

Oak Lodge School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Elisabeth Brunton
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Date of last inspection	29 January 2009

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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 Council. It is a specialist resource which provides education to 77 deaf pupils aged 11-19 years of age, with residential places for 24 pupils. 18 pupils currently reside at the school for up to four nights a week during term time. The residential unit is located within the school building and includes a large lounge, kitchen/diner, a games room and quiet room. Boys' and girls' bedrooms are on separate corridors. There are 20 single bedrooms and two three-bedded rooms, though no young people currently share bedrooms. The residential unit is managed by a residential manager and head of care and there are four additional full time members of staff. About 15 young people were resident during the inspection and participated in it.

Summary

There was an announced key inspection and all key standards were inspected. Young people are receiving good care in this school. They are very well safeguarded, health care needs are very well met and young people's educational progress is very well supported in the residential unit. Young people are well nourished but the variety and choice of food served is limited. The individual support provided and consultation with young people are both outstanding and equality and diversity needs are well met. The school and its residential unit are very well managed, staffing levels are satisfactory and staff are qualified and able. There are some gaps in staff recruitment and some parts of the residential unit building need attention. These shortfalls have already been identified by the recently appointed interim principal who is strongly committed to improvement.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Six recommendations were made at the last inspection, four of which have been met. Window restraints have been fitted to first floor bedroom windows and monitoring visits to the residential unit are now carried out. A daily log of incidents and events in the residential unit is maintained and dates of staff training in administering medication are recorded.

The two outstanding recommendations relate to the accommodation provided; namely the size of the single bedrooms and the windows in these bedrooms having single not double glazing.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people benefit from very good health care, in line with the school's policy. While parents retain ongoing responsibility for ensuring that their children's health care needs are met, some routine health care and checks are provided in school by the school nurse. Young people are well cared for when unwell and staff liaise closely with parents over their children's health care. The school has comprehensive written information about young people's health care needs, together with signed consents from parents for emergency medical treatment and first aid. Young people are provided with an excellent personal, social and health education programme, guidance in recognising and expressing emotions and extensive support in developing communication skills. Some young people benefit from further therapeutic help through referral to

the locally situated national deaf child and adolescent mental health service. Young people participate in a wide range of sport and physical activities, both as part of the school programme and in the evenings. Medication is safely stored and administered, in line with the school's policy and staff benefit from the necessary training. Staff are also trained in first aid and first aid materials are accessible.

Young people are provided with meals which conform to comprehensive nutritional standards provided by the Food Standards Agency. Cultural, religious and dietary needs are well catered for. There is varied feedback from young people about the meals provided. The menu provides for reasonably varied meals but changes to the menu reduces variety, at times. Young people have limited choice at mealtimes and reduced opportunity to contribute to menus. This is attributed to the need to conform to strict nutritional standards. Mealtimes are pleasant, sociable occasions, food is well presented and tables properly laid. There are some opportunities for resident young people to participate in the preparation of food and drinks and snacks are made available. Staff who prepare food are provided with training in food hygiene.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people's privacy is respected. There is currently no sharing of bedrooms and young people are made aware of when staff need to enter their bedrooms. Room searches are rarely necessary. Permission is generally sought from the young person concerned and policy and written guidance adhered to. Bedrooms are not lockable but all young people have lockable units. Toilets and bathrooms are privately situated but wash basins are not. A closed circuit television camera is located in the boys' bedroom corridor. This could potentially be an intrusion into young people's privacy and its use should be reviewed. Although the young people's pay phone and minicom are not ideally situated, young people are confident that they can communicate privately by phone. Private areas are available for meetings. The confidentiality of information is safeguarded and written records are safely stored.

Young people are confident in expressing their views. They know who they would talk to if they were unhappy about something. Young people are provided with information about how to complain and know what action to take. A comprehensive complaints procedure is in place but there have been no complaints made about the residential provision during the past year.

