



Standard 3 Visit

Name of Service	Oak Lodge School
Date of previous visit	07/01/2025
Date of this visit	11/02/2025 Term 3 2024-25 Visit (2) after 07/01/2025 visit was implanted to compensate for term 2 visit not being possible, and to preserve the principle of evenly spreading visits across the school year.
Standard 3 Visitor	Mark Goode
Time of visit	08.45 – 11.15, 3.00 – 3.45
Visit Supported by	Headteacher – Caroline Rowlandson Acting Head of Care – Saul Alison

About the Independent Visitor
<p>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.</p>

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 visit took place in the final week of the 3rd term of the school year, and followed a similar visit in the first week of the term. This duality was the result of having not been able to complete my visit at the tail end of term 2 owing to staff absences. This approach has ensured compliance (as far as possible) with the principle of spreading six visits across the year as evenly as possible. My intention had been to visit and observe the boarders as they made preparations in the morning, had breakfast and went into school, but traffic delays meant an adaptation to this visit. I met with the Headteacher on arrival and captured events pertaining to staffing (most notably the recent appointment of the Acting Head of Care), and then spent time with the appointee. These discussions are recorded in the consultations section lower down this report. I also met a member of the Therapy team to discuss the way life skills work is undertaken across both Education and Residential.

Following these meetings, I left and took a hiatus, returning at 3pm to observe and spend time with the boarders as their school day ended, handover was undertaken from Education staff to the Residential team, and the boarders moved into the boarding part of the day. The visit also saw me recording all responses related to the regular mandatory checks for a Standard 3 visit, and I undertook a call to a parent of two boarders in the days that followed my visit. This visit saw a flexible approach needed to enable the gathering of all information, and the school staff and I worked together to achieve this. I remain impressed with the willingness of all at Oak Lodge to embrace the critique that Standard 3 visits provide and this was more evident than ever in the course of this visit.

Areas requiring action from previous visit	
Action Point from Previous Visit	Provider's Response and Verification by Independent Visitor in next visit
<p><u>Review Documents and Systems</u> For the following to be available for review as far as possible in my next visit in February:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NMS/SCCIF review and Action Plan (if in place by then). 2. New Maintenance and Health/Safety monitoring system. 3. To discuss the Life Skills programme with the therapy team. 4. To consider external consultations with LA representatives/social workers of any boarders that would feel relevant. 	<p><u>Update in this visit</u> This visit saw me complete updates related to all aspects of these areas in my various consultations with staff throughout the day and they are all detailed in the consultations section below.</p>
<p><u>Statement of Purpose</u> To consider the way a 'child friendly' version of the statement of purpose can be created and made available.</p>	<p><u>Interim Updated in this visit</u> I reviewed this during the visit and my reflections are also detailed in the consultations section below.</p>
How well Children and Young People are Safeguarded.	
<p>During this Standard 3 visit, the Headteacher and I discussed recent events and concerns for the residential cohort. I was informed that there have been no fresh referrals for safeguarding concerns made, and the Headteacher and I discussed a small number of open cases and internal concerns that have been raised.</p> <p>Two cases remain open with support agencies, and are receiving support from school staff. There is detailed and relevant support in place, with open and ongoing communication with social workers and child protection agencies. One boarder is in the process of moving from children's services to adults' and strong support is in place, with school staff undertaking good quality supportive work in this as an external PA is being brought into the fold as part of this process. Internally, the Headteacher informed me of support and discussions that have taken place to make sure that interactions between boarders of different ages remains healthy and that relationships in boarding are all as they should be, and as a result of all of the discussions that were held, I remain of the view that I have no concerns related to safeguarding at Oak Lodge after this visit.</p>	

Mandatory Areas	
Topic	Comments
<p>Records of attendance/ exclusion/ missing episodes 20.9</p>	<p>During this visit I undertook a discussion around attendance and I was informed that no boarders have been excluded or gone missing since my last visit in early term 3.</p> <p>The boarding cohort was healthy and filled with energy during my visit, and the information shared showed that attendance remains strong with an overall attendance figure for all students of 88.48%. Boarders clearly enjoy their time in residential and this makes a significant contribution to attendance generally. In the next visit it is my intention to consider the boarding cohort's attendance set against the whole school figure.</p>
<p>Complaints 19.1, 19.2, 19.3</p>	<p>In discussion with the Headteacher, it was explained that there have been no complaints received since the last Standard 3 visit early in term 3. I observed interactions between boarders and staff in residential, and at handover from education. It was clear that staff and boarders have a mutually respectful interrelationship and the chances of complaints remain unlikely in my view.</p>

