



Standard 3 Visit

Name of Service	Oak Lodge School
Date of previous visit	14/05/2025
Date of this visit	24/06/2025
Standard 3 Visitor	Mark Goode
Time of visit	2.15pm
Visit Supported by	Interim Head of Care – Saul Allison Headteacher – Caroline Rowlandson

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 early part of the final half term of the school year on a Tuesday afternoon. The visit saw me undertake an initial consultation with the Interim Head of Care in which I covered all regular mandatory checks that are a requirement of a Standard 3 visit. I then spent time with the boarders and staff before a final consultation with the Headteacher. In the days following the visit I reached out to 2 parents of boarders to gauge their views upon their experiences of boarding.

Areas requiring action from previous visit

Action Point from Previous Visit	Provider's Response and Verification by Independent Visitor in next visit
<u>Governors' visit</u> For the written report from the recent Governors' visit to be made available in my next visit in term 6.	<u>Review in this visit</u> This document is set to be based upon a visit in the days following this visit. I will seek to review it in term 1 2025-26.
<u>Life Skills Programme</u> For the Occupational Therapist involved in the review of the Life Skills Template to be available for a consultation in my next visit if possible.	<u>Review in this visit</u> This was not undertaken in this visit but will be a focus for term 1 2025-26.
<u>SCCIF and NMS Review Processes</u> For the reviewed and updated documents related to these crucial evaluative documents to be available at the point of my next visit in term 6 if possible.	<u>Review in this visit</u> The Headteacher explained that this is set to be a focus in the coming weeks and will take place alongside the restructure that is referred to in the consultations section.

How well Children and Young People are Safeguarded.

During this Standard 3 visit, the Interim Head of Care 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, although ongoing support for one of the boarders that has since stopped boarding was explained. This has had a safeguarding element to it and the details were outlined to me. Following this discussion, and consideration of the support in place in the school generally, my view remains that safeguarding systems are comprehensive at Oak Lodge and I have no concerns after this visit.

Mandatory Areas

Topic	Comments
Records of attendance/ exclusion/ missing episodes 20.9	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 term 5. The information shared showed that attendance remains strong with an overall attendance figure since my last visit for all school students of 90.4%, with Authorised Absence of 7.8%, and Unauthorised Absence of 1.9%. Boarders' attendance has been 94.8% as an average in the same period, with Authorised Absence of 4.8%, and Unauthorised Absence of 0.2%. Boarders continue to enjoy their time in residential and this makes a significant contribution to attendance generally.
Complaints 19.1, 19.2, 19.3	The Head of Care explained that there have been no situations that have led to complaints since my last visit in term 5. Complaints remain a rare thing at Oak Lodge as a result of hard work by the Residential Team and strong, supportive relationships.
Sanctions/Consequences 20.6	During this visit the Interim Head of Care explained that one boarder has been at the centre of a consequence after a sequence of events that was caused by a personal trigger, and had escalated to see them involved in a physical altercation towards a staff member. There has been a team meeting and actions have been set in place, with the agreement and involvement of the boarder. This is strong, well considered and impactful practice that is proving successful so far. I agreed to check in on this in my next visit to ascertain the longer term effectiveness of the strategy.
Restraint/Safe Hold (including restrictive interventions) 20.3, 20.4, 20.5, 20.6, 20.7	This visit saw the Head of Care explain that there have been no incidents of restraint of any kind since my last visit in term 5. The atmosphere in boarding was positive during the visit and the processes explained in the sanctions/consequences section are an example of the typical methods used to prevent such events leading to restraints.
Risk Assessments Appendix B (11,16)	This visit saw me updated by the Interim Head of Care and he showcased the termly review processes that are in place. The Risk Assessments and Plans are all up to date and there are reports being produced in the coming 3 weeks. The new versions of the care plans for 2025-26 were shared with me and in my view they are thorough and comprehensive. An example was shown to me that has seen strong information gathering from the parent of a boarder, and in my opinion this format will be a solid base for the residential planning going forward.
Placement Plans 7.2	

Suitability of the building, furnishings & external environment.

