

# Standard 3 Visit

Name of Service	Oak Lodge School
Date of previous visit	08/02/2024
Date of this visit	13/03/2024
Standard 3 Visitor	Mark Goode
Time of visit	13.30
Visit Supported by	Headteacher – Caroline Rowlandson
	Heads of Residential: Connor Byrne/Elizabeth Quinn

#### **About the Independent Visitor**

Visiting the residential provision today is Mark Goode. Mark has worked in the Education sector for the past 24 years, leading in multiple schools and alternative providers with experience as both Headteacher and Executive Headteacher. Mark spent time as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors with OFSTED. Mark is experienced in leading bespoke education covering ages 4 to 19 across the full academic range for pupils with wide-ranging complex additional, special and health needs. Mark's strong track-record of inspection processes has helped organisations with low ratings, as well as both 'Good' and 'Outstanding' ratings. Mark undertakes visits on behalf of Platinum Care Consultancy in a number of residential School settings. These include settings designated for care and education of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties, sensory impairment, physical disabilities and health conditions.

#### **Standard 3 Visits**

INTRODUCTION: Standard 3 - Monitoring by Independent Visitors (as of 5th September 2022).

- 3.1 The Governing Body, trustees, or proprietor of the school appoint a representative who is independent of the leadership and management of the school to visit the residential provision six times, spread evenly, over the course of a school year and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. The representative is vetted in line with the school's safe recruitment policy, in accordance with the safer recruitment requirements set out in Keeping children safe in education, and has the skills and authority to effectively carry out this role
- 3.2 Monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include:
  - conversations with children, the senior management team and staff;
  - conversations with social workers where relevant;
  - conversations with parents/carers where relevant;
  - checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, bullying, restraint (including
    restrictive interventions), risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children
    including in relation to residential provision;
  - evaluation of the quality of the provision and effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded;
  - Assessment of the suitability and physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the residential provision and the external environment.
- 3.3 Written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the Headteacher (or school equivalent) and where applicable the Governing Body, trust, or proprietor.
  - Reports are also provided to each member of that body (or the appropriate committee of that body)
    within two weeks and as written by the visitor without amendment or summary. The Governing Body,
    trustees, or proprietor of the school should record a formal response to each written report.
  - Monitoring reports and formal responses should be retained by the school and made available during an
    inspection and, on request, shared with any placing authorities and with the local authority where the
    school is located.
- 3.4 The Headteacher (or school equivalent), Governing Body, trustees, or proprietor carry out, and record in writing, once each year: a review of the operation and resourcing of the school's welfare provision for residential pupils, in relation to:
  - its Statement of Purpose;
  - its staffing policy;
  - the placement plans for individual children; and
  - an internal assessment of its compliance with these standards and
  - actions it will undertake to ensure compliance.

There is also an intention to review other thematic areas in discussion with the school:

- The evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded.
- An assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture, and equipment of the School.

During visits opportunities are also taken to:

- Provide opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet me (in private if they wish).
- Carry out observations of the care provided, or systems being used.

#### Introduction and Context for this visit

Oak Lodge is a regional maintained Special Education Needs school in the London Borough of Wandsworth, providing education for pupils aged 10 to 19; who are D/deaf and/or who have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). (The term D/deaf is used throughout education and research to describe students who are Deaf (British Sign Language users) and deaf (who are hard of hearing and tend to communicate more orally).

Many of the pupils have additional needs e.g. ASD, Motor Difficulties, Visual Impairment, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, etc. and require a differentiated curriculum and more intensive support to facilitate their learning. The school aims to support the development of each student's full language and communication potential using a student-centred multi-modal approach to language development which includes BSL, Sign Supported English (SSE), spoken English, written English and the use of visual and kinaesthetic learning strategies. Students benefit from being educated in an inclusive multimodal communication environment with additional intensive pupil support to facilitate their learning when required.

Oak Lodge is centrally located just south of central London near the A205 (South Circular). Rail services are excellent with Balham and Clapham Junction rail station and Clapham South tube stations within walking distance. To date they have pupils from 32 different local authorities and offer weekly residential facilities which have been praised by Ofsted.

