



# CordisPulse

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## February 2026

Welcome to February's edition of the CordisPulse – a monthly digest of key research and policy developments across the sectors in which Cordis Bright provides research and consultancy services, i.e. adult social care and health, children and young people's services, and criminal justice.

This month, we are pleased to share our independent evaluation of the [Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool \(PDAT\)](#), commissioned by the Youth Justice Board. The PDAT aims to support more consistent, proportionate and Child First-aligned assessment practice in prevention and diversion. Our evaluation highlights promising shifts towards strengths-based conversations, alongside practical challenges around systems integration and variation in local implementation. Alongside the report, we worked with children to co-design a [short explainer video](#) to support meaningful participation in assessment conversations.

We're also excited to launch our new mini-series, [Making mentoring work](#), drawing on our experience of evaluating mentoring programmes. The series explores what works in mentoring, how to evaluate programmes and what is needed to build a stronger evidence base as mentoring programmes continue to grow across the UK.

In this edition we also summarise some recent publications across our sectors from the Governments proposed policing reforms which emphasises neighbourhood policing and stronger national coordination, to a series of evidence reviews of disabled people's lived experience in the UK and national evaluations from the Department of Education.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this month's Pulse, please do contact us on 020 7330 9170 or email [stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk).

Best wishes,

Dr Stephen Boxford Director & Head of Research

If you would prefer not to receive future editions of the CordisPulse, please click 'unsubscribe' at the very end of this email. If you would like to discuss anything that arises from the Pulse (or if there are others who you think would like to receive copies) then please contact Dr Stephen Boxford on [stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk) or 020 7330 9170.

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Cordis Bright Ltd, 23/24 Smithfield Street, London, EC1A 9LF.

Telephone: 020 7330 9170

Email: [info@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:info@cordisbright.co.uk)  [@CordisBright](https://twitter.com/CordisBright)

Website: [www.cordisbright.co.uk](http://www.cordisbright.co.uk)  [Cordis Bright](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cordis-bright)



## Cordis Bright News

### Evaluating the Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool (PDAT): learning from implementation

We have recently published an independent evaluation of the **Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool (PDAT)**, commissioned by the **Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB)**.

Introduced nationally in April 2024, the PDAT was designed to support more consistent and proportionate assessment practice for children involved in prevention and diversion, aligned with the [Child First](#) framework. Our evaluation explored how the tool has been implemented across Youth Justice Services (YJSs), and what early learning can strengthen the PDAT and its supporting guidance over time.

The evaluation highlights both the promise of the PDAT and the practical challenges of embedding a new national assessment tool in diverse local contexts. Practitioners described the PDAT as supporting more strengths-based and child-led conversations, while also identifying areas where proportionality, perceived duplication and IT systems shape day-to-day experience.

Key learning from the evaluation includes:

- **Supporting positive shifts in practice**, including more strengths-based approaches and clearer focus on planning and exit decisions
- **Ongoing challenges**, particularly around proportionality for lower-need cases and accessibility through Case Management Systems
- **Variation in implementation**, influenced by leadership, training, and how the PDAT is embedded locally
- **Children's experiences**, with some children describing assessments as “a chat” and not always recognising when an assessment process was taking place

Alongside the evaluation report, we worked with children to co-design a short explainer video, created to help children understand what the PDAT is, why assessments happen, and how they can take part meaningfully in the conversation.

Find out more:

- The full evaluation report is available on GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluating-the-implementation-of-the-prevention-and-diversion-assessment-tool>
- The child-designed explainer video can be accessed via Close-Up's website: <https://www.closeupresearch.com/pdat/>

For more information please contact: Dr Angela Browne Collins, email: [angelacollins@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:angelacollins@cordisbright.co.uk)



## Making mentoring work: Building evidence for What Works

We're pleased to share a new **four part mini-series** which explores what we're learning from evaluating **mentoring programmes** for children and young people across the UK.

Mentoring is expanding rapidly and shows promising evidence in reducing violence and offending as well as improving wider outcomes. However, high-quality UK evidence on what works is still developing.

In Part 1, we explore why mentoring matters, what the current evidence tells us, and why building a stronger UK evidence base is essential. In Part 2, we draw on our evaluations of real-world programmes to examine what effective mentoring looks like in practice, highlighting the common features that underpin impact.

