

Poor mental health can be a risk factor for serious violence. Rates of weapon carrying are higher among children with mental health problems, including conduct problems and hyperactivity, as well as those who self-harm. We also know that receiving talking therapies^{xxix} can reduce violence and associated behaviours.

We’ve used the total number of children in contact with NHS-funded secondary mental health, learning disability and autism services^{xxx} as our core measure for mental health. This measure captures children who have been referred to these services by their GPs or other healthcare professionals and includes both those who have received services and those who are still waiting to be seen. By using this measure, we aim to capture the children most likely to need professional help. But it’s important to remember that it depends on whether a child or their family seeks treatment and whether they receive a referral. This can be affected by changes in awareness and diagnosis.

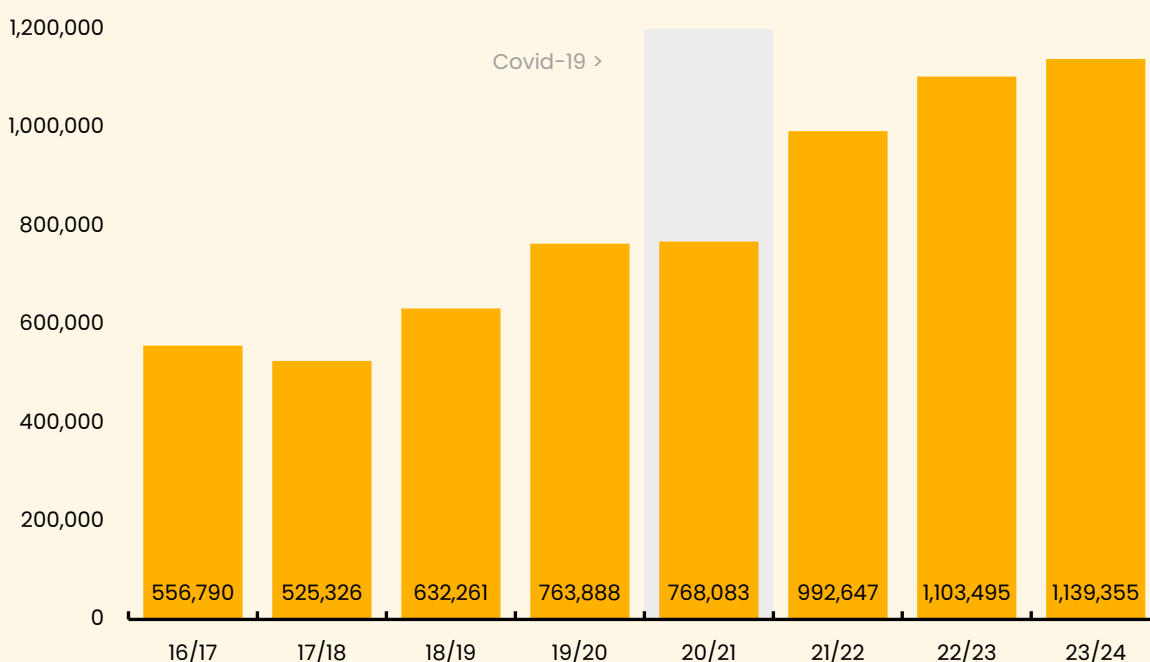
⁴ Unlike for other measures, there is only six years-worth of historic data to compare the long-run trend, rather than ten.

FINDINGS

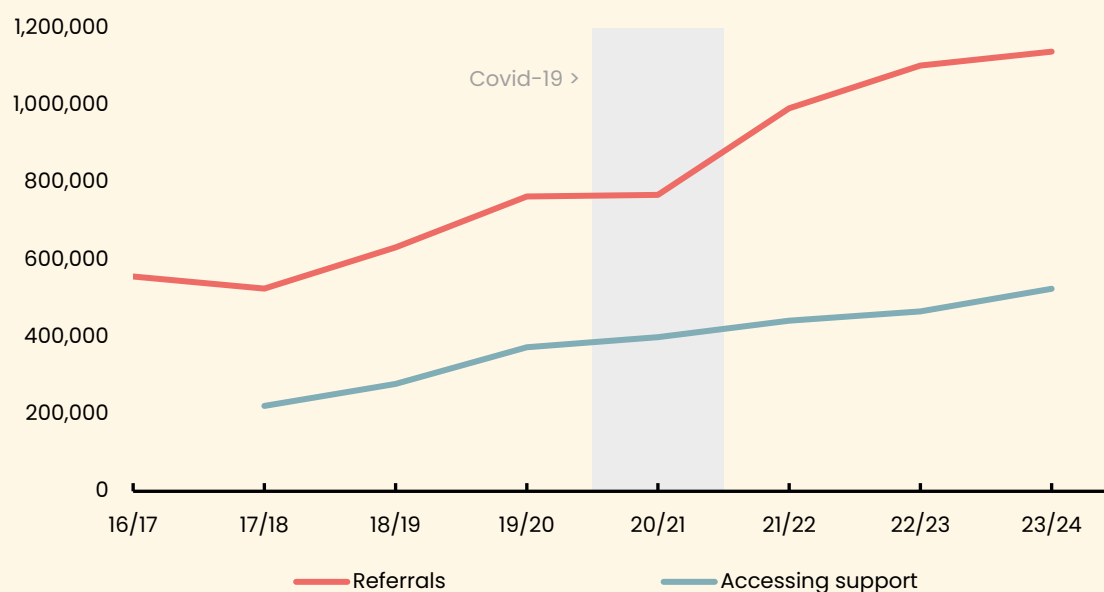
Pressures on children's mental health services continue to increase.

Following five consecutive years of increasing referrals to NHS-funded mental health services, the latest data shows that the number of children referred increased again. In 2023/24, 1,139,355 children were referred – a 3% increase from the year before and equivalent to 9% of all children in England. The number of referrals is now more than double what it was in 2016/17, the earliest year for which we have consistent data. In Wales, the number of children referred to mental health services also rose in 2023/24 – up by 19% from 2022/23 to 13,387 referrals.

FIGURE 8.1. CHILDREN REFERRED TO NHS-FUNDED MENTAL HEALTH, LEARNING DISABILITY AND AUTISM SERVICES (ENGLAND)



The system appears to be having difficulty meeting the needs of this growing number of children. There is a significant gap between the number of children being referred to NHS mental health services and those accessing support, and this has been growing over time. In 2023/24, the number of children in England accessing services post-referral increased by 13% to over half a million. This shrunk the gap between children being referred and those accessing support. However, the number of children who accessed support in 2023/24 remained less than half (46%) of the number referred.

