This article reflects on the aims and focus of citizenship education for young people in secure institutions in England and Wales. Drawing on writing by Government and specialist educational organisations and data from a research project in four secure establishments for young people, it considers the limitations of viewing citizenship education as a reform tool and the identification for educational purposes of young people first and foremost as «offenders». It reflects on the challenges to fostering «active citizenship» in secure environments with reference to encouraging critical reflection and building links between young people and their local communities. It suggests that there is a need for a re-appraisal of the assumptions underpinning citizenship education for young people in secure institutions and for further reflection on deeper ideological and structural tensions between education and criminal justice systems.

**Keywords:** citizenship education, young offenders, secure institutions for young people, responsibility, critical reflection, participation

**Introduction**

*Citizenship in the deepest sense is even more important to those youngsters whom, for whatever reason, we have put temporarily outside the community.*

House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2007: Ev80

This article offers some reflections on the provision of citizenship education for young people detained in secure institutions in England and Wales. In 2008 there were on average 2,926 under 18 years in secure accommodation in England and Wales (Youth Justice Board, 2009). As Mr. Wylie in