Next up, we'll be sharing how to evaluate mentoring and some common challenges.

Stay updated here: <https://www.cordisbright.co.uk/news/making-mentoring-work>

For more information, please contact Matt Irani, email: [mattirani@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:mattirani@cordisbright.co.uk)

## Adult Social Care and Health

### Reports

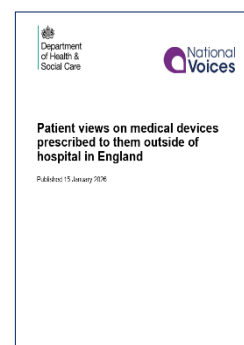
#### NHS England. Health Survey for England.

The Health Survey for England (HSE) is designed to estimate the proportion of people in England who have health conditions, and the prevalence of risk factors and behaviours associated with certain health conditions among the population and to monitor trends. A total of 9,220 adults (aged 16 and over) and 1,950 children (aged 0 to 15) were interviewed in the 2024 survey. Findings include:

- 46% of adults reported at least one longstanding health condition.
- 27% of adults were physically inactive, reinforcing ongoing prevention challenges.
- The prevalence of childhood obesity varied by area deprivation among those aged 11 to 15, from 8% in the least deprived areas to 30% in the most deprived areas.

#### Department for Health and Social Care. Patient views on medical devices prescribed to them outside of hospital in England.

The Department for Health and Social Care commissioned National Voices to research the experiences of people prescribed NHS medical devices outside hospital settings. Between November 2024 and March 2025, National Voices gathered 679 survey responses and conducted interviews or focus groups with 66 people with experience of medical devices, for example stoma bags, wound care products and Continuous Glucose Monitoring sensors.

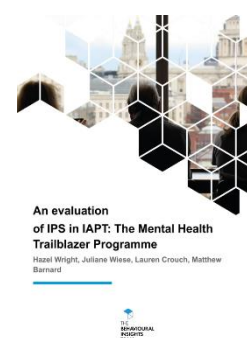


Key themes include:

- The importance of devices that support daily life, fit comfortably and offer choice.
- The need for medical devices to respond to the needs of the diverse groups of people who use them.
- Gaps in high-quality information and guidance for users.

#### Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. An evaluation of Individual Placement Support in Improving Access to Psychological Therapies: Mental Health Trailblazers programme.

This report presents an evaluation of the Mental Health Trailblazers programme, conducted by the Behavioural Insights Team. The programme tested locally led models integrating Individual Placement Support (IPS) with Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) to support unemployed adults with common mental health conditions in three areas: Blackpool, the North East and West London.



IPS is a vocational rehabilitation intervention for individuals who are unemployed, and who have been referred to mental health services with severe and enduring mental health conditions. Using a randomised controlled trial alongside a process evaluation, the study found no statistically significant overall impact on mental health recovery or benefit outcomes from adding IPS to IAPT, though variation between local models was observed. The report highlights implementation challenges, data limitations and the importance of delivery context for integrated work and health interventions.

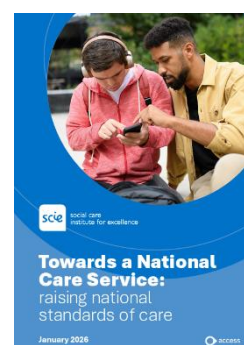
### **Disability Unit and Office for Equality and Opportunity. Disabled people's lived experience in the UK: evidence reviews and reports.**

The Disability Unit and Office for Equality have published a series of thematic reports which build on findings from a [systematic literature review](#) published last year.

- [Social care and support for disabled people in the UK](#). The report finds that disabled people's experiences of social care and support are highly variable, shaped by local delivery, relationships and access to information, and concludes that effective social care must go beyond meeting basic needs to support autonomy, inclusion and quality of life.
- [Public perceptions and attitudes towards disabled people in the UK](#). This report's evidence review finds that public attitudes towards disabled people in the UK remain largely negative - often focused on impairments and limitations, leading to stigma, infantilisation and exclusion - and highlights the need for strategies such as awareness-raising, positive representation and empowerment to shift societal perceptions and enhance inclusion and wellbeing.
- [Disabled people's lived experience of housing in the UK](#). The report highlights that appropriate housing can significantly support disabled people's independence, wellbeing and sense of security, while also identifying ongoing barriers linked to professional understanding and limited involvement of disabled people in housing decisions.
- [Disabled people's lived experience of education in the UK](#). The evidence review finds that disabled learners across the UK face persistent barriers at all stages of education - including inconsistent support from staff, inflexible systems, social exclusion and challenges with transitions - and highlights that inclusive practice, tailored adjustments and improved staff knowledge are key to improving disabled students' educational experiences.