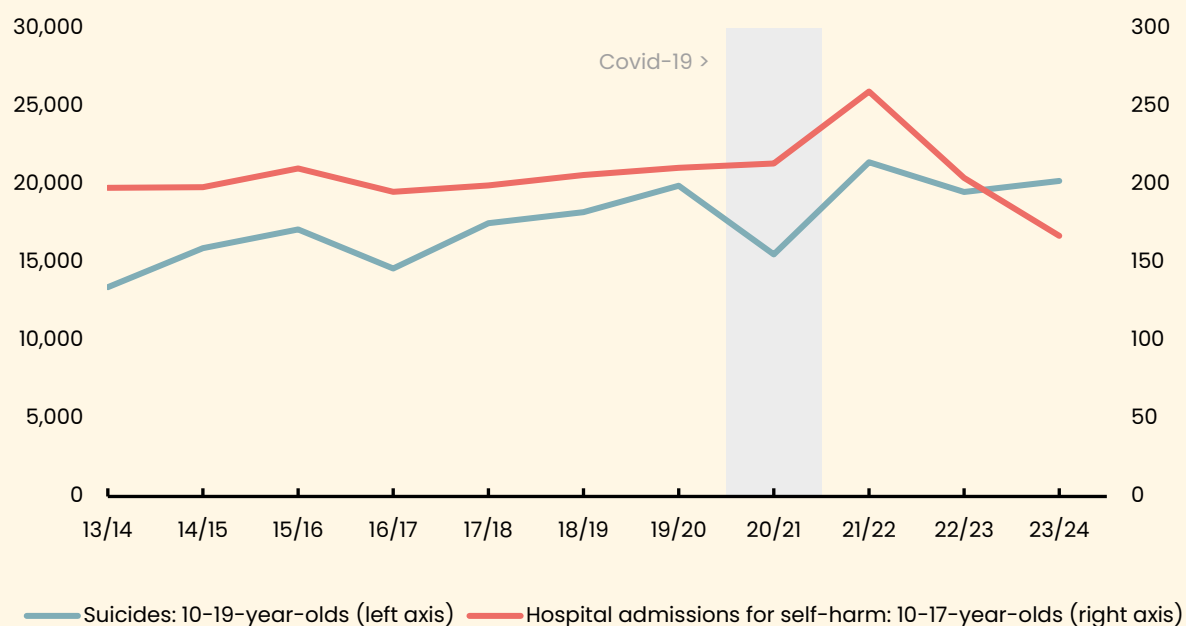
FIGURE 8.2. NUMBER OF CHILDREN REFERRED TO AND ACCESSING SUPPORT FROM NHS-FUNDED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES (ENGLAND)

The large gap between referrals and support could be related to several factors. For example, children may not receive support after a referral because they're judged not to need it. However, other data indicates that the increase in referrals likely does reflect a real need for mental health support. The most recent data available from the [NHS Mental Health of Children and Young People survey](#) estimated that the proportion of children with a probable disorder has been increasing since 2016/17 and was up to 20% of all children in England by 2022/23.^{xxx} A more [recent analysis](#) conducted by the Children's Commissioner^{xxxii} showed that the number of children referred to services because they're 'in crisis' (i.e. in acute distress, often self-harming or suicidal) has risen.^{xxxiii} In 2023/24, 59,700 children were referred for being in crisis, up by 7.7% from 2022/23.

Fewer children were hospitalised for self-harm.

Self-injury and suicide – some of the most extreme indicators of poor mental health – have also shown broadly upward trends over the last decade. In particular, the year following the pandemic saw more young people harming themselves. But the past two years have seen falls in the numbers of the most extreme cases. In 2023/24, there were 16,688 admissions of 10–17-year-olds to hospital for intentional self-harm.^{xxxiv} This is 18% down from the previous year and 16% below where it was ten years ago. Whilst this is a positive trend, it's important to remember that the majority of self-harm incidents don't require a hospital visit, which means a significant number go unrecorded.

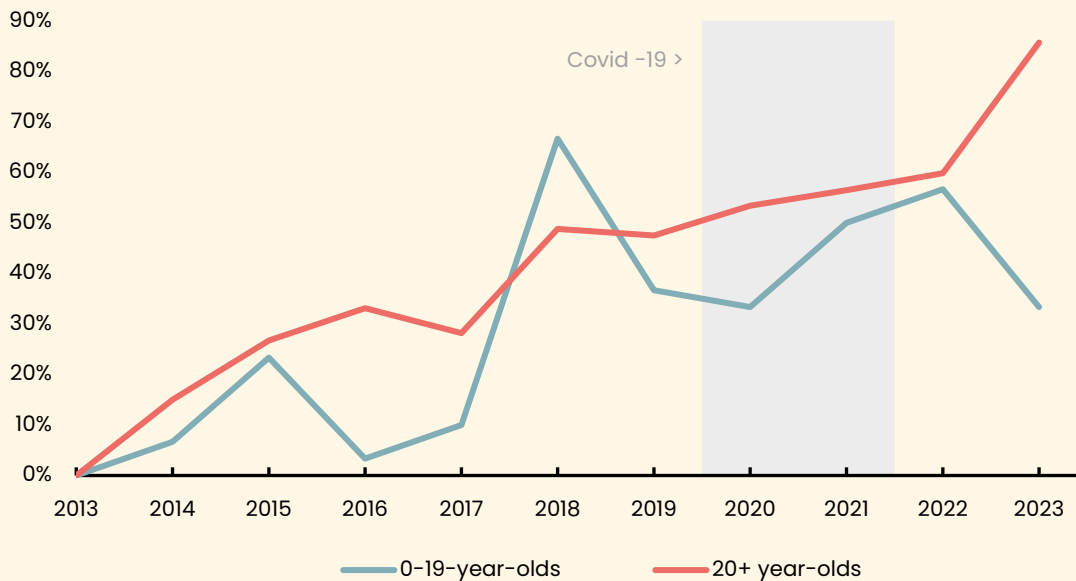
In contrast, the number of suicides remains 51% up from where it was ten years ago.^{xxxv} In 2023/24, 202 young people aged 10–19 tragically lost their lives to suicide – a similar number to the previous year and the year before Covid-19.

FIGURE 8.3. DEATHS BY SUICIDE AND HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS FOR SELF-HARM (ENGLAND)

Fewer children are trying illegal drugs, but related harms remain high.

Fewer school pupils are trying illegal drugs. A [national survey](#) of secondary school pupils' drug use in England found that in 2013, 16% said they'd ever tried any drug.^{xxxvi} In the latest survey (2023), this had fallen to 12%. The proportion of pupils who'd ever had an alcoholic drink was also the lowest it's been – 37% in 2023 – although this hasn't changed much from 2013 (when it was 39%).

However, related harms are higher than they were a decade ago. The total number of [deaths related to drug misuse](#) has grown considerably over the past 30 years.^{xxxvii} Following a peak in the late 90s, the number of young people dying from drug misuse had broadly been falling until a low in 2012, after which it rose again. In 2023 (the latest year for which we have data), 40 young people under the age of 20 died due to drug misuse, down from 47 the year before (2022). However, the number remains higher than it was ten years ago (30 in 2013).