I once again toured the residential spaces in this visit, and the Interim Head of Care once again outlined the plans for fund raising, purchases and decorations across the summer holidays after a targeted walk-around.

This has been connected to the planned arrival of new boarders that have significant needs and support staff assigned to them. This is necessitating a degree of movement of rooms and re-use of office spaces on the female floor to support this taking place. I agreed to speak to this parent as a part of my consultations in this visit and this is captured in the relevant section of the report. The premises in general remain suitable for the boarding that takes place, and are maintained well.

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:

Interim Head of Care and Deputy

I discussed a range of areas with the Interim Head of Care as detailed here:

- I was updated on the projected destinations for 4 boarders and updated on destinations for the former boarding cohort. All have received strong support and there is an end of year barbecue taking place as a mark of closure for them before they move on to their next destinations. There is also a very high quality plan in place to see a leavers' pack that is full of relevant advice for them to retain. This contains a great deal of bespoke information that will help the boarders engage with the wider community effectively. This includes personalised photos, staff goodbyes, services available moving forward for Young Deaf people, how to book interpreters, 999SL, Deaf Rainbow UK – info over LGBTQ+ information and a wide range of advice for them in the community. This is a very strong piece of work that I consider to be worthy of sharing with other provisions, and as such ought to be referenced in the SCCIF audit in the relevant section
- The Interim Head of Care also discussed recruitment that has been attempted and not seen an appointment to existing roles. He is fully on board with the need to adjust how the service is set up. I have detailed this outline more fully in the consultation I undertook with the Headteacher.
- The Interim Head of Care explained that the imminent change and new responsibilities for others will be helpful, and that he is operating as a Senior and Head of Care. As such he is pacing his work and using the support from the Headteacher in the way this is being done.
- The Interim Head of Care explained that he uses a simple app tool for task delegation that he is keen to see rolled out to other staff. There is a great deal going on to prepare the Residential Setup for September including new boarders, the new placement plans, and preparations for the end of this term as well. These include three trips that are being set up that boarders can choose from (London Transport Museum, Greenwich Park, Waterplay in Clapham Common).

Headteacher

The Headteacher and I considered events that have recently taken place, leadership of Residential and general developments as detailed here:

- The Headteacher reported that the leadership of the Residential Service has pleased her of late, and that whilst recruitment development was disappointing (with a few candidates dropping out), there is a restructure taking place that will see staff empowered and succession planning built in in a more overt way. The detail of this was explained to me and the work to make this happen is underway.
- The Interim Head of Care has been completing leadership courses and has been developing his leadership approaches, as well as receiving support for this from the Headteacher. This is a very pleasing development and bodes well moving forward. This has been taking place alongside both the Interim Head of Care and his Deputy taking on sleepovers as well.

- The Headteacher also shared that a fresh Health and Safety Audit is underway to see a new ticketing system in place for repairs and maintenance.
- The SCCIF Audit is set for updating and the Headteacher stated that the NMS audit would be shared with me as well.

It is clear that the Headteacher's plans are set to see the Residential Service streamlined and made as effective as possible for all boarders and staff, building upon a very strong base, and applying many lessons learned from the past incarnations and staff movements. I am looking forward to seeing the shape that is set in place when I next visit at the start of the next academic year.

NMS Audit

An extremely detailed review of the NMS statements has been shared with me and illustrates that there has been a great deal of thought applied to it. There are some 5 sections that are currently rated Amber (as a part of RAG rating) and there are clear actions identified.

It is suggested that consideration is given to the following aspects of the Standard 3 guidance related to the annual review of the Residential Service:

1. its Statement of Purpose; *IV Comments: This may be considered as a part of the restructure process*
2. its staffing policy; *IV Comments: This may need doing*
3. the placement plans for individual children; *IV Comments: This is in hand through reviews and the newer versions of plans*
4. an internal assessment of its compliance with these standards. *IV comments: This seems complete*
5. actions it will undertake to ensure compliance. *IV Comments: This can simply be done by gathering the amber sections from 4.*

My suggestion is that the leaders should consider creating a document that uses the current NMS review as the centrepiece (4. Above) and adds to it with 1., 2., 3., and 5 above as a start point for a wider development plan, utilising the restructure as a staging post to add in a SCCIF Audit in time as well.