Young people are very well safeguarded through the vigilance of staff and the commitment of the school's designated child protection co-ordinator. Close attention is paid to any safeguarding concerns. Young people's welfare is closely monitored, any concerns logged, analysed and shared between key staff. Young people feel safe and are well supported in keeping themselves safe, as part of the school's comprehensive personal, social and health education programme. There have been no allegations made against staff. The only recent child protection concern relating to the school's residential provision was thoroughly investigated. Staff deal appropriately with young people's disclosures of abuse within and provide the young people concerned with excellent support. Comprehensive safeguarding policy and written guidance is in place and staff are provided with regular training.

Young people are protected from bullying by the robust approach taken by staff. Young people are confident that, if bullying does occur, staff will sort it out. Staff are aware of the different forms which bullying can take and of the vulnerability to bullying of pupils in this school. It is

made clear that bullying is not tolerated. Any incidents are discussed and sensitively dealt with by staff, with individual support being provided to some young people.

Young people's attendance in school and in the residential unit is closely monitored and no young person has gone missing during the past year. A protocol for dealing with any such incidents is in place and staff are aware of the action to be taken.

Young people benefit from a thoughtful and effective response to their behaviour by staff. There is a strong emphasis on rewarding good behaviour. Young people are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour, its consequences and causes and are supported in making changes. Young people are aware of the rules and sanctions and feel that these are fair. Only acceptable sanctions are imposed and these are properly recorded. Physical intervention has not been used during the past two years. Staff are provided with training in behaviour management and physical intervention. The school has a policy on exclusion but this is rarely used.

The building and its grounds appear to be safe. They are regularly checked by staff and any problems are promptly dealt with. Window restrictors have now been fitted to all accessible windows above the ground floor and radiators are covered. Young people and staff are safeguarded by regular checks of fire safety and other equipment and monthly fire drills are held. There are trained fire marshals and a comprehensive fire risk assessment is in place.

Young people benefit from staff recruitment practice which is generally sound. However, there are some omissions which could potentially jeopardise the safety of young people and undermine the otherwise very strong safeguarding practice in this school. Where staff have started work before the provider's own Criminal Records Bureau check has been completed, the Criminal Records Bureau's recommendations relating to the portability of checks have not always been followed. The reference request letter does not ask if there is any known reason why an applicant should not work with children. Where references are sent for because an applicant is applying for a different post with the same provider, these are not always received before employment commences work. The Criminal Record Bureau checks on staff are regularly updated and the necessary checks are made on other adults who have unsupervised contact with young people. Visitors to the school are carefully monitored. These shortfalls in recruitment practice have already been identified by the recently recruited interim principal and measures are being put in place to raise standards.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff in the residential unit provide young people with excellent support in their education. Staff have worked hard at establishing effective liaison between school and residential staff, in order to monitor and support young people's education and welfare. The residential unit provides facilities for study and young people receive support from residential staff and some older young people, in completing homework. Young people benefit from access to the school's facilities during the evening, such as the library, computers, arts and crafts and sports facilities. A choice of activities is provided each evening, both inside and outside the school. Learning the skills needed for independence is part of the school programme and older residents are provided with some additional support in this area.

The individual support given to young people across a wide range of needs is outstanding. Young people are supported, individually and in small groups, in developing communication

and in meeting their emotional, social, behavioural and learning needs. A variety of methods are used, including play therapy. All young people benefit from participation in an excellent 'emotions' programme, developed by staff in the school. A comprehensive personal, social and health education programme is also provided, as previously mentioned. Excellent support is provided to young people with identity issues arising from their deafness and other disabilities. Support to young people with their racial, cultural and religious identities is also provided as part of school programmes and in daily 'circle time' discussions in the residential unit. Young people also receive individual support from regular meetings with pastoral teachers and residential key workers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people benefit from excellent support and opportunities to communicate their views. Extensive support is given to young people in developing their communication skills, as mentioned under previous standards. Staff are required to undertake the necessary training, so that they can communicate with young people using British Sign Language. Young people are well able to express their views and are supported, when necessary, by an excellent interpreter employed by the school. Young people contribute views about their education, welfare and their future, through key work and pastoral sessions, individual support and reviews. Young people are consulted about issues relating to how the school and residential unit operate, through annual questionnaires, discussion groups and the school council. Some views expressed through these avenues have led to change.