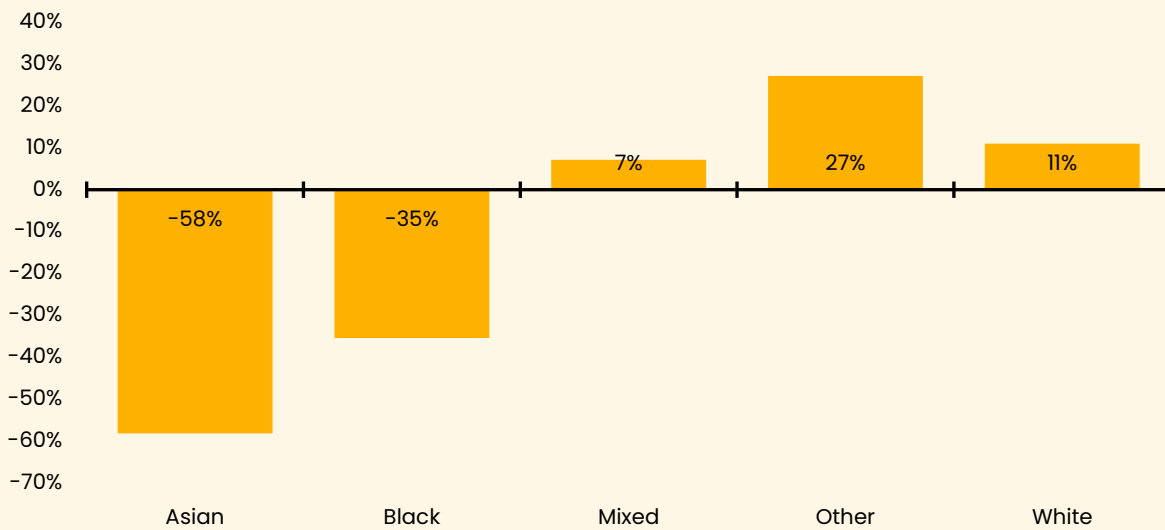
FIGURE 8.4. DEATHS RELATED TO DRUG MISUSE, PERCENTAGE CHANGE SINCE 2013 (ENGLAND AND WALES)

Children from Black and Asian backgrounds continue to be less likely to receive support.

In 2023/24, White children made up 80% of children referred and 81% of children accessing mental health services, making them overrepresented compared to their share of the national population (73%). In contrast, Black and Asian children are underrepresented in referrals and access, making up 4% and 5%, respectively, of those accessing services compared to 6% and 12%, respectively, of the national population. This means that Black children are 35% less likely to access mental health services compared to their share of the national population, and Asian children are 58% less likely compared to their population share. These differences have remained fairly stable since 2017/18.

Concerningly, when Black and Asian children are referred to mental health services, they're more likely to be in crisis. Of those who were referred in 2023/24, being in crisis was the most common reason for referral for children from Black (29%) and Other (24%) backgrounds and was within the top three most common reasons for referral for Asian (19%) and Mixed race (15%) children. This was not the case for White children.

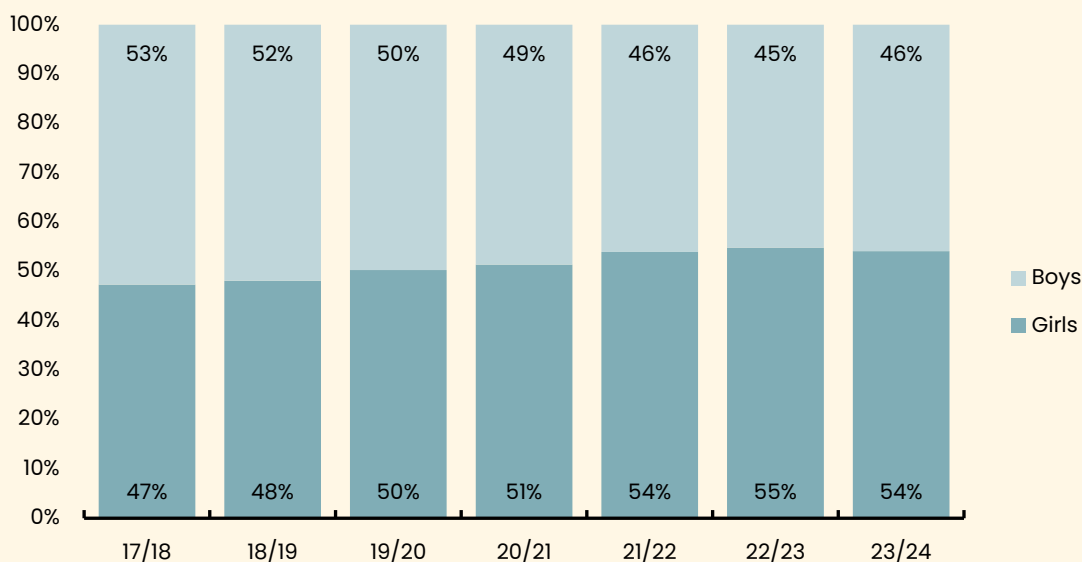
FIGURE 8.5. UNDER- AND OVERREPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN 2023/24 BY RACE (ENGLAND)



Referral rates are similar for boys and girls.

In 2023/24, roughly equal numbers of boys and girls received referrals to mental health services in England. Girls made up 49.9% of referrals, boys 49.5% and non-binary or other gender children 0.6%. But girls are slightly more likely to access services. In 2023/24, they made up 54% of children accessing support. This gender difference has not changed much since 2021/22.

FIGURE 8.6. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN 2023/24 BY GENDER (ENGLAND)



9. Children's services

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Children's services Children looked after	Mixed	90,830	- 0.1%	+ 4.2%	+ 21.9%

COMMENTARY

In last year's update, our children's services indicator had a **worsening** rating – the number of children looked after was up compared to the previous year (2021/22), the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2012/13). This latest data shows the picture is now **mixed** – the number of children looked after in 2023/24 was down slightly compared to the previous year (2022/23) but remained up compared to the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2013/14).

What is this sector, and how are we measuring it?

Local authority children's services exist to support families dealing with challenging situations and provide children with a safe and protective home, particularly in cases where a child may be at risk of neglect, abuse or other forms of harm. Children known to local authority children's services are more likely to be exposed to the risk factors associated with later offending.^{xxxviii} One group of children particularly at risk of harm is those looked after by the local authority, who also show significantly higher rates of serious violent offending compared to the general child population.^{xxxix}

