

Oak Lodge School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Oak Lodge School is owned and managed by Wandsworth Education Authority. It is a specialist resource which provides education to 85 deaf pupils aged 11-19 years of age, with residential places for 24 pupils. Pupils can reside at the school for up to four nights a week, Monday to Friday during term time only; 18 pupils were using the hostel at the time of this inspection. Pupils come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and the school highly values such diversity. For the majority of pupils, English is not their first language and they are often the only deaf person within their family. Hence, many arrive at the school with significant communication difficulties and subsequently have to learn British Sign Language (BSL). Once mastered, pupils thrive within an environment that gives them peers and the ability to socialise and communicate. The hostel provides boarding accommodation within the school and has some shared communal spaces, however bedroom accommodation is not used for any other purpose and is not accessed during the school day. Communal spaces for pupils include: a lounge; games room; quiet room; boys' television room; kitchen; an indoor play area; outdoor floodlit football/tennis court; 20 single bedrooms and two three bedded rooms. The hostel is managed by a Head of Care and has four additional full time members of staff with two staff on duty in the morning and three in the evening. A waking night staff member is currently provided every night.

Summary

This announced key inspection was conducted over two days by one inspector. All of the key standards for Residential Special Schools were inspected, as well as a number of others and the four recommendations made from the previous inspection were followed up. The premises were toured, key personnel were interviewed and various records were scrutinised. Individual pupils were interviewed and all three meal times were joined. A parent was also spoken with. The school is judged to be outstanding, in terms of its service delivery and the practice of its staff. This is let down by the inadequate physical provision, which does not meet the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The school received four recommendations from its previous inspection and these have all since been implemented. Health agreements with parents now include their agreement for the administration of homely remedies and a copy of the hostel agreement is now held on all individual pupil files. Additional individual support is being provided for pupils on an as needed basis and the feasibility study for future boarding provision ensures the separation of the residential facilities from other school provision.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils benefit by having their primary and tertiary health needs assessed and met. The health and medication policy is currently being updated and all members of the care team have received first aid and medication training. They have also received training on epilepsy and the management of diabetes. Medication is securely stored and administration records show no

errors. Care files hold clear information about presenting health needs and issues, including allergies and special dietary requirements. Medication stock and records are being robustly monitored and written parental consent for medical treatment and medication administration is available on all care files. The use of homely remedies is appropriately minimal and there is no current use of controlled medication. The local authority's school nurse spends an average of two days per week at the school and provides routine advice and support to the Head of Care. The school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is delivered in a way appropriate to the age and understanding of each individual year group. There is also appropriate coverage of such topics within the hostel environment. Pupils report positively about the provision of meals, which are prepared within the main school kitchen and served in the dining hall. The catering manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She is acutely aware of the presenting needs of the pupils and the impact that their ethnicity, religious beliefs and health needs may have upon the catering provision. Mealtimes are sociable, orderly occasions. Pupils and staff sit together and serve from the tables. Pupils take turns with serving and clearing tables and main meals offer a variety of hot, cold and vegetarian options. Day pupils are able to attend the breakfast club and hostel pupils now prepare one evening meal each week within the hostel to further develop their own independence skills. They really enjoy this and say they would like to do it more often. Inadequate physical provision prevents this. The catering team obtained a five star award from its most recent environmental health visit; it also has the 'Heartbeat Award' and is rated within the top 20% of such provision within the local authority. The team caters for additional events, including a pensioners tea at Christmas; the pupils assist with serving and entertainment.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff implement clear procedural guidance in practice, which serves to protect privacy and confidentiality. Written information is securely stored and shared appropriately, and pupils confirm that the practice of the staff respects their need for privacy. The complaints policy and procedure is being updated. The current guidance is aimed at all stakeholders; it is not currently produced in different formats. Pupils confirm that staff routinely explain and reinforce key policies and procedures through the use of British Sign Language (BSL) as many pupils find written materials difficult to understand. Through interviews, pupils confirm that they know how to raise their concerns and issues, and they report that these are satisfactorily dealt with. A complaints log is in place. This demonstrates a minimal amount of formal complaints being made. The current log book lacks some detail and does not cross reference to other material associated with the complaint, for example, investigation notes and records. A member of the teaching department is the school's designated child protection officer (DCPO). Processes and systems in place for all welfare concerns are robust; all incident, concerns and health referral forms are reviewed at weekly meetings to determine if any are of a child protection nature. Those that are obvious are dealt with immediately and do not wait for the weekly meeting. The data base system in use tracks every pupil and can be used to monitor all historic welfare concerns in order to establish patterns and trends. This system ensures data is easily retrievable. The DCPO liaises closely with the local authority safeguarding team and covers the topic of child protection within all new staff's induction. The policy and procedure is detailed and clear; it is linked and held together with all other associated guidance, such as health care, medication and pregnancy, and is called the 'child welfare and protection package'. Staff across all disciplines receive ongoing updated child protection training and they all demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's procedures. Records show high levels of ongoing welfare concerns and the

