

Oak Lodge School

101, Nightingale Lane, London SW12 8NA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Oak Lodge School is a maintained residential special school, operated by the London Borough of Wandsworth. The school is a signing community. It provides an inclusive, multi-modal communication environment for deaf children and children who have speech, language, communication and additional needs. All the children at the school have special educational needs.

The school offers up to 19 residential places. Children can stay for up to four nights per week. At the time of this inspection, there were 94 children on roll, of whom 17 were accessing the residential provision. The residential provision is in the school building.

The head of care was appointed in February 2025 and is currently undertaking an appropriate qualification for this role.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 October 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 8 October 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make remarkable progress due to the high levels of nurturing care that they receive. They have built trusting, dependable relationships with the highly dedicated and motivated staff team. The relationships between children and staff are full of fondness and mutual respect. Children maintain contact with their school friends outside of school and some return to visit after they have left.

Children make exceptional progress because of the actions of staff working with them in the residential provision and their experiences while staying there. Many children new to the provision make exceptional progress in their communication and they develop appropriate understanding of sign language. Teachers and the occupational therapist report that residential children often outperform their peers in day placements. This is due to the consistent boundaries within the residential setting which support positive behaviour and engagement. One parent commented that, 'I can't say enough about what staff have done and how much my child has thrived, both academically and socially.'

Children speak highly about their residential experience. They make strong and supportive friendships with one another. They are supported to understand the importance of respectful relationships and spending positive time together. Staff are confident and competent in their knowledge of each child. They provide a nurturing place for children to stay and to flourish. Many children move to preferred colleges to pursue their interests, such as computer gaming and childcare courses.

Children say that they are able to influence the care that they receive. Staff recognise that not all children enjoy similar activities or meals. The flexibility of arrangements means that children can cook, bake, play indoor games, attend community activities or simply spend time relaxing with their friends. All children said that they feel listened to and feel confident about talking to staff if they have any worries.

Staff help children to build their independent living skills. Children are taught skills that help them to prepare for adult life. This is a key strength of the residential provision. Routine planners are detailed and meticulous for each child. Targeted work to address each child's individual needs is pitched at their level of understanding and reviewed with all the professionals involved. All staff speak of the genuine desire to increase the life chances of disabled children and act as excellent role models for children.

Staff talk about the children with love and pride, and understand the children's individual personalities. The school has a family feel, and all staff clearly want children to succeed in all aspects of their lives. Children are supported and encouraged to proudly celebrate their identity. There is a consistent and embedded mindset in the children of equality and treating others with kindness and respect.

The children's behaviour is exemplary, and there is a genuine warmth that runs throughout the residential provision and the school. The staff are quick to recognise and respond to any potential difficulties in peer relationships, preventing any escalation. Bullying is not an identified issue.

The staff team works well with the local communities. Children have been involved in fundraising events and have raised money for the residential service, gaining valuable experiences. The school is connected to many charities that support deaf children, helping them to access additional resources.

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

Children say that they feel safe and understand that the rules in place are designed to keep them safe. Staff build warm and trusting relationships with them, so that children are confident to share their anxieties and concerns. Children have a strong sense of safety and well-being in the residential provision. Staff have an excellent understanding of children's needs, vulnerabilities and the potential risks that they may be exposed to.

Comprehensive safeguarding systems are in place. The school has moved to a new system of recording incidents to improve management oversight. Staff know their responsibilities and report concerns effectively. These are followed up with the appropriate agencies and staff ensure that children are protected from harm. Staff undertake a range of safeguarding training, including training on child exploitation and e-safety. Children learn about how to keep safe on social media and engage well with the mobile phone policy during their stay.

Staff know children very well and can spot the early warning signs of children struggling. Staff see behaviour changes as indicators of underlying concerns, and they are inquisitive and professionally curious when seeking to understand the causes. The school's leadership team maintains detailed oversight of this. Staff show appropriate understanding of children's backgrounds and childhood trauma and use restorative practice to promote good behaviour.