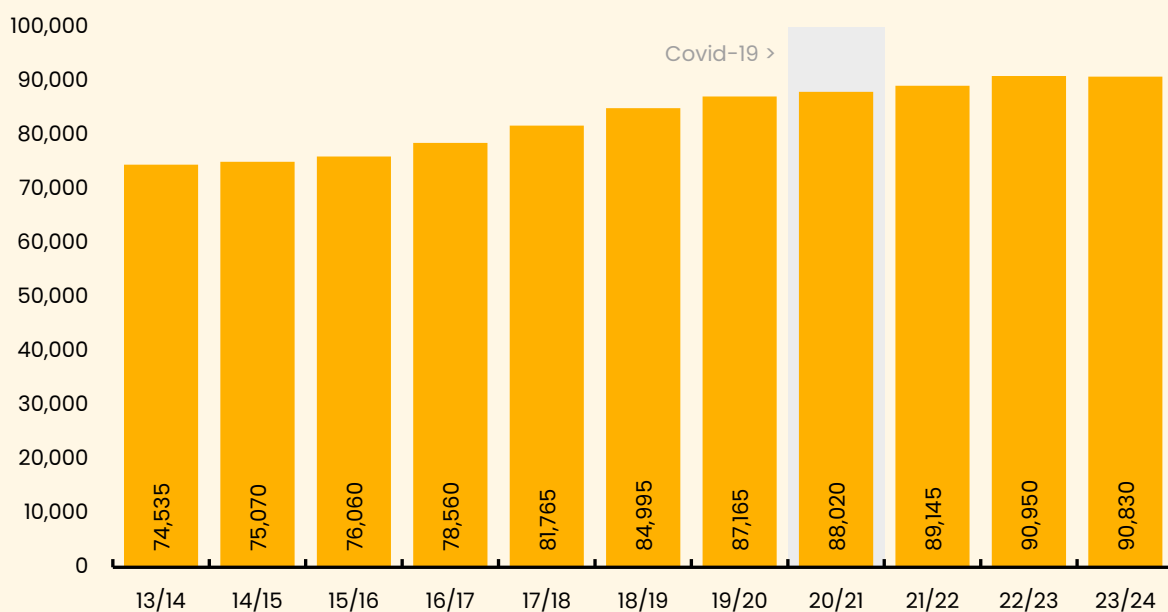
For this reason, we are using the number of children looked after by the local authority in England^{xl} and Wales^{xli} as of 31 March of each year as our core indicator for this sector. A child is considered looked after if they are provided with accommodation for longer than 24 hours or a court has ordered them to be placed in the care of the local authority or for adoption. An analysis by the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice^{xlii} shows that 28% of looked after children go on to offend, and 10% commit a serious violent offence. These rates compare to 5% of all children committing any offence and 1% committing a serious violent offence.

FINDINGS

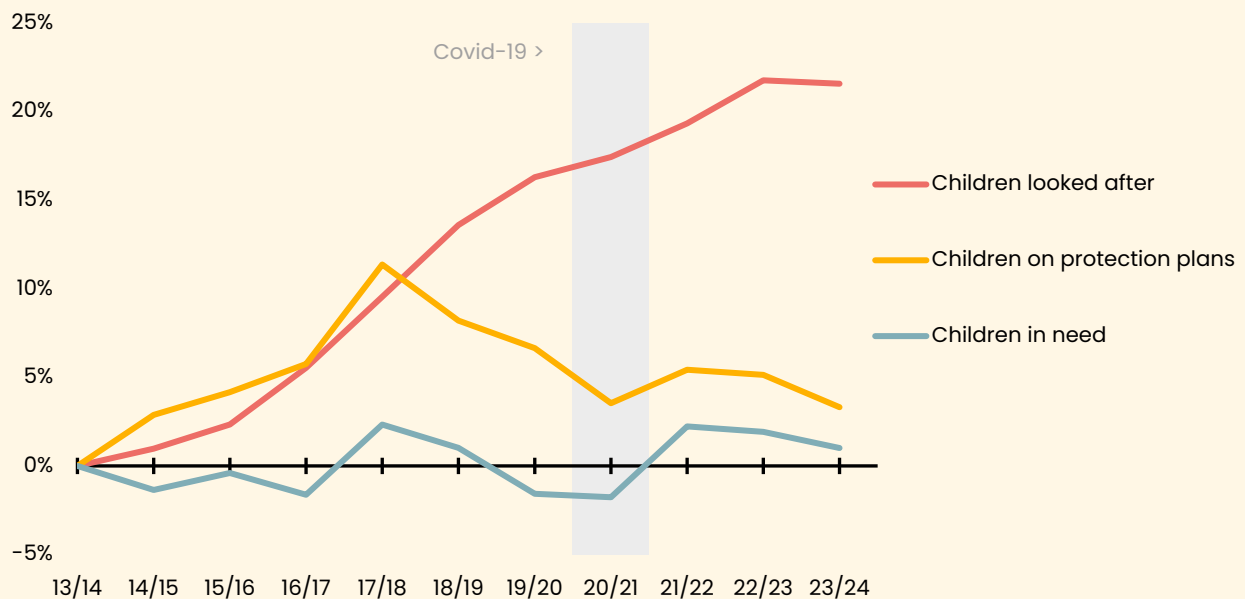
The number of children looked after showed no real change in the latest year.

As of 31 March 2024, 90,830 children were being looked after by the local authority in England and Wales. This number is very slightly (0.1%) below where it was at the same time the previous year – the first time since 2008 that the number has fallen. But the difference represents fewer than 150 children. The most common reason a child becomes looked after is due to abuse or neglect (66%, based on figures for England). The majority of children looked after are in foster placements (67%), 10% are in children's homes and secure children's homes, 7% are in supported accommodation, 6% are with parents or another person with parental responsibility, 2% have been placed for adoption and the remainder are in other settings.

FIGURE 9.1. NUMBER OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AS OF 31 MARCH (ENGLAND AND WALES)

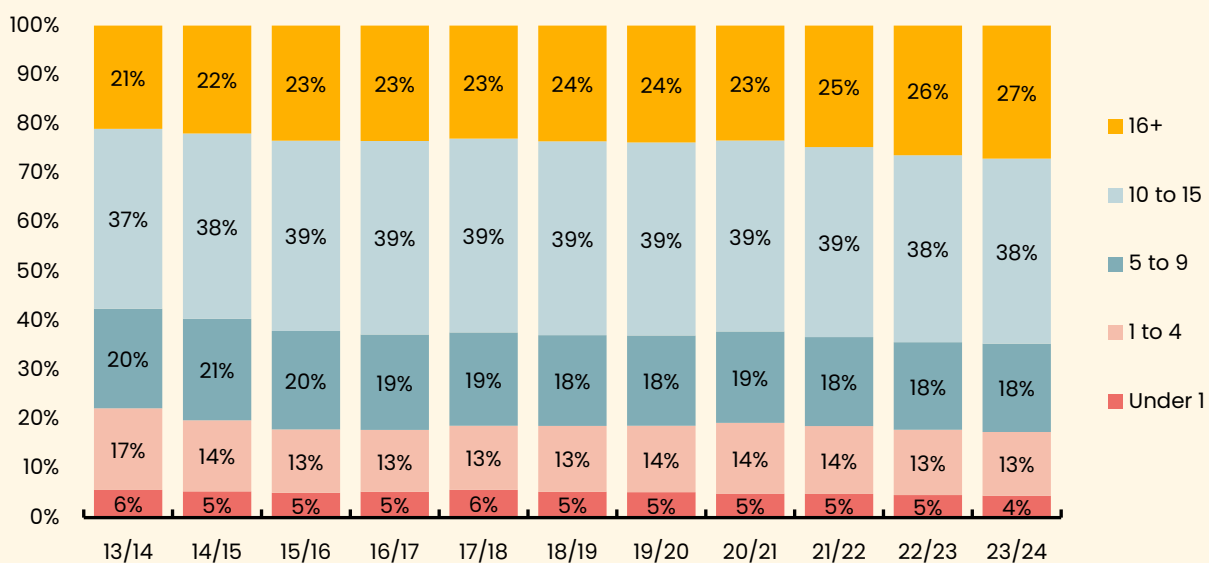


The other main groups of children known to local authority children's services (children in need, children on protection plans) both shrank in the latest year. The number of children in need – an initial stage when children are referred to children's social care services – has fluctuated over the past ten years. In 2023/24, it fell by 0.9% year on year to 399,460 children in England – bringing it to just 1% above 2013/14 levels. The number of children on child protection plans – a higher level of intervention set up when a child is judged to be at risk of harm – was rising until a spike in 2017/18, after which it has mostly been falling. In 2023/24, it fell again, by 1.7%, to 49,900 children, bringing it to just 3% above 2013/14 levels. These have both shown a markedly different historical trend compared to children who have been taken into care. By comparison, children looked after in England have increased in every year of the past decade, except for the most recent year.

