

Oak Lodge School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101094
Local Authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	307580
Inspection dates	29–30 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Paul Clark HMI

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	69
Sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Gray
Headteacher	Ms Denise Morton (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2005
School address	101 Nightingale Lane London SW12 8NA
Telephone number	020 8673 3453
Fax number	020 8673 9397

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection of the school was carried out by an Additional Inspector and that of the boarding provision by a Social Care Inspector.

Description of the school

The pupils and students are drawn from up to 25 local authorities from Greater London and beyond. Oak Lodge is a residential special school for up to 22 boarders and provides education for pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The pupils may board full-time or part-time. Deafness is their prime need, although almost all have additional identified needs, such as emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, autistic spectrum and associated learning difficulties. The complexity of these additional needs has increased significantly in recent years. The pupils may join the school at any time and up to a quarter did not start the school in Year 7. The cultures of pupils are extremely diverse and 17 different languages are spoken at home. A high proportion of pupils have refugee status and almost three-quarters are eligible for free school meals: a very high figure. There are almost twice as many boys than girls. The headteacher also manages off-site support for hearing impaired pupils in other schools, 'Deaf First', a service for the local deaf community, and Corner House which is a unique psychiatric unit for deaf children from across the UK. The school has a range of awards including Investors in People and is recognised as a Healthy School.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Oak Lodge is an outstanding school that successfully demonstrates its aims that include enabling the pupils and students to take pride in themselves as deaf people and in their achievements. The results are evident in their outstanding achievement and personal development. Because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the standards reached by pupils, in most cases, are below average, but are exceptionally good in view of their starting points. The good boarding provision has a positive impact upon the boarders' achievements, personal development and well-being.

The quality of teaching is excellent and is typified by very effective signing skills and specialist subject knowledge possessed by education and boarding staff. The benefit of such expertise is extended beyond the school gates and reaches other young people and adults in a range of settings. Lessons are very well planned and typically they are characterised by brisk pace with many opportunities for first-hand experience. Teaching assistants, some of whom have advanced skills and qualifications, make a significant contribution to the pupils' learning and achievement. The vast majority of pupils meet their challenging targets and, where they do not, the school promptly acts, following a review of individual progress. The pupils enjoy coming to school and parents are very happy for their children to attend. Comments from parents included, 'My daughter is improving a lot with her signing...the school's parents' group has been a very good support to us...always someone on the end of the phone...I wouldn't want my son to go anywhere else because he has come so far and done so well.'

The school's monitoring and tracking of pupils' overall achievement is exemplary and is a major factor in enabling the pupils to achieve as well as they do. The good curriculum is under constant review. The school has accurately identified a lack of sufficient cross-curricular lessons for pupils with complex needs, especially in Key Stage 3. Detailed planning to remedy this is at an early stage. The curriculum is enriched by specialist studies relevant to hearing impairment, access to mainstream settings and a wide range of clubs.

All the pupils make excellent progress in their personal development due to the well-integrated provision of personal, social, health and citizenship education and specific programmes to develop emotional expression. The pupils are very proud of their school, and this is evidenced by extremely positive relationships at all levels, excellent behaviour and good attendance. Absences are invariably due to medical reasons. The overall quality of care, guidance and support provided for all is excellent. School procedures, including those for child protection, ensure pupils' well-being is appropriately safeguarded. Careers education and transition planning prepare them for moving from one stage to the next. Pupils receive very effective specialist support, including speech and language therapy, to improve their access to the curriculum and overall independence. However, some subject reports contain too little progress information as part of the annual review procedures.