### **Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). Towards a national care service: Raising national standards of care.**

This report explores how national standards might support reform of adult social care in England, drawing on a series of policy roundtables held with representatives from national and local government, charities, independent care providers, care provider representative bodies, workforce representative bodies, unpaid carer representative bodies, NHS representative bodies, researchers and think tanks, as well as people with lived experience.



It proposes a framework of principles and expectations that could underpin national standards, clarifying what people should be able to expect from care and support and helping bridge the gap between shared values and everyday practice. The report also emphasises



enablers for standards to have impact, including workforce capability, system data and digital foundations, and accountability mechanisms.

## **Briefings**

### **The Health Foundation. Health at the heart of local growth.**

This briefing explores how population health and economic performance are closely connected at a local level. It presents evidence that poor health can limit labour market participation, productivity and earnings, while also placing additional pressure on public services. It argues that local growth strategies focused narrowly on skills, infrastructure or investment risk overlooking health as a key factor in long-term economic performance.

The report highlights the role of local and regional actors in aligning economic development with action on health and its wider determinants, including employment conditions, housing, transport and place-based investment. It also notes that health outcomes and economic opportunities vary between places and population groups, suggesting that more integrated approaches could support both growth and improved outcomes over time.

## **Tools and Guidance**

### **Local Government Association. Common ground: Building cohesive communities.**

The Local Government Association (LGA), in partnership with the Belong Network, has published updated guidance on building cohesive communities to support councils in responding to growing social pressures.

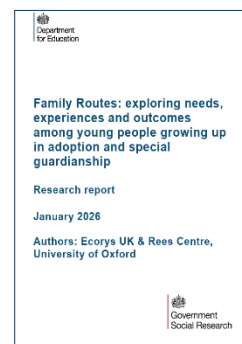
The guidance sets out a framework for considering cohesion at a local level, including how factors such as trust, belonging and participation interact with local policy and service delivery. It outlines the legislative and policy context for cohesion work and provides practical considerations for strategy development, partnership working and community engagement. It also includes a range of case studies illustrating how different local areas have approached cohesion challenges in response to local circumstances.

## Children and Young People's Services

### Reports

#### Department for Education. Family Routes: exploring the needs and experiences of young people.

This report presents findings from the first wave of the Family Routes study, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE). The study was designed to explore the needs, experiences, and outcomes of young people (aged 12–25) growing up in adoptive and special guardianship families in England, to improve understanding of long-term outcomes and inform policy and practice.

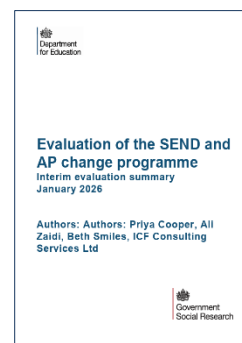


Key findings include:

- Emotional, behavioural and mental health needs were common, alongside challenges in education and learning.
- Adoptive parents and special guardians often reported limited information about children's early histories and needs.
- Access to specialist and timely support varied, with families frequently describing gaps in provision.
- Stable, supportive relationships within families were identified as a key protective factor for young people's wellbeing and outcomes.

#### Department for Education. Evaluation of the SEND and AP change programme: Interim evaluation summary.

This report examines early progress in implementing reforms to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision (AP) systems across participating local areas. The programme aims to support more consistent, joined-up and outcomes-focused SEND arrangements through structured improvement activity and support.



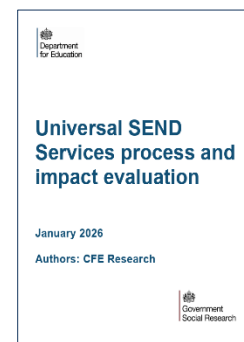
The evaluation finds early indications of progress, particularly in system development rather than outcomes. Key findings include:

- Strengthened strategic leadership and governance in some local areas
- Improved collaboration between education, health and care partners, though implementation varies
- Increased capacity for local improvement activity through programme support and peer learning.