The residential service aims to provide a safe and nurturing environment which allows young people to develop skills to become independent and develop their D/deaf identity. Residential boarding is offered Monday- Friday for young people who attend Oak Lodge School and have an EHCP and additional support with social development from Wandsworth Borough and across London. Phoenix House offers up to four nights a week, term-time boarding for students aged 11-19 years. Accommodating up to 19 students per night, the unit is staffed by a professional team who specialise in working with young D/deaf people with additional needs.

This report has been completed following the 2<sup>nd</sup> Standard 3 visit undertaken by Platinum Care and took place towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> half term of the year on a Wednesday afternoon. Upon arrival I spent time with the Headteacher as a means to capturing the context of this visit, and then joined the Co-Heads of Residential Care as they completed their weekly Senior Residential Staff Meeting. I then undertook an extensive consultation with the Co-Heads to cover elements of follow up from my last visit, and the required mandatory checks in a Standard 3, before joining staff and boarders for a section of their evening. After the visit I sought to reach a social worker for one of the boarders and spoke to X parents regarding their experiences of the residential setup at Oak Lodge.

During my initial meeting with the Headteacher I was informed that there have been no staff changes in residential since my last visit in term 3, and that one pupil has been undergoing the initial stages of introduction to the residential cohort. This means that there is a stability in the setup at present.

Areas requiring	Areas requiring action from previous visit			
Action Point from Previous Visit	Provider's Response and Verification by Independent Visitor			
Care Planning and Risk Assessment Review For the Residential Leads to consider and apply the feedback in this report related to the regularity of review of plans and risk assessments. Making sure they are reviewed in line with the intentions of the National Minimum Standards. In so doing, to also consider the addition of a mechanism for gathering and recording of parent/carer views when reviewing.	Response Senior residential team will create this as an action point to complete and update current plans and then share at a Team meeting. Set expectations for key workers to complete care plans. To have a review of care plans as a standing item on the Senior team agenda. Review current practice and frequency and method of collecting information from parents.  Verification in this visit  The Co-Heads of Residential informed me that plans are being reviewed every 3 months as ongoing practice and that liaison with parents regarding content is set to be twice yearly. This has been decided upon as a balance between vigilance and not having a feeling of bombarding parents. These contacts will take place in the terms when a full report is not sent home, thereby meaning one formal contact per long term. This is a sensible approach.			

## **Reviewing of the Quality of Provision**

For the Leaders of the Residential Service to consider the next steps for the development of the service against the new areas for improvement once the OFSTED report is published, and consider the suggestions made in this visit (SCCIF Audit tool and other suggestions).

#### **Response**

SCIFF tool to be used with the senior team to evaluate the provision against the Ofsted standards, and to implement the verbal action points raised at the debrief from Ofsted.

# **Verification in this visit**

Staff Training has now been placed under the new HR manager as the 1<sup>st</sup> point of contact and is being centrally recorded. I was also informed that the Fire recording system sits under the Assistant Business and there is a meeting planned for next term related to this. There is also an action plan related to the fabric of the Residential setup that is designed to freshen things. This includes a process for capturing staff feedback on work to be undertaken. I have agreed to review progress in this area into term 5.

# How well Children and Young People are Safeguarded.

During this visit the Headteacher informed me that there is a weekly meeting that sees all follow up action recorded related to open safeguarding concerns that is attended by all DSLs, including for Residential. This ensures that all records are checked thoroughly. The Co-Head of Residential then shared the minute taking system that does this during our consultation, and I am happy to report that there is strong oversight here. The process of moving over to CPOMS is taking place currently with an introduction for staff being imminent. The recording processes will likely be moved across thereafter. This is an area that I will look to revisit in my subsequent visits.

Through these discussions and review of the events in residential since my last visit I was shown that there have been no referrals for support that have seen advice from outside of the school. There has been vigilance related to mobile phone use as referenced in the last visit but this has been managed discreetly and securely. As a result of this and the discussions held/scrutiny of processes and records, I continue to be of the view that there are no concerns about safety for the boarders.