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding due to their very accurate view of the school's effectiveness. Despite recent changes in management, the capacity for further improvement remains good. The governing body gives excellent support on all school and boarding issues.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The students' achievement in a wide range of GCSE, General National Vocational Qualification and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses is outstanding. The quality of teaching they receive is outstanding and tailored precisely to their needs in effective programmes that also include attendance at local schools and a college of further education. The excellent curriculum maintains the students' interest in further education. Retention rates are high as the vast majority stay on to the end of their courses. The quality of leadership and management is the same high quality as the rest of school and sixth form staff form part of the school's senior management team.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The quality of boarding at Oak Lodge School is good. All of the national minimum standards were inspected. The promotion of equality and diversity in the boarding house is outstanding. Staff are trained in the key areas that keep children safe and training is regularly updated. Initial health checks are carried out by the school nurse and routine health checks are carried out by parents. The school will refer to the Deaf Child and Family service if required. Staff have been trained in the administration of medication; however, there was no dated record of this. Guidance is used to risk-assess young people who self-administer medication. The school has a secure cabinet for medication and an additional cabinet for 'controlled' medication is in the process of being purchased. Although a nutritious diet is provided, several young people commented that there was little choice and portions were sometimes small and unappealing. There are arrangements in place to prepare snacks in the evening. There is a kitchen in the boarding house where boarders can practise independent living skills, although space is limited. The school has ordered a chilled water tower to enable children to have drinks at bedtime.

Young people manage their personal care needs supported by the care staff. Care plans are comprehensive and clearly written and ongoing needs are appropriately reviewed. The school has a designated child protection officer (DCPO) and a deputy DCPO. They regularly update their skills and knowledge by attending child protection courses run by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and they also conduct in-house training for staff. There are clear policies for staff on child protection, complaints, dealing with bullying and physical restraint. Many of these policies have been made into 'user-friendly' leaflets to assist young people's understanding of them. Entries into records of sanctions applied, physical interventions, complaints and child protection issues are cross-referenced into the young person's individual case file and monitored by the school. Sanctions applied for unacceptable behaviour are fair and equitable and accepted by the young people.

A record of accidents occurring is kept and is monitored. Staff are appropriately vetted and Criminal Record Bureau checks are in place. Agency staff working in the school must provide evidence that they have been appropriately vetted. The school authority conducts periodic health and safety reviews of the premises and areas of potential danger are appropriately risk-assessed. There are fully opening windows in each of the young people's first-floor bedrooms which could be dangerous. The Head of School and Head of Care have carried out risk assessments and are satisfied that there are no young people currently placed who would misuse this facility. Written guidance is in place for staff action in the event of a young person going missing. A key worker system ensures that young people have access to a member of

staff who fully understands their individual needs. Although conditions in bedrooms are cramped, each bedroom has a desk and a reading light. There is no internet connection in the boarding house, although boarders can access the internet facilities in the school during the evening. There is a wide range of evening activities which the young people can choose from on a daily basis. The school has a mini-bus to transport them to outside events. Drivers are appropriately qualified and the school caretaker carries out health and safety checks on the vehicle. There is also an extensive variety of sporting and leisure facilities available at the school.

All care staff are trained and skilled users of British Sign Language and converse freely with young people. Several members of the care staff are deaf themselves and provide a positive role model for the young people. Good relationships exist between young people and care staff. Young people can express their views about the running of the hostel and discuss day-to-day living. Boarders are given an information pack about the hostel and a 'signed' induction by a member of staff. For older boarders a 'Life Skills' programme is written into their care plan to help them prepare for independent living. Most young people have mobile phones to communicate with their parents by text. They also have access to the school's 'Mini-Com' facility where they can 'Type-Talk' to their parents. The hostel has an 'open door' policy for parents who wish to take their children out for evening activities. There is good staff communication with parents.

The floor size of the single bedrooms is inadequate. Young people say that the single-paned bedroom windows make bedrooms cold in the winter. The number of showers and toilets in the hostel is barely adequate to meet the needs of active teenagers and the school is trying to address this via application to the local authority.

The Statement of Purpose of the boarding arrangements is contained within the school's comprehensive prospectus. Although the hostel keeps a night log, there is no daily record of incidents and events within the hostel. All but one of the care staff have the NVQ Level 3 Qualification in Child Care. There is a comprehensive staff induction programme. Job descriptions are in place for all staff. Access to necessary staff training and development needs is detailed in individual personal development plans and training is made available. Care staff receive supervision fortnightly. Team meetings are held every week. Recent personnel changes have resulted in the appointment of a Head of Care and Residential Manager who act as the Responsible Person and Registered Manager respectively. Both have the NVQ Level 4 Qualification in Managing Residential Child Care and both have many years' practical experience in child care. The school conducts internal quality assurance, monitoring of all aspects of the school including the hostel. The views of all stakeholders are consulted verbally and by questionnaire survey. The school has not yet appointed a Standard 33 visitor, although it has plans to do this by next term.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more cross-curricular lessons for pupils with more complex needs, especially in Key Stage 3.
- Ensure all subject reports for annual reviews contain more information about the gains made in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care.