However, the evaluation also highlights ongoing challenges, including variability in delivery, data quality limitations and difficulty demonstrating impact at this stage.

## Department for Education. Universal SEND Service process and impact evaluation.

The evaluation of Universal SEND Services (USS) examines the reach, delivery and early impacts of a national programme of SEND-focused training and CPD for mainstream school and college staff in England. Delivered between 2022 and March 2025, USS engaged over 255,000 individuals across all regions and roles, offering flexible online units, webinars, toolkits and networking support.



The evaluation finds strong evidence that USS has improved staff knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying and responding to SEND, with most participants adapting their teaching and support practices as a result. Many settings reported changes to SEND policies, identification processes and inclusive practices, alongside early signs of improved pupil engagement, belonging and relationships.

However, evidence of impact on attainment, attendance and long-term outcomes remains limited at this stage, and whole-setting change was more evident where strategic leaders were actively involved. The evaluation concludes that USS represents a well-designed CPD offer that has strengthened mainstream SEND provision, with further impact likely as changes become embedded over time.

## Department for Education. Evaluation of the Behaviour Hubs programme: Final report.

The evaluation of the Behaviour Hubs programme examines a three-year national initiative (2021–2024) supporting over 650 schools and trusts to strengthen behaviour culture through peer collaboration, specialist advice and tailored training. Lead schools with established behaviour approaches partnered with schools seeking improvement across primary, secondary, AP and special settings.

The evaluation finds the programme largely achieved its objectives, contributing to sustained improvements in behaviour management and policy design. Staff reported improved pupil behaviour, with an average change score of 6.5 out of 8. Success was linked to inspirational practice-sharing, practical guidance, strengthened leadership involvement, and tailored, flexible delivery. Progress was strongest where staff motivation, capacity and leadership engagement were high. External pressures and resourcing constraints limited impact in some schools.

Recommendations for similar programmes include:

- Preserving relational, peer-led delivery and in-person school visits.
- Maintaining programme flexibility alongside clear milestones.
- Strengthening use of behaviour monitoring data.
- Ensuring sustained leadership and staff engagement.

## **The Children's Commissioner. Children living in illegal children's homes.**

The Children's Commissioner's latest data collection identified 669 children living in unregistered children's homes on 1 September 2025, a 12% decrease from 764 the previous year. The report highlights these placements remain unlawful and unsafe. Of the children in unregistered homes:

- Most children were aged 16–17 (51%).
- 59% had an EHCP, 36% were receiving CAMHS support, and 30% had experienced at least one missing episode.
- Around a third (32%) were subject to a Deprivation of Liberty order, and these placements were typically more costly and more likely to be out of area.



The report calls for coordinated action across government to expand the supply of appropriate registered homes, particularly for children with the highest levels of need. It recommends strengthened oversight and enforcement powers, clearer duties on local authorities when using unregistered settings, and a fully funded strategy to grow foster care capacity. The Commissioner also highlights the need for greater clarity around market regulation and profit controls within the children's care sector.

## **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. Understanding the impact of smartphones and social media on children and young people.**

This report commissioned by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology examines the evidence on the population-level impacts of digital technologies - including social media, smartphones and AI - on children and adolescents. While concerns about individual harms remain pressing, the report focuses specifically on causal evidence at population scale to better inform policy.

The report calls for prioritising policy-relevant experimental and natural experiment research, strengthening national cohort data on digital use, and involving young people in co-developing interventions. It also highlights the need for a coordinated UK research strategy to build a stronger evidence base on online harms.

## **Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation). The multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse.**

This report sets out findings from six joint targeted area inspections (JTAs) carried out between October 2024 and June 2025 on how local partnerships respond to children aged 0–7 (including unborn babies) who are victims of domestic abuse. The inspections assessed identification, assessment, protection, prevention and multi-agency working.

Inspectors found examples of strong, child-centred practice - particularly in early identification by midwives, effective school involvement, and where domestic abuse was prioritised strategically. However, children's experiences were inconsistent.