FIGURE 9.2. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN THE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN NEED, ON CHILD PROTECTION PLANS AND LOOKED AFTER AS OF 31 MARCH (ENGLAND)

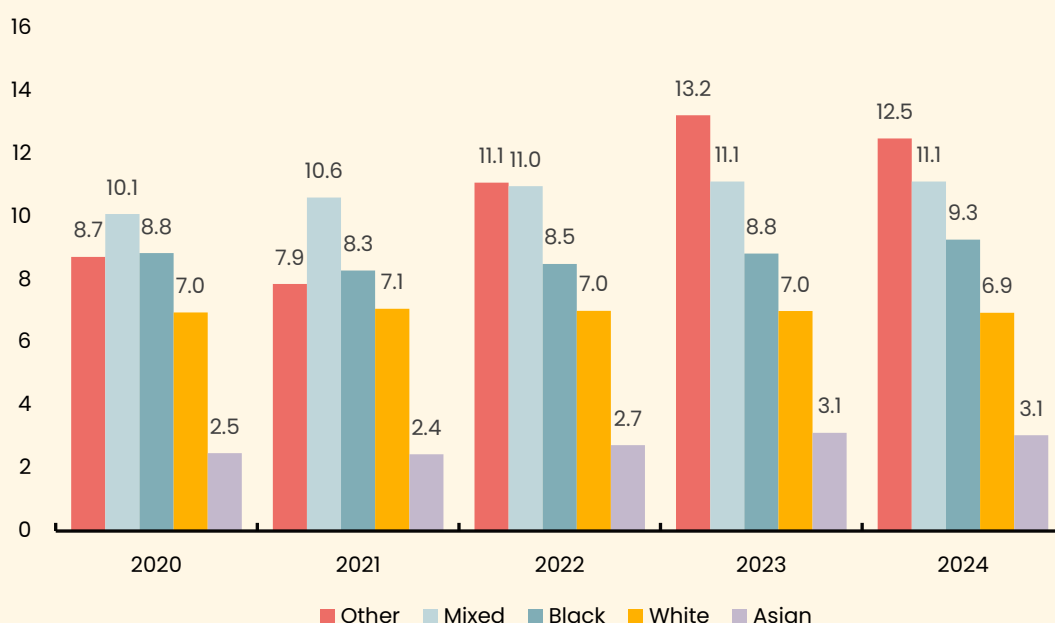
Children are increasingly being looked after at older ages.

Over the past ten years, the number of children aged ten and over being looked after by the local authority has steadily increased. This pattern is particularly pronounced for those aged 16 and above. At the end of 2023/24, 22,620 children aged 16 and over were being looked after, 57% up from ten years ago (2013/14). The number of 10–15-year-olds looked after was up 25% from 2013/14, and the number of 5–9-year-olds looked after was up by 8%. In contrast, the number of children looked after under the age of five was down 5%. The proportion of children looked after who are aged 16 and above has increased accordingly. They now account for 27% of all children looked after, according to the latest measurement from 31 March 2024.

FIGURE 9.3 CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AS OF 31 MARCH, BY AGE (ENGLAND)

The difference by age is even more pronounced among children in need – an earlier stage of identifying children who could benefit from local authority support. In the ten years from 2013/14 to 2023/24, the number of children in need under the age of five has fallen by 30%, whilst the number of children in need aged 16 and above has risen by 51%. These age differences we see could reflect children's needs being identified later in life as a result of pressures on the sector. Fewer children being identified as in need at younger ages and more being identified later on could also have contributed to the total increase in the numbers of children looked after due to families receiving less early support to prevent more extreme interventions, such as taking a child into care.

FIGURE 9.4 CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AS OF 31 MARCH RATE PER 1,000, BY RACE (ENGLAND)



Black and Mixed race children are overrepresented among children looked after. Looking at the rate per 1,000 in the population,^{xliii} as of 31 March 2024, 11.1 children from Mixed race backgrounds were looked after per 1,000. For Black children, the rate was 9.3 per 1,000. This compares to 6.9 per 1,000 White children and 3.1 per 1,000 Asian children. Over the past five years, the rate has increased by 5% for all children looked after. For White children, the rate has fallen marginally (down from 7 per 1,000 children in 2020 to 6.9 in 2024). However, for children from Black, Asian, Mixed and Other backgrounds the rate has increased, up by 23% for Asian children (2.5 per 1,000 looked after in 2020, compared to 3.1 per 1,000 in 2024), 5% for Black children (8.8 per 1,000 in 2020 compared to 9.3 in 2024) and 10% for Mixed race children (10.1 per 1,000 in 2020 compared to 11.1 in 2024).

10. Youth sector

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Youth sector Local authority expenditure for youth services	Mixed	£492m	- 0.3%	+ 8.1%	- 47.7%

COMMENTARY

In last year's update, our youth sector indicator had a **mixed** rating – total local authority real-terms expenditure on youth services was more than half what it was ten years previously (2012/13) but up compared to the year before Covid (2019/20) and the previous year (2021/22). This latest update shows the picture continues to be **mixed** – expenditure in 2023/24 is still higher than it was in the year before Covid (2019/20) but fell slightly from the year before (2022/23) and remains considerably below levels ten years previously (2013/14).

What is this sector, and how are we measuring it?

Youth services can provide young people with important spaces and sources of support outside of the home. Participation in positive activities, such as [sports](#),^{xliiv} and access to trusted adults or [mentors](#)^{xliv} may also be effective in reducing children's involvement in crime and violence. Some evidence suggests that [cuts to youth clubs](#)^{xlvi} during the 2010s may have led to an increase in crime.