school, in particular, the DCPO, is commended for the rigour and effort that is being placed upon supporting the welfare needs of such vulnerable young people. The school recognises this heavy workload and an additional DCPO has just been appointed. Pupils report that incidents of bullying do occur; they describe these as low level instances of name calling and being unkind. They say the staff deal effectively with such incidents and expect to be punished if they are the perpetrator. The data base system records all reported incidents and is used to monitor patterns and trends. This leads to a proactive approach in terms of supervising key areas where it is more likely to be occurring. The written policy for staff does not fully describe the very good practice that is in place. The Head of Care has a clear system in place to report any significant events to external agencies, including Ofsted and absence monitoring systems are clear and robust. No instances of pupils being absent from the hostel without authority have occurred for some years; however, a clear missing person's procedure is in place. The school places much emphasis upon rewarding positive behaviour; pupils are routinely commended for their good conduct in an attempt to encourage this to continue. Pupils understand the school rules and they know what to expect should they deviate from these. A prescribed list of sanctions is being followed; however, the details recorded in the log book do not always contain sufficient details and there is an example of a sanction being applied a long time after the actual event. All staff receive externally provided physical intervention training and any use of this technique is clearly recorded and monitored. Written guidelines are in place and the use of this type of intervention is rare and is only being used as a last resort. The written guidance lacks full detail, whereas the actual practice is sound. Pupils say they feel safe at school and the premises offer good security. A sound maintenance system is in place and fire records are all in good order. Pupils understand fire evacuation procedures and practise these regularly. All first floor windows are suitably restricted; these are older style single glazed and do little to protect against the wind and the cold. All hot water supplies to the hostel are thermostatically controlled; however, records show varying hot water temperatures throughout the school site and none of the taps within the hostel are currently being manually tested. All radiators within the hostel are covered. The drainage system within the school is very old; it flooded last year, causing difficulties for the hostel provision and pupils say they often have difficulties with hot water supplies to baths/showers and they all say they are cold at night. Gaps are identified with regards to recruitment processes. The contents of personnel files do not support or demonstrate robust procedures. Omissions include an absence of risk assessing individuals who commence without all checks being completed and reference request letters contain insufficient details. References have been accepted on emails and there are examples of references not being followed up with telephone verification. In the case of a regular agency member of staff, the school has accepted verbal information from the agency and holds no written information of its own about this individual. Such omissions present potential risks and undermine the other robust child protection procedures that are clearly in place.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils receive ongoing and additional support within the hostel environment to achieve their academic potential. Teachers are regular visitors and pupils have access to classrooms and resources beyond the school day. All pupils have a pastoral tutor and there is excellent communication between these individuals and key workers from the hostel team. Hence, care plan targets complement educational ones. Daily handovers ensure pupils' progress, including any concerns and issues, is expediently shared between the two teams. After school, pupils engage in numerous and varied activities. These are decided and planned through regular

