

Oak Lodge School

Oak Lodge School for the Deaf, 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 for young people aged 10 to 19 years. It is operated by the London Borough of Wandsworth. It provides an inclusive multi-modal communication environment for deaf young people and hearing young people who have language, communication and/or auditory processing difficulties. Many of the young people have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school offers up to 100 educational places and up to 17 residential places. The school is a signing community. The residential provision is located in the school building. Young people may reside there for up to four nights a week during term time.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 March 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the staff within the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 26 September 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children and young people thrive and make exceptional progress from their starting points in all areas. They clearly love staying in the residential setting.
- Residential staff are highly skilled communicators. They use a variety of creative methods to meet children and young people's individual needs and to overcome barriers to communication.
- Children and young people participate in a wide range of activities within the residential setting and the wider community.
- The staff and resources across the school and residential provision are fully integrated. This provides a seamless experience of care and support across the whole school.
- Staff work closely with parents, specialist partners and placing authorities to ensure that children and young people get the very best support available.
- The school and residential staff advocate strongly for the rights of children and young people. This enhances children and young people's life chances and ensures that they have every opportunity to develop their skills for independence.
- The school staff prioritise the safety and well-being of children.
- The head of residential provision is a highly skilled leader and has significantly improved the service since the last inspection.
- The wider leadership team in the school is visible and passionate about ensuring high standards of care in the residential provision.
- Staff provide exceptional care and support to children and young people and are excellent role models to them.

The residential special school's areas for development are to:

- Ensure that waking night staff receive formal supervision at the frequency set out in the residential school's policies and procedures.
- Revise individual written risk assessments to better reflect the protective factors that must be implemented and demonstrate the progress that young people make in reducing behaviours of concern.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Staff work with their head, hands and heart to provide exceptional, thoughtful and nurturing care to children and young people. All aspects of the shared living experience are used as opportunities for learning and development. Children and young people thrive in this environment. They are proud of their achievements and place high value on their relationships with staff and each other.

The residential provision promotes a strong sense of culture and belonging to the deaf community. Many of the residential staff are deaf and they are excellent role models to the children. Staff are highly skilled in using sign language and other communication devices and techniques. They share aspects of their own life experiences to raise aspirations for the children and young people in the residential provision. This helps children and young people to develop the courage, skills and confidence to aim high and make their mark.

Children and young people speak highly of their experience as residents. Several described it as 'like home' and 'like a family'. One young person said, 'It's better than home because I have lots of people I can communicate with.' Children and young people were consistent in their praise for the high standards of care and support that staff provide for them.

Parents described many examples of how their children develop skills for independence as a result of the support provided by the school and residential provision. One parent said that, 'Staff are amazing, my child is able to do things for himself that I never thought were possible.' Another parent described how her child has improved his communication and skills and can now interact better with others and has made friends. She went on to say, 'I am amazed at what staff can get him to do – I am now much more hopeful about the future.'

The children and young people in the residential setting have a wide range of needs and abilities. Not all of them are deaf. The residential staff create an inclusive environment and provide a flexible service in order to meet all of the children and young people's individual needs. This ensures that they all have equal opportunities to reach their full potential. Children and young people are encouraged to learn about and celebrate difference and diversity within the school and in the wider society.

The benefits for children and young people go far beyond the school and residential provision. The staff work closely with parents and key partners to help families access a range of additional help and support. Some parents have limited ability to sign, and staff frequently help young people to communicate with their parents. This enables children to share their views and feelings in a way that may otherwise be problematic.

Children and young people are fully engaged and involved in decisions about their

care. Staff consult with them constantly to enable them to share their feelings, views, ideas and choices.

There is a strong culture, ethos and value base driving the manner in the residential provision which supports and cares for children and young people. From the outset, new children and young people are carefully introduced and welcomed into the group.

The residential service and school are alive to the fact that members of the deaf community face significant barriers to employment. There is a keen focus on providing children and young people with a safe, inclusive space to learn and to reach their full potential. This means that they have successful outcomes as they progress and leave the school. Several young people have won coveted awards for the progress that they have made. Many of them benefit from meaningful work placements and useful vocational qualifications.