We've used combined spending on young people's services in [England](#)^{xlvii} and [Wales](#)^{xlviii} as our core measure to give us a broad picture of what's happening in the youth sector. This includes universal provision (e.g. leisure and cultural and sports-based activities, often based in youth centres) and targeted provision (e.g. substance misuse or teenage pregnancy services). We've adjusted these numbers to account for inflation using [GDP deflators](#).^{xlix}

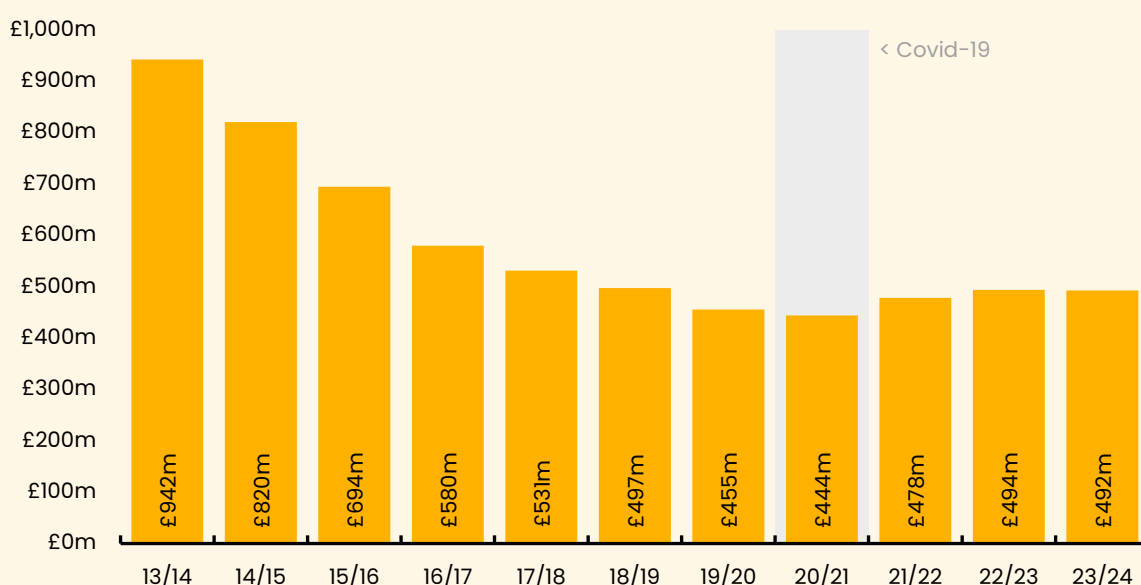
It should be noted that there are other routes to providing services for young people that are not accounted for here. For example, in 2019/20, £35 million was allotted to set up Violence Reduction Units, with the aim of tackling serious violence at a local level. At least 20% of this funding was to be used for interventions specifically with [young people](#).ⁱ

FINDINGS

Spending on services for young people remains low.

For more than ten years, spending on services for young people fell continually in real terms, up until 2021/22. Spending increased slightly in 2021/22 and 2022/23, but in the latest year (2023/24), real-terms spending fell again. Total spending on youth services was £492 million in 2023/24. This was up by 6% on the previous year in cash terms (before adjusting for inflation), but, once inflation has been taken into account, real spending is down by 0.3% compared to the previous year (2022/23). It remains around half the level it was ten years ago (2013/14).

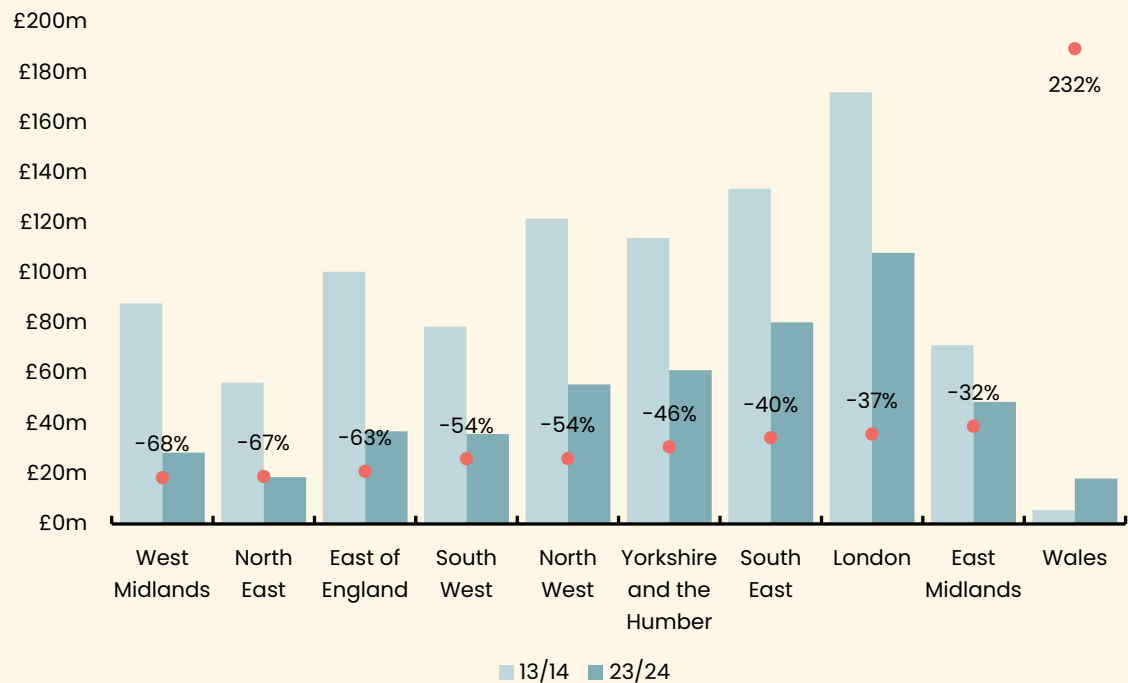
FIGURE 10.1. TOTAL LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE ON SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, REAL 2023/24 PRICES (ENGLAND AND WALES)



Nearly all areas have seen cuts to spending on services for young people over the past decade. In England, this has varied between -32% in the East Midlands and -68% in the West Midlands. However, in Wales, expenditure on services for young people has increased – up by nearly two and a half times (232%) in real terms between 2013/14 and 2023/24. Despite the large increases in total real-terms spending on young people's services in Wales, it still ranks below most other regions in terms of spending per head. London ranked the highest in 2023/24, at £57 per 0–17-year-old, followed by Yorkshire and the Humber (£53) and the East Midlands (£48). Wales is ranked eighth, spending £29 per 0–17-year-old on young people's services. The West Midlands is ranked the lowest, at £21 per 0–17-year-old.⁵

⁵ Spending per head figures were derived using latest Office for National Statistics mid-year 2023 population estimates ([here](#)).

FIGURE 10.2. TOTAL LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE ON SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, REAL 2023/24 PRICES BY REGION (ENGLAND AND WALES)



11. Poverty

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Ten years ago (2013/14)
Poverty Proportion of children in absolute poverty	Mixed	26.4%	+1.4%pt	+1.6%pt	-1.9%pt

COMMENTARY

In last year’s update, our poverty indicator had a **mixed** rating – the proportion of children in absolute poverty was up on the previous year (2021/22) and the year before Covid (2019/20) but 3.8%pts below where it was 10 years before (2012/13). This latest data shows the picture is still **mixed** – the proportion of children in poverty is up again compared to the previous year (2022/23) and the year before Covid (2019/20). However, it remains lower than 10 years previously (2013/14).