	Mandatory Areas
Topic	Comments
Records of attendance/ exclusion/ missing episodes	During this visit I was informed that since the last Standard 3 visit that took place (08.02.2024) there have been no episodes of boarders going missing from residential and no exclusions from residential.
20.9	Attendance figures have been captured since the last Standard 3 visit that took place, and the attendance percentages illustrate an average of 83.88% for residents, although these figures include a resident that has not been able to attend at all owing to broader concerns. When this student is disapplied from the statistics the average attendance rises to 89.88%. There have been no unauthorised absences at all in this period.
Complaints 19.1, 19.2, 19.3	In discussion with the Co-Heads of Residential it was explained that there have been no complaints received since the last Standard 3 visit in February. Given the positive nature of the feedback I have received this does not surprise me at all.
Sanctions 20.6	During this visit, I once again discussed the approach taken to behaviour support in the residential service and was informed that there have been no sanctions used since my last visit in February. There has been a referral to external support for a boarder that has required it after an incident that took place just before my last visit and this is being supported by a Deaf CAMHS assessment in late March. I will be seeking to capture an update in my next visit. The positive reflections I have made in the consultations section illustrates the impact this has, and validates this approach from the interactions I observed in this visit, topped off with comments from one parent related to how the residential service changes lives.
Restraint (including restrictive interventions) 20.3, 20.4, 20.5, 20.6, 20.7	In the light of the feedback received in my consultations and the time I spent with the boarders and staff during this visit, it is very clear to me that the use of dialogue and calm support generally precludes the likelihood of situations occurring where any form of physical intervention will be required, and there have been none since my last visit in February.
Risk Assessments Appendix B (11,16)	During this visit the Co-Heads of Residential explained that some adaptations have been brought in to processes for plans and risk assessments in terms of the review timings (as detailed in the recommendations follow up above). In addition, they illustrated how their processes of quality assuring the reviews and the language used by key workers sees critique applied. In this way they illustrate how the use of language is checked, and
Placement Plans 7.2	any hint of judgement in the review process is thereby challenged. Key workers have been updating the plans in line with the newly adapted timelines and I will review a selection in my next visit. They also detailed how there are new routines being used related to rewards to support consistencies between home and residential setups. The weekly feedback process is supporting this.

# Suitability of the building, furnishings & external environment.

As explained higher up this document, there is a 'refresh' programme underway for the Residential setup as explained by the Co-Heads of Residential. This is set to include a well-being room is coming for staff. Other planned developments include possibly adding new light fittings, plants and canvasses to decorate the computer room with art made by the pupils of the school. The overview plan is set to go to the Headteacher for discussion and approval imminently.

In this visit I once again noted how the space is used to support a homely atmosphere and friendly interactions between boarders, visitors and staff. The fabric of the building remains fit for purpose but the plans for development will enhance them further.

# **Consultations Supporting this Visit.**

Under Standard 3 this is stated as meaning that conversations with children, senior management team, staff and parents/carers and social workers, where relevant.

## **Consultation with the Headteacher**

At the beginning of this visit I met with the Headteacher to capture the current context of the school and residential setup. The developments since the last visit that I undertook were covered and the Headteacher informed me that the staff team have taken steps since the last visit, particularly with regard to the development of the Life Skills Programme – that has been a considerable focus. I was also informed of the fact that there have been other staff adjustments (Assistant Business Manager) that have had supportive consequences to the processes in residential. Towards the end of the visit I checked in again with the Headteacher and reflected upon the many strong areas that I had observed, and reflected that the Residential service is in a strong place and that the Co-Heads are seeking to build upon the strong foundations through systematic processes, evaluations and refinements.

# **Attendance at Senior Residential Staff Meeting**

As I arrived in the Residential Service the Senior Staff were engaged in their weekly review meeting. This took the form of a solidly packed agenda and was chaired by one of the Co-Heads. Attendance comprised of all senior care staff, and as several are Deaf staff members, there were several staff present that have BSL training. I later discovered that 2 of these are currently undergoing training towards qualification as signers, and the meeting also contained the presence of the senior qualified interpreter for the school (who is a practising teacher in the school as well). This meant that the signing that was taking place was also being seen as a training opportunity for the trainees. I later observed feedback being given over the interpreting that took place in the meeting.