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

Leaders, managers and staff in the residential provision demonstrate considerable skill and knowledge to provide children and young people with a safe environment. This is done in a thoughtful way that balances the need to keep children and young people safe, while allowing them to take acceptable risks to develop independence.

Children and young people make significant progress in improving their behaviours and become safer as a result of the help and support provided by residential staff, although written individual risk assessments do not always reflect this progress. In one instance, a young person was identified as exhibiting a number of challenging and risky behaviours, when, in fact, he had not displayed these behaviours for several months.

Staff consistently use positive reinforcement to encourage positive behaviour. They use restorative approaches to manage challenging behaviour and help children and young people to reflect and learn from their mistakes. Children and young people reported feeling safe in the residential provision. They value each other's friendships and treat each other with respect.

The school and residential provision have a fully integrated approach to promoting the safety and well-being of children and young people. Staff notice the smallest detail that may indicate that a child is unhappy. Staff communicate concerns effectively and act promptly to investigate and provide support.

The designated safeguarding lead has keen oversight of all welfare concerns. She is experienced, well trained and highly skilled. The designated safeguarding lead makes good decisions about what action is needed to keep children and young people safe.

The therapeutic staff provide expert assessment, guidance and support to residential pupils and staff. Staff can draw on resources from the school's speech and language therapist to improve the capacity of children and young people to communicate their needs and wishes. This has a most positive impact on their behaviour and

development because children and young people can shape the world around them by communicating their needs rather than acting out negatively through frustration.

Children and young people benefit from an excellent range of positive activities and therapies that help them express themselves creatively. This helps every child to participate to their full potential and promotes a strong culture of community and inclusion.

The school and residential provision embody the approach that safeguarding is 'everybody's business'. The senior leadership team prioritises the safety and well-being of children and young people. Staff are well trained in key areas of safeguarding. Children and young people contribute to making the residential provision a safe and welcoming space to stay.

It is an outstanding feature of the residential provision that it is outward facing and forward thinking. Staff think beyond the immediate needs of children and young people to teach them the skills and to build their confidence in order to protect themselves as they move on into adult life.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of residential was relatively new in post at the previous inspection. She has now had time to use her outstanding leadership qualities to make significant improvements to the service.

The head of residential is inspirational and highly effective as a leader and a manager. Staff, without exception, described how the culture of the residential service has shifted to place the needs of children and young people at the heart of the service. They attribute this to the knowledge, skill and passion of the head of residential.

Staff report feeling more included in developing the service. They described now having clear direction and high expectations in relation to standards of care. This makes them more effective in their role.

Staff attend weekly meetings and have opportunities to reflect on their practice and share ideas. Most staff receive regular, formal supervision from the head of residential. However, this is not always the case for waking night staff. This is a shortfall that the head of care is aware of and has plans in place to address.

The head of residential continually advocates strongly for the rights of children and young people. She leads by example and creates a culture of inclusion. The head of residential leads an effective staff team through an excellent balance between challenge and support to drive improvement and maintain high standards.

The head of residential has overseen several initiatives to improve the residential service since the last inspection. The recruitment and selection process for new staff has improved and includes a range of activities that involve children and young people, while several new staff have been recruited to the residential team. All staff are now fully inducted and suitably experienced for the role. A parent commented

that, 'I am in awe of the quality of staff that they manage to recruit.'

The executive headteacher of the school provides excellent support to the head of the residential. He is a skilled, experienced leader and uses this experience to excellent effect by mentoring, enabling and supporting the head of residential in her role. The executive headteacher is visible and directly involved in working with residential staff and children and young people. This ensures that the residential provision is a fully integrated part of the whole school provision.

The school governing body provides effective oversight and constructive challenge in relation to the welfare of residential pupils and the quality of care. They make good use of monitoring reports from the head of residential and an independent visitor to keep informed of developments. The board member who is the dedicated lead for residential services visits the provision regularly and speaks to staff, children and young people.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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

Executive Headteacher: Mr Derek Kitchen

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Inspector

Lee Kirwin, social care inspector (lead)



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