How are we measuring poverty?

Poverty is widely perceived as a key cause of violence affecting children. However, a recent YEF-commissioned evidence review into poverty and children’s involvement in crime and violence found only a small effect of poverty on crime and violence when various individual and neighbourhood-level risk factors were controlled for.⁶ Despite this, we know that violence is highly concentrated in the areas of highest poverty.ⁱⁱ For this reason, it’s important to understand the trends in poverty affecting children.

There is no single, agreed measure of poverty. As our core measure, we’ve used the proportion of children in households in absolute povertyⁱⁱⁱ after housing costs. Absolute poverty is defined as the share of individuals whose household income (adjusted for inflation) is below 60% of the median income in 2010/11. Other measures include relative poverty (defined as incomes below 60% of the median income that year), but this is affected by changes in the income distribution, irrespective of what happens to the earnings of the poorest households.

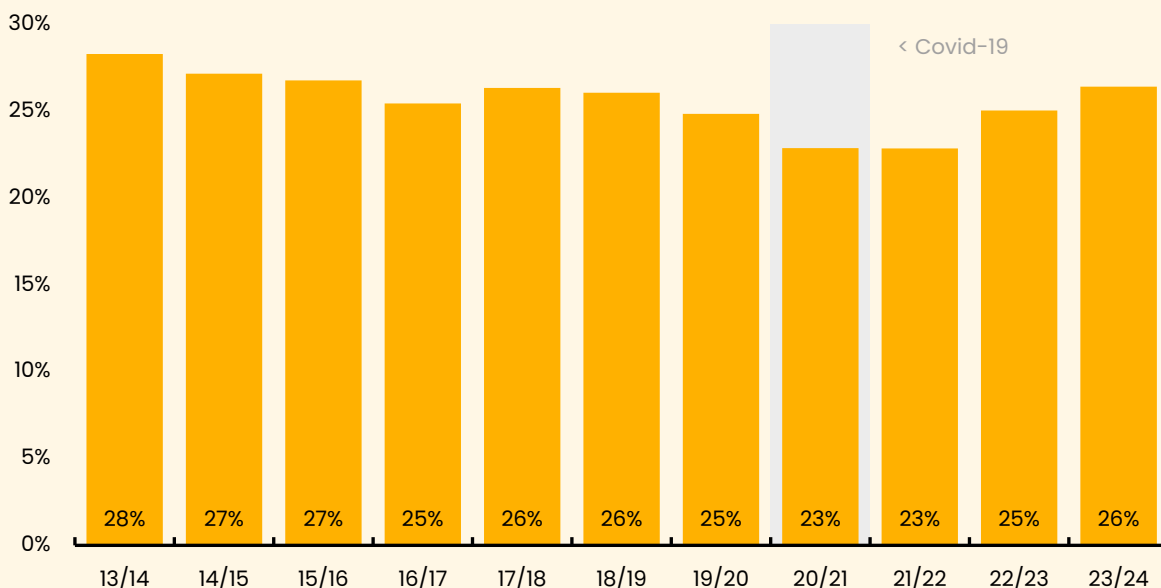
⁶ Forthcoming YEF publication, expected in summer 2025.

FINDINGS

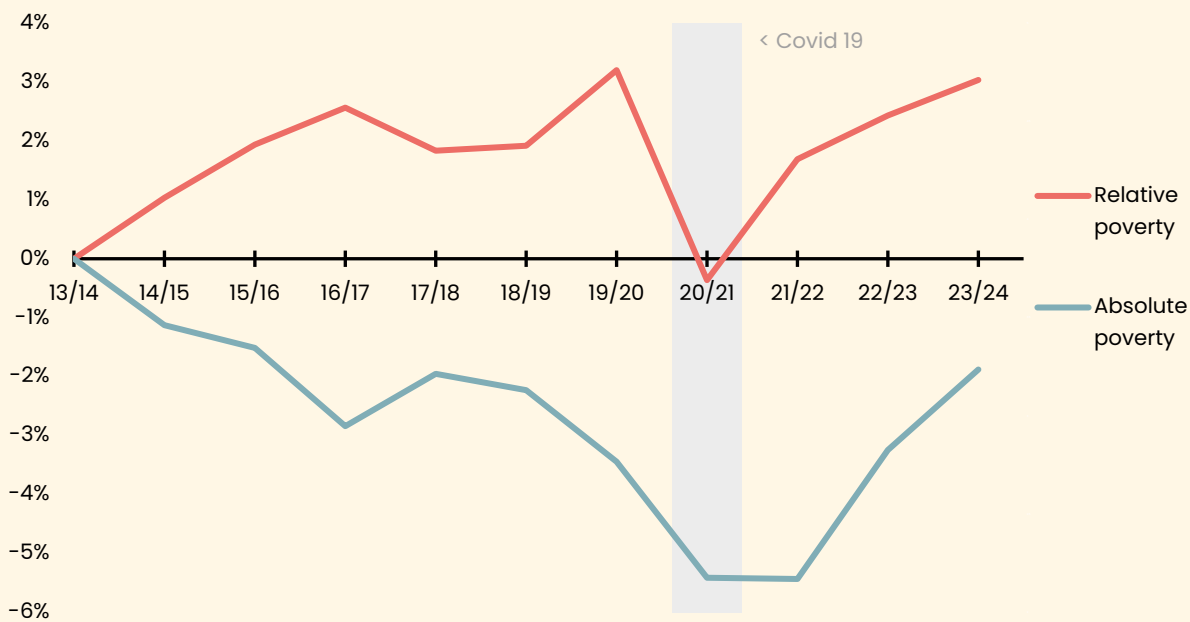
The proportion of children living in poverty rose again in the latest year.

Over the past decade, the proportion of children in the UK who were living in absolute poverty had been slowly improving. Temporary government schemes to support the poorest households, such as the uplift to universal credit, meant that absolute poverty continued to fall, even during the pandemic. However, the past two years have shown meaningful increases. In the latest year (2023/24), an estimated 3.85 million children were living in poverty in the United Kingdom, equivalent to 26% of all children. This is up 1.4%pts from the previous year (2022/23). It remains 1.9%pts below where it was ten years ago (2013/14), but the progress made over the past ten years appears to be reversing.