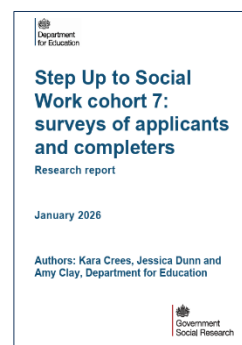
Key findings include:

- Children are not always recognised as victims in their own right, despite the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Practice often remains overly focused on adult victims rather than children’s needs.
- Information sharing and multi-agency coordination are variable.
- Early help and risk management are not consistently robust.

The report concludes that while pockets of excellent practice exist, stronger strategic leadership, improved information sharing and a more consistent child-centred approach are needed to ensure timely protection and support.

### **Department for Education. Step Up to Social Work cohort 7: surveys of applicants and completers.**

The Department for Education’s Step Up to Social Work: Cohort 7 Surveys of Applicants and Completers report presents findings from surveys of people who applied to, and completed, the 2022 Step Up programme, a 14-month graduate route into social work with a focus on children and families. The applicant survey received 1,156 completed responses and the completer survey received 234 responses.

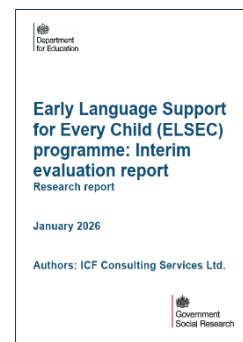


Key findings include:

- Most applicants decided to embark on a career in social work because they wanted to help people and make a difference (88%) or wanted to work with children and families (78%).
- The main barrier applicants faced in choosing to apply for a career in social work was the cost of training (54%).
- 91% of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience of the programme.
- Almost all respondents (99%) reported being in some form of employment at six months after the Step Up programme.

### **Department for Education. Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme: Interim evaluation report.**

The interim evaluation of the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme examines early implementation of a universal, early years language support model across participating local areas. The report explores how ELSEC has been delivered, stakeholder experiences, and early learning about programme design and partnership working, with a focus on enhancing children’s communication outcomes before school.



Key findings include:

- ELSEC has increased awareness and prioritisation of early language support among practitioners and partners.
- Local areas have adopted varied delivery approaches, reflecting existing structures and needs.
- Early engagement with families and settings shows promise for supporting children’s communication.

The interim report highlights learning on implementation and suggests areas for refinement as the programme progresses.

### **HM Revenues and Customs and Ipsos. Impact of Tax-Free Childcare on the labour market participation of working parents.**

This report examines the impact of the Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) scheme on the labour market participation of working parents. Drawing on quantitative analysis and in-depth interviews, it assesses whether financial support with childcare costs influences employment decisions. The findings indicate that eligibility for TFC is associated with increased labour market participation, particularly among mothers of younger children. The scheme appears to support some parents to enter work or increase their hours by reducing the net cost of childcare. However, effects vary across households and are shaped by factors such as earnings levels and access to childcare. The report adds to the evidence on how childcare policy interacts with employment behaviour.

## **Briefings**

### **NSPCC. “Teachers listen to you”: How to ensure youth voice is centred in sex and relationships education.**

This evidence brief reports on the national pilot of EMPOWER, a structured toolkit designed to amplify young people’s voices in shaping sex and relationships education. The pilot ran in 24 secondary schools across the UK and used surveys, interviews and focus groups to explore how EMPOWER was used and its effects on practice. Findings indicate that involving young people in evaluating and co-creating content made lessons more relevant and engaging, improved teacher confidence, and helped young people build skills in critical dialogue. Schools adapted the toolkit to their contexts, and participants valued the opportunity to be listened to and influence learning.



## **Tools and Guidance**

### **Department for Education. Mobile phone in schools.**

The Department for Education has published revised guidance on mobile phones in schools, advising schools to start using this guidance in April 2026. It sets out expectations for schools to restrict pupil use of mobile phones during the school day, outlining options for implementation, communication with families, and inclusion within behaviour policies.