- Ensure that a dated record is kept of when staff receive training in the administration of medication. (NMS 14)

- Ensure that window restraints are fitted to all young people's first-floor bedroom windows. (NMS 26)
- Ensure single bedrooms meet the recommended floor size of 6 square metres. (NMS 24.8)
- Change the single-paned windows in the single bedrooms to double-glazed. (NMS 24)
- Keep a daily log of incidents and events within the hostel. (NMS 19)
- Ensure the school secures the services of a Standard 33 visitor to conduct unannounced monitoring visits once per term on its behalf (NMS 33).

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

During the last academic year, all pupils were entered for a range of GCSE and Entry Level certificates in English, mathematics, science, art and design, information and communication technology and design technology. All gained at least one GCSE grade from A* to G and several gained good passes with grades A-C. They also gained success in vocational studies such as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and keyboard skills. Although the pupils' attainment compared to mainstream schools is below average, considering their starting points, their progress is outstanding. They also gained awards for their signing skills, including British Sign Language. Pupils make excellent progress in meeting the challenging targets in their individual education plans. The school's highly effective analysis of each pupil's progress helps ensure that any underachievement is promptly addressed. Routine analysis indicates that there are no significant differences in progress made by any individual or group.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development as they respond so well to the excellent relationships between themselves and staff, displaying very positive attitudes. Unauthorised absence is exceedingly rare and attendance is only occasionally interrupted for medical appointments. Pupils respond exceptionally well to the many sporting, artistic and other cultural opportunities in and out of school. They have an excellent understanding of the value of exercise and healthy eating because of the extensive personal, health and social education programmes, science curriculum, food technology and very good opportunities to take part in physical exercise. The school's football teams have enjoyed success in competition at national level.

Behaviour is excellent both in class and around the school. Pupils show a good appreciation of safety when walking down corridors or using staircases, which are quite narrow in some cases. Several pupils took part in making a DVD giving relevant road safety guidance, and all pupils benefit from the structured programme for independent travel using public transport. All pupils, and especially boarders, make excellent use of the community for arts, sports and recreation.

The pupils feel safe and that they always have a trusted adult with whom they can share concerns during the school day and evenings. Membership of the school council is taken seriously and pupils feel involved in making decisions that affect them. Racial harmony and close friendships are very evident throughout the school community. Assemblies and cross-curricular themes give the pupils a good understanding of cultural diversity and Deaf Studies ensure they develop an awareness of issues related to communication with peers and others. They respond positively to the well-planned 'emotions' programme where they consider their own behaviour and emotional responses to everyday life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The high-quality teaching and learning throughout the school are key factors in its overall success. All staff are well qualified and experienced in communicating with the pupils and boarders. Relationships are strong and expectations are high in relation to work and attitudes to learning. Lessons are well planned with due regard to national guidance to ensure that learning takes on a brisk pace with good opportunities for pupils to reflect upon their learning. Progress is identified by setting challenging targets over time based on rigorous assessment. The quality of written feedback on course work, for example in English, is informative and really helps pupils to know how to improve their work. Teachers make good use of comprehensive 'strategies' guidance supplied by senior managers to ensure the right channels of communication are employed. Pupils, too, are encouraged to be receptive to learning as part of the 'My Learning' initiative. Teachers' prompts at the start of lessons enable the pupils to consider what they need to do in order to learn effectively. Particularly effective support is given to older pupils sitting examinations, for example, study sessions after school hours and homework overseen by boarding staff. All staff minimise the adverse effects of accommodation, particularly where room sizes and storage space are limited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is successful in enabling the pupils to make the most of their academic abilities and also makes a significant contribution to their personal development. A strong emphasis is placed upon developing personalised learning and thinking skills across the curriculum. The school does not offer music or a modern foreign language; instead, this time is used to include Deaf Studies and an innovative 'emotions' programme. These relevant subjects greatly assist the pupils' emotional development and expression according to their specific needs. This work has a positive impact on behaviour as pupils learn to express their feelings with greater understanding of themselves and others. These sessions complement the school's comprehensive personal, social, health and citizenship programme.