The meeting itself saw all staff contributing in relation to key areas of day to day operations and some wider strategic discussions. The roles played in these areas were spread between deaf and hearing staff and all contributed fully. The areas covered in the meeting included:

- Individual Pupil reflections concerning observed behaviours, and an open discussion on tactics to use to support them in residential.
- Staffing updates and training opportunities.
- Discussion over staff absences and HR processes to be used (return to work interviews etc) to reinforce expectations for all.
- Reflections upon staff supervision by Senior Care staff.
- The adjustment of the overall staff team meeting to a Monday to see all involved when weekly fatigue has not become a factor.
- The development of the staff well-being room, and other internal decoration/refurbishment plans that can maximise efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
- A report back from a Senior Care worker over a connection to a charity that is contributing funds to the Residential Service. The use of this money was discussed, as well as ideas for fundraising to the cause at Oak Lodge as well.
- The meeting concluded with some housekeeping information over elements that required discussion.

Overall, this was a very compact and well organised inclusive meeting that sets the tone for the work that takes place in the Residential service very well.

#### Consultation with the Co-Heads of Residential

After the meeting detailed above I spent time with the leaders of the Residential Service and we covered all mandatory checks, as well as follow up on the recommendations that I left in February. These are covered higher up this report. We also discussed a range of other areas:

# <u>Life Skills Programme and Evidence</u>

Through scrutinising the planning that was referenced by the Headteacher I was able to see how the new programme works. It entails a monthly review process against a series of activities and milestones for life skills that is designed around the key areas that are required for independent living. The Co-Heads illustrated the system, how it works and how evidence is captured to build a strong profile and evidence base. This is viewable by parents and is accessible for Key Workers as well as the boarders themselves.

This is clearly a new initiative at the school, but has enormous potential to capture evidence of progress over time and generate further ideas for targets. I suggested that I would seek to get an update on its use in the next visit that I undertake in term 5.

#### Leavers Book

The Co-Heads shared a leavers' document that is in the process of being created for the boarders that are set to see their time at Oak Lodge come to an end this year. This contains staff and boarder reflections upon the time spent in residential over their period of attendance. The detail is very thoughtfully constructed and will serve as an evocative and moving gathering together of the journey that each boarder has gone on. Each is set to be very personalised and I look forward to reviewing the finished products as the year passes.

# **SCCIF Review Discussion**

In my last visit I shared a blank template of SCCIF audit tool for consideration by the school, and clearly by the Co-Heads of the Residential Service in the main. During this visit we spent time discussing the power that a self-evaluation using this tool can potentially have in terms of action planning to capture the many strengths that the Residential Service has and of course to illustrate the ongoing work to develop further.

The Co-Heads reflected that the work related to the Life Skills Programme is a key current development that they are involving the wider staff in, and that the SCCIF review is a tool that can be considered in the background for a while before involving other staff more deeply. I agreed that this is a sensible approach to take.

#### **Time Spent in the Residential Setup**

## **Alongside Boarders and Staff**

There were 11 boarders staying on the evening of my visit, and as I arrived I was informed that 5 had been taken bowling for the evening. Of the 6 that remained in the Residential building I spoke to 5 during the time I was present. There was also a friend of one of the boarders that had come to residential after spending the day alongside his friend at college to simply spend further time with his friend.

The oldest 2 boarders explained that they had been in college during the day, and detailed what they had been studying. One of these boarders explained his plans for the next steps at college and that this is closely connected to his wish to make more deaf and hearing friends. His interaction with a staff member over his ability to travel independently and how it was developing saw them not seeing 100% eye to eye over his travel ability, but when explained it was agreed that there are aspects where more practice is needed. It was all a healthy discussion and the staff have a great relationship with him.

The other boarders were engaged in conversation with staff over the costs of things, especially food and drink, and there was a lot of healthy, jovial interaction as befits a group of independent minded teenagers.