Sanctions 20.6	During this visit, I was again informed that there have been no sanctions used since my last visit early in term 3. There have been some behavioural issues between boarders that have required the use of restorative processes and support after some concerning comments, but it was clear that this has been a successfully managed process as things have improved greatly since.
Restraint (including restrictive interventions) 20.3, 20.4, 20.5, 20.6, 20.7	The topic of restraint was discussed in conjunction with the sanctions element above, and it was explained that no circumstances requiring the restraint of a boarder have occurred. This remains unlikely at Oak Lodge in my opinion as a result of the nurturing environment that has been created. Staff and boarders have an open dialogue that is based upon encouraging transparency and fairness. As a result, boarders are able to express their views and are listened to. This generally precludes the possibility of the circumstances where a restraint may occur.
Risk Assessments Appendix B (11,16)	During this visit, I explored the current position related to Care Plans and Risk Assessments with both the Headteacher and the Acting Head of Care separately. The Headteacher explained that there has been a recent activity undertaken when she undertook a sampling audit of Care Plans and Risk Assessments. This was undertaken as a means of supporting the newly aligned leadership in Residential to navigate termly updates and records.
Placement Plans 7.2	<p>When I spoke to the newly appointed Acting Head of Care, he explained that he has been reviewing the existing paperwork and has been researching other examples as a means to improve processes. This is part of a process of linking with other provisions as well, and I have reflected upon this with him in the visit (the detail is captured more fully in the consultations section).</p> <p>I made the suggestion that a recorded audit of the contents of all Care Plans and Risk Assessments as a baseline for him since taking over would be a fruitful process. The current position is that the Ofsted Inspection that took place prior to the departure of the former Co-Head of Care saw a handover document produced that had referenced care plans being checked. There is therefore no concern at present about compliance.</p> <p>The next review of all Care Plans and Risk Assessments (based on the NMS) is therefore required to be undertaken by the Easter break. I suggested that this full audit being completed and recorded by the 13th March would support me in being able to validate this process having been undertaken in line with the requirements of the NMS when I next visit in term 4.</p>

Suitability of the building, furnishings & external environment.

In this visit I followed up the area for development from the recent OFSTED Inspection, and it is clear that the suggestions made have been acted upon. During the visit I spent time with the boarders in the main school in an area that I had not viewed before as they returned from their daytime activities and gather in a main hall area – this space is more than suitable. This was then followed by a short settling period in the canteen area before moving off to Residential.

The purpose of these two periods was to enable staff from the daytime shift to share details of the day to the evening shift leader for Residential, and then for handover to staff to be undertaken before the evening began. All areas used are well maintained and fit for purpose.

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.

Discussions with Headteacher and Senior Residential Staff

Headteacher

Upon arrival in the morning I spent some time with the Headteacher discussing recent events, and the events surrounding the recruitment process for the Head of Care was chief among these. An external candidate had applied but the mechanics of supporting an interview were quite tricky and this candidate withdrew. The position now is that an internal candidate has been appointed as he has a strong track record in the service and has a great deal of experience. This appointment satisfies the primary area for development as recorded in the recent OFSTED Inspection. The Headteacher explained that a structure is to be developed with a supportive Deputy set to be formalised in place, and that the organisational setup related to numbers of evenings with the senior staff staying over is to be finalised. The Headteacher explained that aspects of recruitment are still ongoing and that a female Senior Residential Staff member would be of benefit. There are some details related to staff capacity and training that may require extra arrangements to be put in place, and through discussion I made a number of suggestions during and after this visit related to aspects of this. These details are included in the recommendations at the end of this report.

It also became clear that the new Acting Head of Care is currently working on the paperwork side of monitoring. The Headteacher explained that reviews of Care Plans and work related to the NMS and SCCIF Audits are to be an ongoing consideration and that a hybrid working situation related to the paperwork was under consideration. I suggested a connection to a local provider of my acquaintance that could be of benefit in these regards, perhaps alongside burgeoning contact and support from similar providers for deaf children. I will be looking to review the position related to the SCCIF and NMS audits in my next visit in term 4. The Headteacher also updated me over developments related to the Maintenance and Health/Safety monitoring system. These have been completed since the Inspection and are detailed above.

Newly Appointed Acting Head of Care

The newly appointed Acting Head of Care explained his excitement and how he is looking forward to the challenge that lies ahead. He stated how motivated he is to develop the service and using the experiences he has accrued in the 6 years that he has been working at Oak Lodge. He was also keen to stress that he is keen to embrace all support that is on offer. This was explained as being in place from a former Head of Care, and that this brings a breadth of experience.

He went on to explain that he is working on a template for improving the care plans, and has plans to contact two other residential services for Deaf students. There was also discussion over a development plan that is being drawn up to connect to a training provider. In discussion over some aspects of the work, I made the suggestion that a detailed audit of the current Care Plans and Risk Assessments would be a good place start, and that it would be sensible to plan and complete this in such a way as to enable me to review it all in my next visit. For this purpose, I suggested the date of 13th March to complete this work. This will also mean that detailed feedback over the contents can be given to all key workers and fed back into the plans each term, beginning with next term.