Time spent in Boarding with Staff and Boarders

During this visit I spent time in the Residential Area alongside staff and the boarders. There was a happy and relaxed atmosphere with boards on display showcasing the work of the Boarders' Council, Skills for Life Activity Programme, Transport Information, Preparation for Learning and an activity board.

I spoke to three boarders after I offered them the chance: The first of these reflected upon her recent arrival into the school and that she had previously lived abroad and had limited access to schooling and support for communicating with others. She expressed true happiness at the opportunity she has at Oak Lodge and is determined to use the support on offer (emotional, future planning, relationships advice, communication and of course academic qualifications). She stated she wants to work in Paediatric Nursing and it was inspiring to meet a young person who is undaunted by the obvious challenges in store, and determined to overcome them.

The second was a young man that I have spoken to before who is set to leave the boarding service and stay on at the college he has been attending to access a Level 3 course en-route towards his aspiration to go to University. He was very happy to share the fact that Oak Lodge has been extremely important in the journey he is on.

It was very clear to me that the residential service has been a key part of the journey these boarders are on.

Consultations with Parents

In the days that followed this visit I contacted and spoke to the parents of two young persons accessing the residential service. Their views are captured here:

The first boarder has been attending Oak Lodge for closing in on 6 years now and has been a boarder for the whole of that time. The parent explained that up until that time (Year 7), the boarder had been attending a mainstream school with a Deaf Unit. The transfer to a specialist deaf provision was attempted to a different provision had been attempted but had gone very badly, and as such the family sought other options and Oak Lodge was suggested. When the family visited they found that aspects of the boarder's response to the prospect of joining a new provision were met with a far more understanding approach than at the other possible school, and as such Oak Lodge was selected and attendance begun.

Over the past 6 years, the school and Residential has seen the boarder make great advances in a wide range of ways – this has been in terms of personal independence, domestic life skills and experiencing life in London in a way that would not have been possible without the Residential setup. The parent also expressed her admiration for the staff team and the role models that many of the Residential team have been for her son.

The parent reflected upon an incident some 2 years ago where the family had not been happy with one aspect of the care, but that after one call it had been managed and never replicated. This was considered an example of strong processes and support. There are currently no concerns at all, and the parent expressed the view that it was hoped that the one remaining year of provision may possibly be extended by a further year. The parent was overwhelmingly positive about the school, Residential Service and the impact that both have had.

The second parent that I spoke to is of a boarder that has yet to join the school and is projected for a September start date. The reason for the call was to request information about advance planning. The parent explained that visits have already been undertaken and strong processes for supporting the young person are underway – including the adaptation of a larger bedroom than many to support physical needs as well as the obvious support for deafness. The parent is impressed with the pro-activity of advance planning and is hopeful for the young person making strides in signing skills, conversational ability and accessing the waking day curriculum as a means to enhancing social skills, making friends and expanding the young person's horizons. The parent agreed to future calls as time passes.

These calls showcased that the quality of care is life changing when it is done properly at Oak Lodge and has an impact from the first contact that is made. This is the case for a long standing boarder, and also for the newest entrant. This is a broad picture and reflects very positively upon the passion for the work that the staff have, as well as for the prolonged impact that Oak Lodge has.

Governors' Visit Notes

In the days following this visit a member of the Governors shared the notes from two recent visits that have been undertaken in March and May of this year. Upon scrutinising these I am very impressed with the level of detail, the professional support, and appropriate challenge that is clearly in place. These two documents showcase how informed and involved the Governors have been related to the transition into leadership of the new team, and have impressive detail around a wide range of areas that are covered. This includes; Leadership and Staffing, Quality and Impact of Residential Provision, Documentation and Family Engagement, Updates from Monitoring Visits (these Independent Visit reports and how recommendations have been followed up), Questions for Boarders over dinner, and an evaluation of what successes stood out and why. I am happy to state that the support is sustained and very thorough, adding to the strengths of the service considerably.