A younger boarder was taking part in an activity with a staff member in a separate room, but did emerge to spend time with the others as dinner approached and an exciting arrival took place in the shape of 'Q', and to take a call using facetime from her father. This was an exciting part of the evening for her and her happiness was clear to see as staff supported this event.

Q is a PAT dog that attends the residential on a weekly basis and the power of the interactions between the boarders and Q was immediately evident. He has a very calm nature and the boarders clearly enjoy spending time with him. One of the boarders was planning to take him for a walk with his owner (Teacher/Interpreter at the school). He is a fully qualified Pets as Therapy dog and it is clear that his visits are a highlight of the boarding week.

# **Consultations with 2 Staff members**

#### Care Worker

I spent time chatting to a deaf care worker during this visit (with the support of a trainee Interpreter and as QA of this was taking place from the senior Interpreter once again). He explained that he has been working in the Residential service since 2022 part time and has more recently become full time in December of 2023.

He explained that he had been working with deaf adults with mental health needs prior to this role and had wanted a fresh challenge and to work with children. He went on to explain that he has been learning a lot of new skills and is keen to move up.

It is also notable that he does not have English as his first language and that consequently his language and signing skills should receive comment for the range that he has. He feels very included at Oak Lodge and is getting a wide range of experiences – and is keen to possibly move up the organisation in time.

#### Teacher and Senior Interpreter

This visit also saw me spend a considerable amount of time alongside a teacher and qualified signer that was present alongside staff, boarders and other trainee signers throughout the visit, meetings and time with the staff and boarders. She is also the owner of 'Q', the PAT dog that brought such joy in this visit.

We discussed her role and the power of both working at the school and in the residential environment towards the end of the visit. I was struck by her passion for the role she has and the distance she lives away from the school is testament to her commitment. The subtle yet powerful way her presence was guiding the quality of communication for all (myself as a non-signer in particular) was inspirational to note, and the fact that Oak Lodge has staff such as this lady is a key reason why staff and pupils feel so valued here. The communication was aided in no end by her involvement and I noted that her influence was at its most powerful when the signing was discussed with the trainees. The best way to analogise this is to explain that the words alone are added to by an interpreter of her experience and sees the flavour of the discussion enhanced a great deal.

During this visit I also spoke at length to 2 staff members, one being the interpreter that was supporting my work, and her passion for the role she was undertaking was palpable. Her value to the boarders and other staff was clear, and the importance of sign language for general communication was also evident. Staff are

generally accomplished signers, and it is clear how much the residents thrive as a result. There is a real community feel to residential that is inspiring.

I also spent time in conversation with a member of staff that comes from the deaf community. He currently works as a Senior Residential Care worker, and is one of several employees that are deaf. He explained his journey into the post he holds, and that he had been employed outside of the school prior to securing the role, but has now been at Oak Lodge for 2 years, loves working in the team and sees it as very important to be a role model for the boarders/pupils. He is very keen to showcase the fact that aspiration should not be limited by being deaf. He explained how well qualified he is, and that working at Oak Lodge is very important to him personally, but that he has ambition to climb higher in the organisation. Overall, he stated that he works at Oak Lodge because he views the role as worthwhile and that he is able to make a difference.

He is a powerful advocate for the inclusive nature of the work that takes place and stated that he has always felt 'like a pea in a pod' at the school.

# Parent/Carer and Social Worker Consultations.

Following this Standard 3 visit, I called and attempted to speak to the parents of two boarders, and at the time of typing this report I have been able to reach one of these. I also attempted, for the second consecutive visit, to reach a Social Worker without success. It is my intention to seek this in advance of my next visit through an email contact.

The parent that I reached gave me the following feedback:

The boarder in question has been attending the Residential setup for close to 5 years, and is now in year 11. The parent that I spoke to explained that a different school was considered their first choice, but the visits that were taken to explore a placement were not successful and made the family re-think. The home location is not close to Oak Lodge but upon visiting the fit was immediate.

The parent explained that her son has autism as well as being deaf and as such the response to his feeling anxious upon arrival when visiting Oak Lodge for the first time was really supportive, and immediately made everyone feel at ease. The parent explained that attending Oak Lodge has been 'life changing' as an immersive experience alongside deaf peers and staff that contains adult and male role models for her son. She feels it is 100% the most suitable environment for her son.