There is excellent provision throughout the school for developing pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. This increases their access to learning in other subjects. In addition to academic courses, there is a good range of vocational opportunities, including ASDAN for older pupils. The school has identified that for some younger pupils, especially those with increasingly complex needs, the curriculum could be improved by increased use of cross-curricular themes. The plans to enable this to happen are not yet as detailed as other school initiatives.

The curriculum is greatly enriched by an extensive programme of activities after school for boarders and all pupils receive regular opportunities to take part in the arts and physical activities. There are very good programmes to prepare pupils for the next stage in their lives, for example those for pupils in Key Stage 4 who undertake carefully chosen work experience and have opportunities for college placements and life in the sixth form. The outstanding provision for personal development has a positive impact on pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The pupils' care, support and guidance are outstanding. The school has extremely detailed knowledge of the pupils' progress in all areas. As a result, academic guidance, based on the very thorough assessment procedures, is also outstanding. Furthermore, the pupils receive excellent support for their physical and emotional well-being. Academic reporting is very good, although some subject reports associated with annual reviews sometimes contain too little information about gains made and focus overly on attitudes and behaviour. The school has developed its own systems to assess how independent the pupils are in their learning and signing.

There is excellent support from outside professionals and agencies, which is enhanced by the school's own provision of extra input for speech, language and communication. Older pupils and students receive very good support and guidance as they are about to take the next steps in their lives, with all pupils who left last year going on to the sixth form, college or training. The school also supports the pupils' families through workshops to develop their signing skills. Firm plans exist to visit families in their own neighbourhood, thus easing transport difficulties. Systems to safeguard pupils are excellent. Parents report that they are very happy with the work of the school, as do the extensive network of partners within the school and beyond.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leaders and managers provide a clear sense of direction that is readily shared by all staff. The school's senior management team, including senior care managers, has responded very well to recent changes in responsibilities due to illness. The focus of school development planning is successfully designed to improve the impact of education and care upon pupils, students and boarders. The systems for self-evaluation are wide-ranging, rich in data and used to very good effect. For example, the tracking information related to pupils' academic progress and personal development makes a positive impact on programmes of learning and pastoral support. The quality of teaching is kept under regular review and extensive high-quality support is offered to those new to the education and care provision. Excellent guidance is given and performance management targets are related to how well pupils achieve. Staff benefit from regular training opportunities to develop their abilities to meet the changing needs of the pupils.

Together all members of staff have created a highly cohesive community with an exemplary inclusion programme, recognised as such by outside agencies. Links with the community are extremely effective and feedback is routinely gained in the continual pursuit of improvement. The school's support for other services and schools is well regarded by its partners. The considerable attention given to its communities does much for the benefit of both, for example, mainstream peers learn much about the implications of deafness and this aids understanding and community cohesion.

Governors work closely with senior staff and have a very clear view of the strengths of the school and the developments needed. Since the last inspection, a strong emphasis has been placed on securing necessary improvements to quality of provision for education and boarding. The school has made considerable improvements and despite the recent changes in responsibilities at senior level, it has a good capacity to improve further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

12 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oak Lodge School, London, SW12 8NA

Thank you for making me and my colleagues so welcome last week. It was a real pleasure for us to see just how well you are doing in your outstanding school and also in the hostel.

I was so pleased to see how well you all do at school and thank you so much for the warm welcome! I can tell you that you go to an outstanding school and it's clear that you enjoy your lessons. All the staff work very hard to help you learn. The quality of teaching is outstanding and this helps you to do as well as you can. Your behaviour is excellent and attendance is good. The care you take moving around the buildings is really good to see. We know the school has plans to improve the accommodation. You make outstanding progress and you told me just how much you enjoy learning. I know you enjoy the responsibilities given as school councillors and prefects. The school does all it can to make sure you keep fit and healthy. You have excellent relationships with the school and hostel and each other. The school also helps your parents so that they may learn to communicate even better with you at home.

I am asking the school to do a couple of things to help the school be even better for you. One is to look at ways in which some of the subjects you learn can be taught in different ways. The other is ensure that all your school reports show just how much you have improved in the subjects you learn.

Good luck!

Yours faithfully

Greg Sorrell

Lead Inspector