## Criminal Justice

### Reports

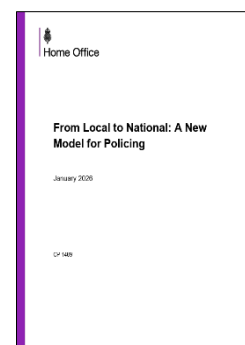
#### Youth Justice Board. Evaluating the implementation off the Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool (PDAT)

This report examines how the PDAT, introduced nationally in April 2024, has been implemented across Youth Justice Services in England and Wales. Designed to support consistent and proportionate assessment practice aligned with the Child First framework, the evaluation explores early learning from practice. It finds that the PDAT has supported more strengths-based, child-focused conversations and clearer planning in some areas. However, challenges were identified, including proportionality for lower-need cases, perceptions of duplication, and technical constraints within case management systems. Implementation varied depending on local leadership, training and integration into existing processes. The report identifies practical learning to strengthen guidance and future embedding.



#### Home Office. From Local to National: A New Model for Policing.

This White Paper sets out a wide-ranging reform programme intended to modernise policing in response to changing crime patterns and declining public confidence. Detection rates and victim satisfaction have fallen in recent years, while public confidence dropped from 79% in 2015/16 to 67% in 2024/25. The White Paper intends to outline a vision to strengthen both local community policing and national coherence.



The proposals include deploying 13,000 additional officers into neighbourhood roles, reducing the number of police forces from the current 43, and creating a new National Police Service to bring together national policing bodies. Reforms also include abolishing Police and Crime Commissioners, introducing Local Policing Guarantees, strengthening performance oversight, investing £115 million in AI capability, and expanding live facial recognition. The White Paper positions these changes as necessary to improve consistency, capability and national coordination while strengthening visible local policing.

#### Home Office. Serious Violence Duty evaluation.

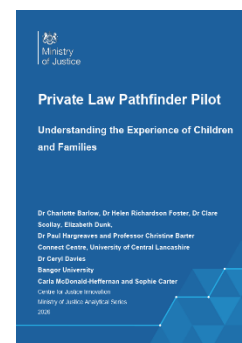
This report examines how the statutory requirement for multi-agency collaboration to prevent and reduce serious violence has been implemented across England and Wales since 2022. The Duty expanded a whole-system approach to all 43 Local Policing Body areas, requiring police, local authorities, health, probation, fire and rescue, and youth justice partners to work together.

The evaluation finds the Duty strengthened partnership working, formalised data sharing and led to the development of Strategic Needs Assessments and Response Strategies. Many areas reported improved collaboration and early indications of reduced violence, although it is too early to attribute outcomes directly to the Duty. Progress was supported by clear governance and dedicated coordination, but constrained by capacity pressures, short-term funding and variable analytical capability.

Recommendations include clearer national guidance, longer-term funding, stronger engagement from underrepresented partners, improved data infrastructure, and greater cross-government coordination to sustain a whole-system approach.

### **Ministry of Justice. Private Law Pathfinder Pilot: Understanding the experience of children and families.**

This evaluation of the Private Law Pathfinder pilot explores how families have experienced reforms to private law child arrangements cases in Dorset and North Wales since 2022. Pathfinder replaced the previous process with a model focused on earlier information gathering, a stronger emphasis on the child's voice, improved multi-agency coordination, and enhanced support for domestic abuse survivors.



Interviews with parents and children suggest mixed but broadly constructive experiences.

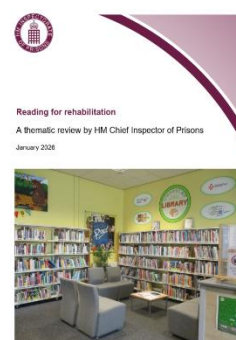
Key findings include:

- Improved capture of children's views through Child Impact Reports.
- Positive feedback on Cafcass involvement and access to domestic abuse support.
- A perception of greater efficiency compared to the previous system.
- Ongoing challenges with multi-agency information sharing and consistency.
- Limited implementation of the review stage following final orders.

The report highlights opportunities to strengthen trauma-informed practice, communication with families, and post-order support as Pathfinder is considered for wider rollout.

### **HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Reading for rehabilitation**

This thematic review examines literacy support across adult prisons in England and Wales. It follows earlier reviews that found serious weaknesses in reading education, particularly for those with the greatest need. The latest report identifies examples of positive practice where prison leaders have made reading a strategic priority, embedding it into prison culture through assessment, coordinated interventions, vibrant libraries and cross-department support.



The report urges governors and the prison service to learn from effective sites and implement robust, whole-prison reading strategies to support prisoner engagement, wellbeing and resettlement.