In terms of the impact of attending the school, and residential in particular, has seen him improve in so many ways; massively increasing his tolerance for wearing clothes; understanding self-care, privacy and cleanliness; becoming very independent related to cooking, washing clothes and in his social skills through trips out into the community. The parent explained that contact with the residential service is strong with lots of updates, emails and texts being received. They are particularly impressed with the fact that continuity between the classroom and residential is supported by a named TA spending time with their son in both environments.

In terms of concerns, the parent detailed an event some 18 months ago when it was felt that care was not at the high standard that had come to be expected as the normal, but upon commenting on it just once to the Headteacher there was immediate repair action taken, and there has been no repeat of this in any way.

The parent concluded by stating that they are really glad he is at Oak Lodge and they would not send him to any other school. They have absolutely no concerns and wished me to know that they feel the work and the staff is impeccable.

Thematic Areas		
Standard/SCCIF	Evidence / Observation	
Reference		
	None undertaken at this visit.	

# **Summary of Visit and Quality of Provision**

This was an equally strong visit as the first that I have undertaken to Oak Lodge as both the range of commentary on the quality and the staff that I have encountered continues to be overwhelmingly positive.

The leaders of the service have been quick to build upon the recent OFSTED Inspection and are genuinely embracing the challenge and support that I am trying to offer.

The parental feedback received in this visit has also illustrated how important the care that is being offered is. The parent that I spoke to was very keen to explain that the service has truly changed life for the resident in question. This is a powerful statement and speaks volumes.

My thanks to all staff, pupils and parents that have once again welcomed me with open arms and embraced my support. I would like to wish everyone a lovely Easter break and I'm looking forward to my next visit already.

Name: Mark Goode Date: 25/03/2024

RECOMMENDATIONS	AND/OR RESPONSE FOR THIS VISIT	
Actions	Comments from Provider	Expected Completion Date
Building developments & Life-skills Programme For the Residential Leaders to continue in their work to develop both the fabric of the building and the life skills programme in order for me to review progress at my next visit.		Term 5
SCCIF (Outstanding Criteria): The Effectiveness of Leaders and Managers Leaders and managers create a culture of aspiration and positivity. They have high expectations of their staff to change and improve the lives of the children they are responsible for.		
Updates to Care Plans and Risk Assessments  For the reviews of the associated documents to be available for me to consider a sample in my next visit.		Term 5
SCCIF (Outstanding Criteria): How well Children are helped and protected  Professional practice results in sustained improvement to the lives of children. Highly effective planning manages and minimises risks inside and outside of the school.		

Safeguarding Record System	Ongo
To continue to pursue the developments	
towards transferring over to CPOMS.	
SCCIF (Outstanding Criteria): The overall	
experiences and progress of children	
Research-informed practice, some of which may	
be innovative, continues to develop from a	
strong and confident base, making an	
exceptional difference to children's experiences	
and progress.	

#### **Head of Residential's Comments**

We greatly appreciate your positive feedback and the detailed insights you provided about the areas we have developed, as well as the time you dedicated to observing the young people's participation in residential activities and the staff's approach in working with them.

Name: Conor Byrne

Date: 26.04.24

#### **Head Teachers' Comments**

The overall report captures the work of the residential team and progress against their improvement agenda. The passion for all staff to support our young people is evident and really showcases why Phoenix house is such a special provision in which they can thrive. Q has certainly been an asset and the work that our extended team provide.

We have a clear list of actions that the Head of residential and his team are addressing.

Name: Caroline Rowlandson

Date: 24.04.24

# Formal Response from the Governing Body, trustees, or proprietor of the school

A very comprehensive report with clear recommendations and actions. Mark's recognition of the high quality provision and positive feedback from the parent he spoke with is wonderful to read. It was good to connect with Mark recently to share our thoughts verbally and talk through his recommendations. We are aligned in being impressed by Phoenix House and its excellent staff – well done!

Name: Louisa Steensma Williamson, Governor

**Date:** 20 May 2024