

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 19 residential places. Children can stay for up to four nights per week. At the time of this inspection, there were 103 children on roll, of whom 15 were accessing the residential provision. The residential provision is located in the school building.

The new head of care is working towards an appropriate qualification.

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

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 February 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 21 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff enable children to make excellent progress in their communication, behaviours, social skills and independence. Children receive very good care from a dedicated staff team. Staff understand children's individual communication needs and spend time getting to know children to understand their views. Staff are creative and use a range of resources to find out children's wishes and feelings. They have translated these resources into British Sign Language to help children access them, to encourage communication. For example, children are helped to use colours to express how they are feeling.

Children move between residence and school seamlessly. Staff work well with education staff to ensure that children have good transitions. Staff from both sides of the school communicate well with each other and handovers are clear and detailed.

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. They benefit from having good routines and structure to their day. Children are given opportunities to have new experiences in the community and attend several clubs, including the deaf club.

Staff work hard to support children to develop their individual independence skills. They use a life-skills programme to set individual targets to help children develop their independence skills. Some children who are due to leave the school have developed excellent skills and can manage their own day-to-day activities, which will enable them to live independently. There is a clear reward system that motivates children to engage positively and achieve their individual targets. Staff have high aspirations for children and want to help them to achieve.

The residential environment is homely and warm. Children's belongings fill the space, and their artwork and certificates are on display. Books and games are easily accessible and soft furnishings help to maintain a nurturing feel. Children personalise their bedrooms in ways that meet their needs and staff help them to keep them tidy.

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

All children say they feel safe and happy in the residential provision. They know who to talk to when they are worried. Children display excellent communication and social skills. Staff use appropriate methods of communication to help children share their views and feelings. Staff are skilled in using trauma-informed practice to help them understand children's past experiences. This enables staff to support children appropriately when they feel anxious. There have been no incidents requiring physical intervention since the last inspection.

Children have built strong relationships with the staff who care for them. Relationships between the staff and children are warm, affectionate and loving. Staff are child-centred and supportive of children's individual needs. They respond to children sensitively and with compassion, as well as providing consistent, individualised support. This helps children to build trust and feel safe and relaxed in their surroundings.

Leaders ensure that there is a strong safeguarding culture in the school. Safeguarding procedures are clear and staff know the processes to follow if any concerns arise, including working with external professionals. This contributes to an all-round effective safeguarding approach. Residential staff work well with the school pastoral team and use every opportunity to help children understand risks, including those online.

Children benefit from high staffing levels and there are clear behaviour support plans to support their needs. Staff support children to understand boundaries and routines. This is done in a child-friendly way, using children's preferred method of communication. Incidents are well managed by staff, who use de-escalation techniques to support children. This means that even children with the most significant needs have positive experiences.

Staff ensure that the environment is safe for children to live in. Staff carry out regular health and safety checks to assess whether there are any hazards to children. Children take part in regular fire drills. Each child has a clear personal emergency evacuation plan that is adapted to their specific needs. Children have a good level of knowledge about the fire safety arrangements. However, records of the maintenance checks in the residential provision are not always updated. This means that it is not clear what work has been completed following fire system inspection and if there are any issues, such as faulty emergency lights.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are committed and child-centred and want the best for children. They are extremely ambitious for children. The head of care is completing his qualification and feels supported by the senior leaders. Leaders have introduced a practice lead and two senior lead staff to support with operational management and the oversight of the provision. Leaders consider the residential provision as an integral part of the school. Residential staff have full confidence in the school's leaders and managers and find them inspiring.

Monitoring of the care that staff provide in residence is comprehensive. Governors and senior leaders also visit regularly and provide a supportive listening service for children. Governors are supportive and positively challenging. They have confidence in the care children receive. These visits help staff to consider any areas for improvement, as well as celebrating successes. Leaders respond positively to the independent visitor's report. These measures contribute to the positive environment children live in.

Staff say they feel supported by leaders and managers. They have regular supervision and leaders are available for advice or guidance. The headteacher has worked tirelessly to support the new head of care and the team. New staff receive a good induction that helps them settle into their work. All staff have access to training, as well as joint discussions about children with other professionals in the school. They are able to demonstrate the skills learned to provide nurturing and supportive care that helps children build their independence. However, training records are not always updated to show what courses staff have completed.

Parents have confidence in the school and the care that their children receive. Staff communicate frequently with parents and adapt this to suit the families. Staff use online messaging and phone calls to keep families up to date. All parents spoken to gave positive feedback about the care provided to their children. Effective communication with families enables children to have consistency in the care provided and to maintain their progress at home and in school.

Staff work well with other professionals, including social workers, education staff and therapists. Working collaboratively enables the team to strive towards helping children in a more holistic and effective way. External professionals and parents are very positive about the care provided to their children.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that monitoring and recording of the maintenance checks of the residential provision are good and that records are kept updated to show what has been addressed following maintenance inspections.
- School leaders should keep the record of staff training updated to assure themselves that staff are suitably trained and qualified to carry out their roles.

Information about this inspection

Inspector has 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/teacher in charge: Caroline Rowlandson

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Inspector

Dorothy Thompstone, Social Care Inspector

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