Young people appear to settle easily into the residential unit when they first become resident. Procedures are in place for admitting new young people when some residential provision is felt to be in their interests. New entrants to the school and their families are visited at home by one of the staff and information is exchanged. The residential staff ensure that they have full information about newly resident young people. Young people are already familiar with their peers and are given written information and a verbal introduction to the unit by staff. Staff ensure that the groups of resident young people staying on each night of the week, are as well balanced as possible.

Young people benefit from excellent residential care plans drawn up by key workers, in discussion with young people, their parents and pastoral teachers. Care plans are based on extensive information about young people. They are presented in a child-friendly format, including symbols, so are accessible to young people. Care plans include a limited number of clear and achievable targets. Young people's progress in relation to their care plans and the support they have received in working towards targets, is regularly reviewed and recorded. There is also a clear system of rewards when targets are met.

There is good communication between staff in the residential unit and parents about young people's welfare and progress. This is promoted through the use of daily diaries, supplemented by telephone calls and letters, when necessary. Young people are able to contact families and friends by telephone and there are facilities for families to visit. Parents' views about their children's welfare and progress and about the way in which the school and residential unit operate, are regularly sought through questionnaires and meetings.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The communal rooms in the residential unit are comfortable, sufficiently spacious, well decorated and furnished. Young people and staff are pleased with their spacious new kitchen/diner. Staff have worked hard at redecorating bedrooms in line with young people's choice and attractive new duvet covers and curtains have been provided. Young people have personalised their rooms with pictures and posters. However, beds and bedrooms are too small, bedrooms are not sufficiently warm and carpets are in poor condition. There are enough baths, toilets and wash basins for the number of young people. However, baths are in poor condition and there are no separate showers. Young people are not happy with the bedrooms and bathing facilities provided. The recently appointed interim principal is committed to improving these facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has an up-to-date Statement of Purpose which is comprehensive and well presented. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. This is discussed in the body of the report, under the specific outcome areas. For example, meals are provided which reflect young people's cultural and religious needs. Individual health care and education needs are well met. Excellent individual support is given to young people in developing their communication skills and in meeting their psychological, behavioural and educational needs and needs arising from their racial, cultural and religious identities.

The residential unit is staffed by a stable, qualified and permanent staff team. There are enough staff on duty to enable young people to receive individual support with homework and to participate in a range of evening activities. Staff are competent and committed and are generally able to communicate effectively and interact positively with the young people. Any issues relating to staff performance are robustly dealt with. Staff are well supported and provided with the necessary training and supervision. Staff benefit from regular staff meetings and access to a comprehensive handbook.

The school and its residential unit are well managed by able and experienced managers who are well supported by senior staff. An annual review of the school is undertaken by the principal and considered by the governors. An independent person carries out monitoring visits to the residential unit every half term. These visits are thorough and include feedback from young people. Reports of these visits are considered by the governors who also regularly visit the school and residential unit themselves.

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 that young people have a choice of meal, subject to dietary needs, are consulted over the planning of menus and are encouraged to state their preferences for food and drink, which are taken into account wherever possible (NMS 15.3)
- ensure that young people's privacy is respected by reviewing the use of a closed circuit television camera within the residential accommodation (NMS 3.1)
- undertake all the necessary references and checks when recruiting staff to work in the school (NMS 27.2)
- provide adequate, good quality and well-maintained accommodation for resident young people, which is consistent with their needs. (NMS 24.1)