FIGURE 11.1. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN IN ABSOLUTE POVERTY AFTER HOUSING COSTS (UNITED KINGDOM)

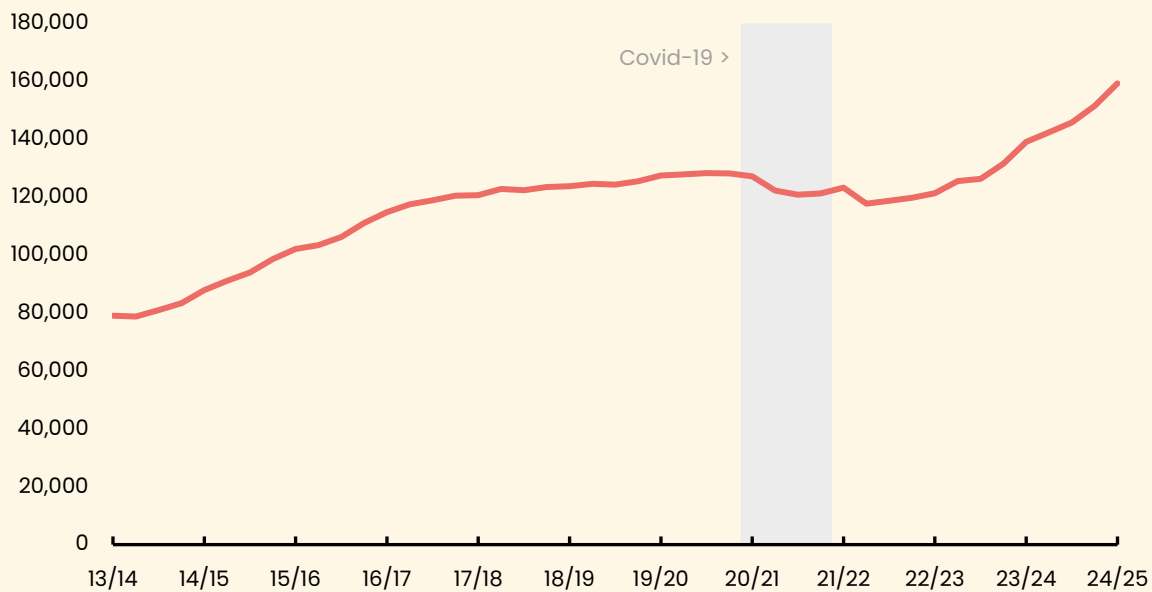


Relative poverty – which measures income inequality by comparing incomes between the poorest people and middle-income earners – has historically shown a somewhat different trend. Between 2013/14 and 2023/24, the proportion of children living in households in relative poverty in the United Kingdom increased by 3%pts, from 27.5% to 30.5%. The differences imply that whilst the poorest households' earnings have increased in real terms over the past decade, they've grown at a lower rate compared to middle-income earners. Both absolute and relative poverty have seen significant increases since Covid-19, increasing by 3.5%pts and 3.4%pts, respectively, since 2020/21.

FIGURE 11.2. PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN THE PROPORTION OF CHILDREN LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS IN ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE POVERTY COMPARED TO 2013/14 (UNITED KINGDOM)

The number of children in unstable housing continues to increase.

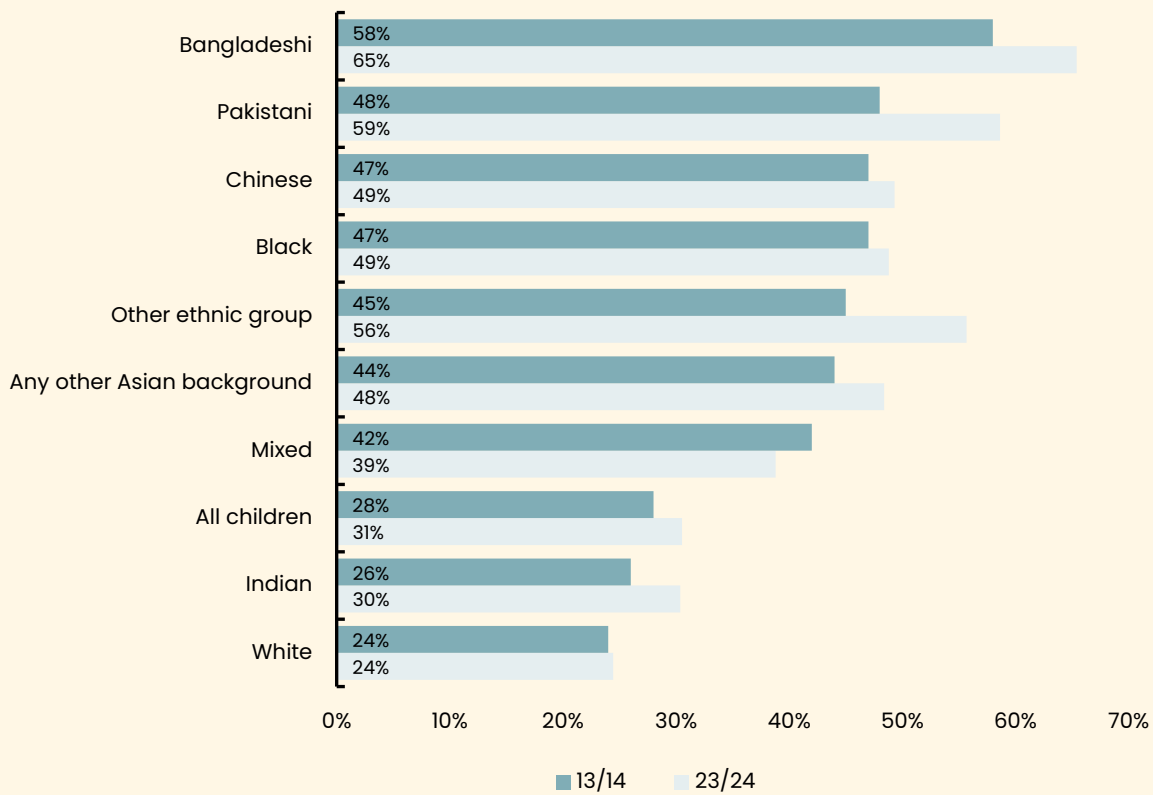
Increasing costs continue to put pressure on all households, particularly the poorest. This is the second year in a row that the number of children living in temporary accommodation has reached an all-time high. The number fell throughout the 2000s but then increased significantly between 2012 and 2019. It fell temporarily during the pandemic – likely due to pandemic-related measures put in place to protect renters and mortgage holders – but has since continued to rise. At the end of May 2024, 159,310 children were living in temporary accommodation. This is up 15% from May 2023 and 25% from May 2019 (the pre-Covid-19 high). It's more than double the number in May 2013.

FIGURE 11.3. NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION (ENGLAND)

Increases in poverty have disproportionately affected children from minority ethnic groups.

An analysis of relative poverty rates shows that children from minority ethnic groups experienced relatively greater increases over the past decade, compared to White children. Headline rates of relative poverty have remained broadly flat for White children between 2013/14ⁱⁱⁱ and 2023/24, at 24%. However, for children from Black backgrounds, rates increased by 2%pts over the decade (from 47% to 49%). For children from certain Asian backgrounds, some increases were a lot greater. For children from Bangladeshi backgrounds, the proportion in absolute poverty increased by 7%pts (from 58% to 65%). For children from Pakistani backgrounds, the increase over the past decade was 11%pts (from 48% to 59%).

FIGURE 11.4. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS IN RELATIVE POVERTY AFTER HOUSING COSTS, BY ETHNIC GROUP* (UNITED KINGDOM)



**Only data on race were published in the Households Below Average Income data, except for Asian and Asian British ethnic groups.*

Part 5

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