

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.

The school offers up to 17 residential places. Children can stay for up to four nights per week. At the time of this inspection, there were 92 children on roll, of which 16 were accessing the residential provision.

The residential provision is located within the school building. The interim co-heads of care have been in post since 11 November 2022 and are working towards an appropriate qualification.

The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 March 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 19 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children's experiences are extremely positive, and there are several high-quality elements in this residential provision. The judgement of good overall takes the judgments for the school's help and protection and leadership and management into account.

The school's well-being team provides high-quality support for children to learn how to look after their own mental health. Staff have created safe spaces for children to confidently explore their emotions, including a school-wide initiative to embed pictorial prompts that aid discussion around exploring emotions. Regular well-being assemblies cover a range of informative topics to promote positive well-being. Strong links with specialist deaf mental health teams ensure that children receive the support they need when they need it.

All children benefit from spending time in a supportive, enabling environment that greatly enriches children's quality of life and future life opportunities. For many children, they experience their communication being opened, and for some children, this is for the first time. Consequently, the children can embrace their identity, explore the wider community inclusively and make lasting friendships with each other.

The relationships between staff and children are strong. Staff are highly skilled in supporting British Sign Language and Sign Supported English. There is a culture of high mutual regard and respect. Several staff are deaf themselves and have a personal insight and empathy for the lived experiences of the children in residence. Staff are excellent role models and provide individualised support for children from a stable space in which children can learn and grow.

There are a wide range of enrichment activities that support children's talents, interests and enjoyment. A good variety of sporting activities and links with youth clubs are available and well attended by children. Interesting recreational opportunities keep children stimulated and occupied. These experiences encourage social growth and help children to adjust to being away from home.

Staff provide well-planned support for children to make good progress with their life skills. Children have responsibility for tasks in the residential provision, such as cooking, taking out the recycling and cleaning. Children are supported to undertake work experience opportunities. Individualised support is provided for children when appropriate, to gain skills in managing finances, using public transport and securing interpreters. As a result, children's self-determination improves, and they are more prepared for adulthood.

An on-site therapy team, including occupational health and speech and language therapists, provides targeted support to children and staff. Specialist art therapy is

also available to children. Carefully planned therapeutic interventions help children to overcome previous barriers to education and understand their past experiences and trauma.

In one case, effective support was provided for a family to help them better understand their child's diagnosis. Staff were able to help their learning using British Sign Language. This has helped the family tremendously in meeting the child's needs at home.

Children who stay in residence have excellent attendance and an increased aptitude to achieve their educational targets in reading and writing when compared to day students. There are good communication links between residential staff and school day staff. Detailed handovers take place to ensure that a unified approach to support is maintained.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Children say that they are happy and feel safe in residence. They know who to talk to when they are worried or upset. Staff understand children's individual needs well and provide consistent routines and nurture that help children to feel secure.

The staff use proactive behaviour management strategies successfully to reduce situations that can increase children's anxiety. The staff have a good awareness of potential triggers and are confident and skilled in de-escalation interventions.

Staff are alert to and have a good knowledge of the lower-level and wider contextual issues that children with additional vulnerabilities may face. Designated safeguarding leads are appropriately trained. Weekly safeguarding meetings take place. This promotes a good safeguarding culture across the school.

School leaders maintain appropriate health and safety arrangements in residence to ensure children's safety. Fire prevention equipment is in place and checked by the local authority fire service. The staff and children are familiar with the fire safety procedures and regularly practise drills. However, at the time of the inspection, one child's bedroom fire door did not self-close. This was immediately resolved.

Although the head teacher has responded appropriately to an allegation against staff members, there was a delay in completing a written referral to the local authority designated officer. While there was no impact on the safety of the children, and the investigation was thorough, a delay in external oversight can undermine safeguarding procedures.

Staff have effective procedures to record, monitor and escalate safeguarding concerns. In most instances, concerns have been actioned and shared promptly and appropriately with external safeguarding agencies. However, a small number of incidents between children, that may indicate harm, have not been responded to with the same consistent rigour. The recording system used has made it difficult to

verify actions taken by staff, including the use of restorative meetings to support children on these occasions.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

School leaders are currently recruiting a permanent head of care. In the interim, this role is being fulfilled by two senior residential staff who are overseeing residence alongside the head teacher. School leaders have ensured that this arrangement has been managed smoothly, which has provided stability for children and staff.

School leaders actively seek constructive scrutiny and make improvements. Appointed governors have oversight of areas for development. There have been improvements in the effectiveness of medication administration systems and the oversight of children's health needs. Additional staff have been trained in the school's therapeutic model of trauma-informed support. The provision of well-being support for children has recently increased.

School leaders, managers and staff have extremely good relationships with parents, who provided unanimously positive feedback about the quality of care. Parents highlight the excellent levels of communication and the rich depth of children's experiences alongside their academic progress as strengths of the school.

School leaders and managers ensure that staff training and induction opportunities fully equip staff for their roles. An ongoing programme of professional development is in place for staff, which enhances staff skills to meet the individual needs of children.

Most staff benefit from child-focused, challenging and constructive supervision sessions. However, part-time staff working regularly in residence do not have access to the same formal supervision opportunities. One full-time staff member has not received an appraisal within the required timescales.

External monitoring by the independent visitor contributes to improvements in the residential provision. A good level of analysis is undertaken, and school leaders quickly respond to recommendations that are made. However, families' and social workers' views have not been gained or considered. This is a missed opportunity as this area of feedback could make a useful contribution to practice developments.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that records relating to safeguarding concerns are complete and provide clarity on actions taken. Monitoring systems should be strong enough to identify and action any gaps.
- School leaders should ensure that a written referral to the local authority designated officer is completed in line with local authority procedures when allegations against staff are made.
- School leaders should ensure that all staff receive an appraisal within the required timescales. They should also ensure that regularly used part-time staff receive formal supervisory support.
- School leaders should ensure that external monitoring by the independent person includes family and social worker consultations.

Information about this inspection

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

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Inspector

Mark Anderton, Social Care Inspector

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