consultation meetings and include the cinema, bowling, signing theatre trips and local restaurants to celebrate various cultures and festivals. A generous budget ensures variety and the school has its own transport. The hostel has its own pool table and this is very popular, as is the outdoor sports pitch. The school is sensitive to the economic situation of some of its pupils and individual subsidies ensure that no pupil misses out on popular external activities. Students speak positively about the individual support they receive. Their biggest issue is a feeling of isolation within other surroundings, due to communication difficulties. They commend the fact that the hostel environment allows them to socialise with their peers and that the staff team are competent in the use of BSL. For this key reason, a number of pupils report dissatisfaction and frustration due to being allocated one or two nights per week, whereas they would like to stay for all four. This issue is beyond the school's control. Whilst clear records and data demonstrates sound individual improvement through using the hostel service, a number of requests continue to be turned down by placing authorities due to a lack of funding. Parents remain dissatisfied with this situation and one who has secured a full time place says, "It's been the best thing for my child. She has come on in leaps and bounds. She is isolated at home and she loves it here." For the majority of pupils, English is not their first language and a high number are the only deaf person within their family. The school is acutely sensitive to the difficulties of pupils having to effectively master two new languages, as they are not only learning the art of signing, but this is also in English. Support is clearly aimed at assisting parents to effectively communicate with their children and weekly support group sessions are offered. Due to language and cultural barriers this forum is not always used; however, the school continues to persevere, believing this to be vital for the well being of the pupils. Due to the inadequacies of community resources for deaf people, the pupils remain very reliant upon the support networks within the school. Despite continued efforts, it is proving difficult to secure the services of an independent visitor for the pupils.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

All of the staff of the school are required to undertake BSL training in order to effectively communicate with the pupils. In addition, interpreters are also employed by the school to assist visiting professionals and to attend external meetings in support of pupils. Forums exist within the school to enable pupils to express their views and opinions. Formal consultation occurs through student council meetings and the outcomes of these sessions feed directly into senior leadership meetings. The hostel staff host weekly meetings with the pupils and key worker meetings are also used to ascertain views and opinions. Pupils enjoy sound relationships with the staff; there is much humour and laughter within the hostel, balanced against appropriate boundary setting. Pupils join the hostel through a variety of routes. Often pupils themselves ask to stay there and other ways include parental requests and direct referrals from social services departments due to welfare concerns. The school works in close partnership with a number of local authorities, providing weekly accommodation for 'looked after' children. The assistant head conducts all annual reviews for Years 7, 8 and 9 and this forum is frequently used to explore the options of using the hostel facility. When such a request is made, the assistant head thoroughly researches the individual circumstances before submitting detailed cases to placing authorities. At present, 33 different boroughs place with the school and their processes for placement requests all differ. This creates additional tasks and the school is commended for its continued hard work. Key workers and pastoral teachers frequently meet for care planning purposes and care files hold very clear details pertaining to targets and progress. Care plans are currently being signed by members of staff and not the pupils. The

deputy head is largely responsible for the continued development of a database, which provides extensive and detailed individual pupil information. The school can record and track in detail the progress and development in all subjects, as well as areas including social and behavioural issues. Thus, the very positive impact of staying at the hostel is being clearly evidenced. Pupils confirm they are able to maintain contact with their families whilst staying at the hostel. The majority have their own mobile telephones and private mini-com telephones are made available. All pupils have their own school email account and historic server difficulties are now being resolved. The hostel staff write in a home/school contact book at the end of each hostel stay and ask parents to do the same.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