Each child has a risk assessment that provides staff with clear guidance and individualised strategies to manage risks. This ensures that children are supported by staff who understand how to keep them safe. Highly effective planning by the staff minimises risks, both inside and outside of the school. When children are new to the school, any risks are discussed with families and involved professionals to ensure that they are well understood and that appropriate strategies are in place to reduce them.

Staff help children to understand risks. They complete workshops and individual sessions around internet safety, healthy lifestyles and community safety. Children talk to staff about their anxieties and worries related to their life, including those outside of school. Staff take prompt action to follow up any concerns raised. Parents say that

their children are kept safe and secure, which gives them peace of mind when their children are at the school.

Children's behaviours were observed to be exemplary throughout the inspection. When children are in crisis, staff go above and beyond to keep them safe. They work with families to keep children safe and offer support and guidance when families are struggling at home. One child was helped to settle into their family home when their foster placement ended. The school supported the family to understand the child's needs and provided strategies to manage behaviour when at home. This focus on children's safety outside of school time is an example of the commitment that staff have, to ensuring that children feel safe and well cared for.

The oversight of health and safety checks has significantly increased. The school now has a new system of monitoring maintenance and repairs and conducting regular health and safety checks to ensure that the environment is physically safe. This includes fire safety and having regular fire drills. Each child, including children new to boarding, has a clear, personal emergency evacuation plan that is adapted to their specific needs. Staff help children to develop their knowledge of fire-safety arrangements.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

School leaders have appointed a senior staff member as the new head of care. The new head of care is innovative and is an excellent role model for both children and staff. The head of care shows an excellent understanding of the strengths of the service and is highly ambitious for children.

School leaders and managers are inspirational. They have created an open and transparent culture that fosters mutual support and respect for their staff. School leaders and managers actively promote a culture where children and their happiness are central to the development of the residential experience. They promote a vision where success for each child means that they are developing their interests and capabilities to become well-rounded individuals who achieve their goals.

School leaders and managers regularly review and analyse how the provision is performing. They create targeted development plans and ensure that staff are clear about their roles and their responsibilities to uphold the highest level of care for the children who use the service. School leaders and managers recognise the strengths of the residential provision and talk transparently about the areas that they are focused on developing.

The head of care has plans to collaborate with other residential schools to share exceptional practice and to influence positive changes to children's residential experiences. Effective monitoring systems enable the head of care to track children's progress and to assess the quality of work that staff complete with children.

Staff work closely with families and others to maintain excellent levels of communication. They have regular contact with parents, to update them on the weekly progress of their children. Feedback from parents is overwhelmingly positive and they say that staff go above and beyond to help each child to make excellent progress.

The staff team is stable and receives highly effective support to develop their practice and skills. Staff feel valued and they recognise the high expectations that are placed on them in their work with the children. Appraisal targets support continuous professional development. The targets are also aspirational for children in the residential provision, such as providing opportunities for children to develop their independence skills. School leaders have ensured that all unqualified staff are enrolled on an appropriate course to ensure that the children are helped by staff who have the knowledge and skills to support them. They have a plan to support staff who require adjustments to access the courses.

Team meetings are held regularly. Safeguarding is a running agenda item. Research-informed practice is explored and discussed at team meetings, to ensure that there is a strong and confident practice base within the staff team. Staff receive regular and effective supervision. They say that they feel valued for their contribution and that this positively impacts on their day-to-day practice. Staff receive a wide range of training that reflects the needs of children in their care.

The school's governors maintain a keen oversight of the residential provision. The governors with responsibility for the residential provision are enthusiastic about the impact that residential care has on supporting families and changing children's lives. They regularly visit and spend time with the children and the staff team. They understand children's needs, and support improvements to the residential environment and quality of staff training. The school's independent visitor contributes to the school's rigorous quality assurance processes and school leaders respond well to the subsequent reports.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- School leaders should ensure that staff undertaking relevant qualifications are supported with the required adjustments to complete their qualifications within the required timescales.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC042132

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mrs Caroline Rowlandson

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Inspectors

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