A further suggestion that was made was to connect up, if possible, with a Wandsworth based Residential service that has maintained an outstanding rating for two successive OFSTED Inspections – with a particular reference being placed upon the way plans and paperwork are organised. This was also suggested to the Headteacher and I am happy to connect the two services for this purpose. The Acting Head of Care also shared several newly reviewed documents with me in the course of this visit. These are reviewed lower in this document.

Discussion with Therapy Lead related to Life Skills Processes

In this visit I held a very interesting and informative discussion with a key member of the Therapy team. She began by explaining the fact that one of the former Co-Heads of Residential Care (prior to their departure) had established the Life Skills Framework as a means to see therapies add greater depth and detail to the development of independence skills.

The targets are broken down into an activity analysis and it is all recorded in the computer program access as a means to ensuring transparency and simplicity. There is a clear connection through this to annual reviews of EHCPs and this is all shared with the key leaders of the school and residential. This then leads on to new targets.

The main reflection that was expressed was that the breakdowns and data help to make EHCP reviews openly reviewable based on a solid evidence base. It was also clear from this discussion that the Residential Service is key in the evidence as it is felt that the majority of the progress is made in Residential Time. We then discussed the way the evidence is recorded as a means to showcasing this overtly. The Therapy Lead agreed that discussion with the new Acting Head of Care was needed to draw out the best way to demonstrate the impact that Residential time has in this regard into a form of data that can be easily seen. I agreed to review any emerging data in subsequent visits.

Consultations with staff and observations of Boarders during the visit

During this visit in the afternoon I met again with the Acting Head of Care and other attendant staff as the boarders returned from their school day, and observed handover between the two teams ahead of the evening of boarding. It was clear that most boarders had had a productive day, but one younger member of the boarding cohort had been unhappy at a change of plan related to an evening activity, and was refusing to take part in a changed plan. The staff were quick to realign the plan and were set to offer alternative activities to the boarder as the evening began.

The staff on hand supported the boarders in settling in to the transition half hour whilst all information was disseminated to all staff, and then (after a short period of boardgame play and general chat) the boarders moved into the Residential Space. As this happened I noted that the evening activities were re-organised to include all boarders and as two have not yet received their freedom passes, 2 oyster cards were prepared from petty cash. This took place quickly and smoothly.

I met and spoke to two members of staff that are currently supporting the operations of the Residential Setup, and unpicked that one is a casual member of staff that is undertaking a series of evening shifts until such time as a new senior is in post. The second was from a pool of 4 casual staff (3 of which are teaching assistants in the school). This is all helping maintain the service as it is currently operating. All boarders settled quickly into the evening and were keen to undertake the evening activities that were off site, and well managed.

It was also made very clear that the handover process that I observed is followed up with emails that detail events and any issues for staff to use and hold as an evidence base. This process is then repeated in mornings back to school staff – creating an ongoing cycle of awareness of needs and support.

Review of Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide to Phoenix House

Newly Reviewed Statement of Purpose

The Acting Head of Care shared the most recently updated version of the statement of purpose with me during this visit, and I have reviewed it against the detail contained in Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards here:

- The statement is clearly constructed and makes very clear that student welfare is central to the purpose of residential stays, as well as explaining the general purpose of the school.
- The statement explains the overall purpose and arrangements for the residential provision and how this is organised. The statement also sets out how the residential provision complements the life of the school, details the staffing structure how staff are supervised, and line managed.
- The Trauma Informed approach that the Residential model is based upon is explained in detail, the purpose of the Life-skills and Independence Curriculum as a range of pragmatic and organisational details.
- The Children's Guide (detailed below) also ensures that this part of the requirements of Standard 1 are met as well.

Overall, this statement of purpose is comprehensive and meets the requirements of Standard 1 of the NMS in all regards, although the component in Standard 1.1 for the statement to have been produced in consultation with families is not 100% clear. I would suggest that this is undertaken as soon as is practical.

Children's Guide

The Children's Guide was shared with me in this visit and I am happy to report that this is a really helpful, colourful and informative document. It is simple and clear, without being patronising and details all key information that is required – answering a wide range of questions that a prospective boarder may have about life in the Residential setup.

The inclusion of photos of current boarders adds a touch of warmth to the guide and makes the range of activities, support, fun and games very clear. It is a very effective means of communicating what Residential stays at Oak Lodge are all about and I was very impressed with the way it is laid out. In short, I believe it is strong enough to merit sharing with other providers as a piece of exemplary work.