All pupils are able to change into their own clothes at the end of the school day and they can obtain the personal requisites they need. The school actively discourages pupils from bringing in large amounts of money; however, lockable storage space within bedrooms is provided for the safe-keeping of treasured possessions. The school suggests a limit of £2 per evening and if a proposed activity is likely to be more expensive, parents are advised in advance. The school provides individual financial assistance when this is necessary; no pupil misses out on activities because of a lack of funds and the school is commended for this sensitivity. Pupils beyond the age of 16 are taught within separate facilities that are situated on the same overall school site. The deputy head retains an overall responsibility for this provision, which is greatly concerned with the acquisition of independence skills and preparing pupils for adulthood. Staff from this provision liaise closely with the hostel team, as a number of pupils continue to use this facility. Once again, hostel care plans are written to incorporate and complement educational targets, as well as recognising the areas identified within the local authority documentation in the cases of 'looked after children'. This aspect of service provision is outstanding. This overwhelmingly positive aspect is hampered by the inadequate physical environment. Hostel accommodation is institutional by design and although cleaned and furnished to a good standard, it does not conform to the current standards in place for modern boarding. Administrative offices are situated within the living areas and this prevents the hostel from being for the exclusive use of boarding pupils. The kitchen is used as fully as possible; however, its size and design prevents pupils from accessing it to the full. There is sufficient communal space and the pupils enjoy using the two games rooms and outdoor sports pitches. Bedrooms are suitably separated in terms of age and gender; the majority of bedrooms are single occupancy, although shared rooms are being used. All of the pupils interviewed complain of a lack of space within their bedrooms; this is endorsed through touring the premises. Every pupil complains of being cold at night and this is exacerbated by older style, single glazed windows. Bathrooms and toilets are functional. Pupils say there are frequent difficulties with regards hot water temperature and pressure. Given the number of pupils the hostel aims to accommodate at any given time, the hostel has an insufficient number of toilets and bathrooms and therefore does not comply with the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools. The senior management team has produced detailed improvement plans and has submitted these to the local authority in terms of placing a bid for funding as part of the latest initiative, 'building schools for the future'.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school prospectus accurately describes the services of the school and this is distributed to all parents. Pupils have written literature clearly explained to them by staff using their preferred methods of communication and staff are provided with clear job descriptions and a detailed staff handbook. Duty rosters detail good staffing levels and these build in sufficient time for handovers, the completion of paperwork and liaison with colleagues. Pupils know who is sleeping in at night and there is also a member of staff on waking night duty. The deputy head robustly monitors the training provision for the whole school. Inset training days are carefully planned by her, following direct consultation with all heads of departments. Training courses for the hostel staff are planned in order that they are informed by the development plans for the hostel, and beyond this, the development plans for the whole school. The Head of Care is a member of the senior management team. She is suitably experienced and is working towards the completion of the NVQ Registered Manager's Award. All of the full time hostel staff members possess the NVQ 3 in childcare. They all have professional development plans and a system of annual appraisal is in place. Induction processes for new staff are thorough and all staff receive regular supervision. All mandatory training is up to date and this includes child protection, care planning, first aid, medication training, fire safety, physical intervention, medication administration and manual handling. Internal monitoring systems are robust. All heads of departments hold explicitly clear responsibilities and excellent database systems enable clear analysis of educational attainment, behavioural issues, bullying, emotional literacy and welfare concerns. The senior management team and governing body is also divided into various sub committees, which cover all of the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcome groups. There is no current arrangement in place with regards a representative of the provider conducting regular monitoring visits and this shortfall is being pursued by the head.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure the revised health policy includes clear guidance pertaining to a multi disciplinary approach towards pupils self administering their medication and also ensure appropriate storage is in place in the event of controlled medication coming into the school (NMS 14).
- ensure log books pertaining to complaints and sanctions hold sufficient details and that entries cross refer to other associated records (NMS 3 and 10).
- review the anti-bullying policy to ensure the written guidance accurately reflects and describes the school's good practice (NMS 6).
- ensure the physical interventions policy is updated to include greater detail (NMS 10).
- conduct routine manual checks of water temperatures within the hostel (NMS 26).

- ensure all staff involved in recruitment are fully aware of the contents of this standard and provide them with safer recruitment training. Review personnel files and rectify current omissions. Further ensure that sufficient personnel information is held with regards agency staff used by the school (NMS 27).
- submit an action plan detailing the proposed timescale for the commencement and completion of the works needed to ensure the hostel accommodation complies with the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools (NMS 23, 24 and 25).
- ensure the provider secures the services of a standard 33 visitor to conduct unannounced monitoring visits once per term on its behalf (NMS 33).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.