

# Oak Lodge School

101 Nightingale Lane, London SW12 8NA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## **Information about this residential special school**

Oak Lodge School is a maintained residential special school. It is operated by the London Borough of Wandsworth.

The school is a signing community. It provides an inclusive multi-modal communication environment for deaf children and children who have speech, language, communication and additional needs. All the children have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The school offers up to 100 educational places and up to 17 residential places. At the time of this inspection, there were 85 pupils on the school roll, 15 of whom accessed the residential provision. The residential pupils are placed by 13 local authorities.

The residential provision is located within the school building. The head of care is suitably qualified and has been in charge of the residential provision for over four years. The great majority of residential staff are deaf. The inspector used British sign language interpreters to communicate with children and staff.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### **Inspection dates: 19 to 21 October 2021**

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 5 November 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Staff enable children to make exceptional progress in their communication, behaviours, social skills and independence. All parents and social workers spoken to talked about children's excellent progress and the invaluable experience that children get from being in a signing community.

Staff are excellent role models for children. Being deaf themselves, staff bring a unique insight into understanding the support that deaf children need in order to thrive.

Throughout the inspection, children displayed excellent communication and social skills. They engaged very well and expressed their views and feelings. All children said that they were happy to be staying at the home.

Staff have created a highly supportive and nurturing environment. The home has a lovely atmosphere, which is calm and jovial. Through having shared positive experiences, children have developed strong friendships. They show sensitivity and care towards each other. They rejoice in each other's achievements and successes.

Staff are highly skilled at helping children to make positive choices. Children help to create house rules and encourage each other to keep to them. There is a clear reward system that motivates children to engage positively and achieve their individual targets.

Staff support children to have fun and develop their interests, hobbies and creativity. Children have access to the school's wide range of sporting, recreational, and arts and crafts facilities. This was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions.

Since the lifting of the restrictions, children have returned to their usual clubs and gyms and other activities outside the school, such as visiting museums and places of interest. Staff support children to plan those activities, so that they develop their independence skills and learn how to take an active part in the society outside the school's signing community.

Staff have created safe relationships and safe spaces for children to explore their emotions. The school's well-being team supports children to learn how to look after their own mental health. Children also benefit from accessing speech and language therapy and drawing therapy. Staff work closely with the mental health services which specialise in working with deaf children and other medical professionals to support children's health.

Children's behaviours were exemplary throughout the inspection. This is despite children's additional needs and the history of highly challenging behaviours that some children have. Two children, who were out of education for over a year due to their challenging behaviours, have settled quickly at the home. They are doing extremely well and are making great strides in their learning.

The school extends its excellent support to children's families and carers. Staff teach parents and carers how to communicate with their children in British sign language and/or in any other individualised ways of communicating that their child has developed. This means that during school holidays, children continue to be heard and continue to develop their communication skills and positive relationships with their families and carers.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Keeping children safe and enabling them to be safer is intrinsic to everything staff do.

Residential staff work closely with their colleagues from across the school to safeguard children and promote their welfare. The whole-school approach to safeguarding children results in enhanced children's safety.

The school's safeguarding practices are collaborative and proactive. Comprehensive risk assessments and risk management strategies ensure that children are protected and safe. Residential staff use every opportunity to make children aware of risks and to teach them what they need to do to be safer. This includes online safety.

Regular health and safety checks ensure that the environment is physically safe. This includes fire safety and having regular fire drills. Each child has a clear personal emergency evacuation plan that is adapted to their specific needs. Children have an excellent level of knowledge of fire safety arrangements. However, one fire exit sign misleadingly pointed out to the balcony on the second floor and not to the staircase that leads to the exit.

All children, parents and professionals spoken to had full confidence that children are safe when they are with staff. No child has been missing from the school. There have been no major incidents of any kind since the last inspection.

Children talked about the school as their place of safety. They trust the staff members and take part in the recruitment of new staff members. Children's contribution strengthens further the school's robust recruitment procedure.

The only concerns that children expressed during the inspection related to what will happen to them during the school holidays. The school's safeguarding leadership team works closely with the local authority and other professionals to ensure that

children have appropriate support packages in place during school holidays. Children know whom to contact if they feel unsafe.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

Leaders and managers are highly effective in their roles. In the face of the pandemic, they continued to make decisions that were in the best interests of children. Leaders and managers demonstrated leading with courage, resilience and flexibility. Despite the challenging circumstances, they continued to have high aspirations for children and continued to provide a residential provision of a very high standard.

Leaders and managers exemplify the utmost commitment to children through their actions. During the nationwide restrictions, the headteacher moved onto the school premises to ensure the continuity of support to children and to staff. The headteacher and the head of care lead on good residential care practices through exemplary direct work with children.

Residential staff have full confidence in the school's leaders and managers, and find them inspiring. Excellent training opportunities, regular supervision, reviews of performance and ongoing support keep staff motivated to do their best for children and they are committed to their professional development.

Some senior staff have recently become qualified trainers in positive behaviour management support. This means that they can provide bespoke training and advice to residential staff about understanding what children are trying to communicate through their behaviours. Adapting the trauma-based theory to working with deaf children is becoming an area of the school's interest and research.

Leaders and managers are aware of the weaknesses in the residential provision and the school. The school's improvement and development plan demonstrates the value that leaders and managers place on the school's residential provision. Arrangements are in place to repaint residential areas during the half-term break. Building work is in progress to prepare the premises for an expansion of the residential facilities.

The school's governors maintain a keen oversight of the residential provision. They challenge the school and support its vision. The school's independent visitor contributes to the school's rigorous quality assurance processes by producing detailed monitoring reports. These reports meaningfully guide the residential provision's continued improvement.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendation**

- The registered person should ensure that a review of the fire exit signage is undertaken to ensure that only designated fire exits are signposted as such.

### **Information about this inspection**

The inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC042132

**Headteacher:** Caroline Rowlandson

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Seka Graovac, Social Care Inspector

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