Consultation with Parent of 2 recently started boarders

In the days that followed this visit I undertook a call to a parent of two boarders that have recently transferred into the school and begun boarding. The family live in Brighton and have a background in another country that has meant that, until recent work has been undertaken to support the boarders learning of BSL sign language, communication has been tricky.

The parent explained that the previous school that was being attended by the boarders was closing down and a very specialist environment was needed. Oak Lodge was felt to be the best option. The parent explained that the key aims of attendance have been social skills development, making friends, accessing the curriculum, and that BSL skills to be able to function as independently as possible in society have been key drivers for the family. Naturally a closer provision to the family home on the south coast would have been preferred but the boarders are happy at the school, and whilst the journey is tricky, it is only once a week.

The parent was keen to stress that the support of staff is very helpful, that staff have 'good souls' and that the school has been 'so far, so good'. It is relatively recent to have seen long term impacts, but it is clear to me that the family are very happy with the Residential service. I have met the boarders themselves on a few occasions now and they are lively and keen communicators that are thriving.

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

Summary of Visit and Quality of Provision		
<p>This was an important visit to the Residential Service at Oak Lodge as it has shown that the school has moved quickly to respond to the challenge laid down to recruit a new Head of Care in the recent OSTED Inspection. There has been strident action taken, and this is to the school's credit. The next steps to be taken are critical in ensuring that the new staff structures maintain the solid standards that exist, and are aligned with appropriate support as required. The Headteacher and the Acting Head of Care are both aware of the scale of the challenge that lies ahead and are resolved to making sure standards remain high. I am keen to help this next phase and will be looking to bring my experience and contacts to bear to this end.</p> <p>I look forward to my return in term 4 and wish everyone well as the challenges are taken on as a team. I am grateful to the staff for their flexibility in helping me to complete the two visits this term and will see them all soon.</p>		
Name: Mark Goode		Date: 19/02/2025
RECOMMENDATIONS AND/OR RESPONSE FOR THIS VISIT		
Actions	Comments from Provider	Expected Completion Date
<p><u>Care Plans and Risk Assessments</u></p> <p>It is suggested that the Acting Head of Care undertakes a detailed audit of care plans and risk assessments to act as a baseline for any next steps, and to ensure compliance with the NMS requirements to review them at least termly.</p> <p><u>SCCIF (Good Criteria) How well children are helped and protected</u> Plans and risk assessments are timely and address effectively any known vulnerabilities each child may have. Risk assessments are known to the staff team and regularly reviewed and updated. Children are supported to take appropriate risks according to their developmental age and understanding as part of their development of independent living skills.</p>		
<p><u>Leadership Support</u></p> <p>It is suggested that consideration is given to the various ideas for the provision of support to the staff team, and the new Acting Head of Care in particular.</p> <p><u>SCCIF (Outstanding Criteria) The effectiveness of leaders and managers</u> Leaders and managers develop and maintain professional relationships between the school and partner agencies that ensure the best possible care, experiences and futures for children.</p>		

<p><u>Statement of Purpose</u></p> <p>It is suggested that consideration be given to how families' consultation over the Statement of Purpose can be incorporated to fully meet the stated aims of Standard 1 of the NMS.</p> <p><u>SCCIF (Good Criteria) The effectiveness of leaders and managers</u> The statement of principles and practice is kept under review and clearly sets out the ethos and objectives of the school.</p>		
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Head of Residential's Comments		
<p>It is a positive report reading it since my new recent appointment as Acting Head of Care. It is a detailed and the feedback is positive and encouraging. I am grateful for the support offered and linking to external professionals such as a training link provider and a different residential provision to able me to explore further possibilities to improve this residential service.</p> <p>I will look forward to Mark's next visit soon during this term 4 before Easter.</p>		
Name: Saul Allison		
Date: 27.02.2025		

Head Teachers' Comments		
<p>A thorough report with some clear areas that have been addressed since the last report and some clear actions to be completed by the 13th of March. The Acting Head of care will be supported to link with the Local provider to support development into the new role. An audit of paperwork on Access is a priority and will be discussed at regular Senior meetings and an agenda item.</p>		
Name: Caroline Rowlandson		
Date: 24.02.2025		

Formal Response from the Governing Body, Trustees, or proprietor of the school		
<p>Congratulations on Saul Allison's appointment to Acting Head of Care – this is a positive step forward, and we wish him all the best in his new role.</p> <p>It is encouraging to see the team's ongoing commitment to maintaining high standards of care and safeguarding, as well as their focus on strengthening staff structures and refining care plans. We commend the dedication of all staff in ensuring a nurturing and supportive environment for the students.</p> <p>Thank you to everyone for your hard work and flexibility. We look forward to seeing how things continue to develop on the next visit.</p>		
Name: Louisa Steensma Williamson and Helen Whitmore, Co-Link Governors Phoenix House		
Date: 3 March 2025		