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

Summary of Visit and Quality of Provision		
<p>This visit illustrated that the leadership team at Oak Lodge are very much considering how best to move the Residential Setup forward after the recent recruitment developments. The Headteacher has a very clear and creative vision as to how things will take shape and I feel that the processes being used are very sensibly measured to see a sustainable and self-improving service augmented.</p> <p>The Interim Head of Care is settling in well and the staff team are becoming stronger each visit. The care on offer is strong and has been verified in the calls I have made to families as part of this visit.</p> <p>I look forward to my return in the Autumn, and I would like to thank all at Oak Lodge for their continued warm engagement with my support. I wish everyone a restful Summer when it is reached and will see you all soon.</p>		
Name: Mark Goode		Date: 03/07/2025
RECOMMENDATIONS AND/OR RESPONSE FOR THIS VISIT		
Actions	Comments from Provider	Expected Completion Date
<p><u>NMS Review</u> For the detail contained in the relevant section above to be considered as the service moves into 2025-26. This can then be a launchpad for further self-evaluation using the SCCIF and support the development of the service moving forward.</p> <p><u>SCCIF (Outstanding Criteria); The overall experiences and progress of children</u> Professional practice consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children. Professional practice responds positively to children's complex and changing needs. There are examples of excellent practice that are worth sharing widely.</p>	<p>This to be continued after the summer break especially with the introduction of 4 new starters in Residential. Senior staff will work with Residential team to ensure all are complying with our NMS as well as a planned thorough review of the SCCIF in preparation for the new academic year.</p>	<p>Term 1 2025/26</p>
<p><u>Restructure Developments</u> For the imminent process of restructuring to be moved ahead with and for me to receive an update upon attending my next visit in the Autumn term.</p> <p><u>SCCIF (Outstanding Criteria); The effectiveness of leaders and managers</u> Leaders and managers lead by example, innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest quality care for children.</p>	<p>Currently in process of finalising advert to promote a new role in Residential, and the successful candidate should start at beginning of Term 1 2025/26.</p> <p>This will allow myself as Head of Care to carry out duties full-time.</p>	<p>Term 1 2025/26</p>

Head of Residential's Comments

This is another positive report while we are nearing the end of the academic year. This report reflects the work we have done to prepare the leavers as well as preparing for the new students starting in Residential in September. I am really looking forward to the re-structure of the staffing in Residential so that the service continues to adapt around the children's needs and support, while myself can become full-time Head of Care.

Name: Saul Allison

Date: 8th July 2025

Head Teachers' Comments

Overall, a positive report from Mark. We have some action points in reviewing statutory documentation and further developing good practice. Leadership is developing well across the service and embracing the development of new pupils for September. The service was noted for its transition plans for pupils leaving us. Well done team.

Name: Caroline Rowlandson

Date: 08.07.2025

Formal Response from the Governing Body, Trustees, or proprietor of the school

We'd like to thank Mark Goode for another thoughtful and constructive visit. We are pleased to note the continued strengths in safeguarding and the positive atmosphere observed. It is encouraging to see the team's commitment reflected in both student and parent feedback, as well as in the creative and person-centred leavers' materials, which we feel are a real credit to the service.

We recognise the challenges around recruitment and welcome the steps being taken by Caroline and Saul to restructure and strengthen the team. We are confident that this will help build further stability and support future development.

We also appreciate the recognition of our ongoing governor involvement and will continue to work closely with the leadership team to support progress against the NMS review and upcoming audit preparations. Thank you to all staff for your continued dedication to the young people at Phoenix House. Enjoy a well deserved summer break and we look forward to seeing you all again in September!

Name: Louisa Steensma Williamson and Helen Whitmore, Co-Link Governors

Date: 10 July 2025