

# 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. The London Borough of Wandsworth operate it. 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 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 90 children on roll, of whom 15 were accessing the residential provision. The residential provision is in the school building.

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

### **Inspection dates: 8 to 10 October 2024**

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected      good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers      good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of previous inspection:** 5 February 2024

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children make excellent progress and enjoy their experiences while in residence. They build good relationships with their peers and the staff. New children settle in very quickly due to exceptional staff practice. Staff show appropriate understanding of children's needs and work well with the teaching staff and parents to provide holistic care. New parents said that 'We are really impressed with the support staff provide, our children were so excited to return following their first week.'

Staff work extremely well with teaching staff to ensure that children have good transitions between the residential provision and the school. Staff from both sides of the school communicate exceptionally well with each other and have detailed handovers. Consequently, children receive consistent care by a team who understand their needs. When children are in residence, they have a predictable daily routine which adds stability to their experience.

Children make lasting friendships in the residential provision. Friendships help children to build on the network of people they can rely on and talk to. Children often contact each other when at home. They have built these friendships because of the time they spend in the residential provision. Staff complete picture albums for the children to have special memories when they leave the school.

Children have access to a wide variety of activities. They make effective use of the spacious games area, arts and crafts and a computer room. Weekly inhouse activities include yoga and movie nights. Children also have regular visits from the volunteers from Pets as Therapy (PAT) with their dogs that children enjoy interacting with and taking them for walks. Children can use the large kitchen to cook and bake or prepare snacks independently. They also enjoy community activities such as shopping, attending deaf clubs and walking to the parks. These opportunities help children to broaden their experiences and build their ambitions.

The school is well resourced to ensure that children's most complex needs are met in a holistic approach. The school has a team of highly specialist therapists including occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists on site and available for routines support and throughout the day and evenings. The therapists work closely with the residential staff and contribute to the children's life skills assessments and set individual targets. They also attend residential staff meetings and deliver staff training such as safe eating. This holistic child centred approach helps staff to meet children's assessed needs.

The residential provision is a vibrant, diverse community. Children have positive role models from the staff. Many staff are deaf themselves and bring a unique insight into understanding the support that deaf children need to thrive. This means that children can relate to the adults in the residential provision who have a good understanding of children's communication.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

Children enjoy and value being in residence as a safe and caring place to stay. Children spoken to say that they are happy and feel safe. They can talk to staff when they are worried or upset. Staff understand children's individual needs well including their communication methods and provide consistent routines and nurture that helps the children to feel secure.

The safeguarding team has clear systems in place to oversee safeguarding across the school. They have a plan to move to a new recording system that is more user friendly to monitor actions taken when staff raise a concern. Staff spoken to showed appropriate understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures. They know children exceptionally well and are alert to any changes in behaviour or presentation that may give cause for concern.

Children are supervised appropriately. They do not go missing from residence and children who stay over feel they are supported. Staff do not tolerate bullying and help children to understand the impact of their actions on other peers. Children mirror this view and staff support them to understand how to be kind to one another. As a result, residence feels inclusive, and children enjoy their time there.

Staff work very closely with the specialist behaviour support team to create personalised strategies for children where concerns are raised. Staff are proactive and have excellent awareness of children's communication and potential triggers, which successfully reduces situations that can increase children's anxiety. As a result, there has been no incidents requiring physical intervention since the last inspection.

Staff conduct regular health and safety checks and respond promptly when concerns are raised from these checks. Children take part in regular fire drills and have individualised personal emergency evacuation plans, so staff know how to safely evacuate them in an emergency. The business manager has introduced a new system of recording maintenance work and regular fire checks to improve the oversight of the health and safety systems.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The leadership and management of the residential provision are undermined by the absence of a permanent head of care. However, the head teacher is highly involved in the day to day running of the residential provision and completes some of the staff supervisions. This provides some stability and continuity to the team. The head of care post has been advertised and leaders have plans to provide oversight until a suitable and experienced person is recruited.

The senior leadership team is united in its commitment to providing good experiences for children, and for them to make progress during the residential stays. They know the children well. Children's needs and well-being are central to the

school's ethos. Residence is a well-integrated part of the school, and staff and children know this.

Leaders know their strength and weaknesses and work well to address any gaps identified. There is a highly skilled and experienced independent visitor who visits the residential provision on a regular basis. Their reports are available on the school's website showing the school's transparency and accountability. Governors visit regularly and provide a supportive listening service for children and the staff. This enhances senior leadership oversight of the residential provision.

Staff access regular training and supervision; they discuss children and reflect on their practice. Leaders also support staff by being present and accessible. This means that staff have guidance and advice when they need it. Many staff have worked in the school for a long time, and they continually refresh their approach. Leaders talk passionately about how proud they are of the work staff do and the staffs' commitment to the children.

Staff say that they feel valued and well supported. Strong team working was observed during the inspection. Staff are caring, child-focused and have a good understanding of the children's needs, interests and talents.

Feedback from parents and social workers is positive about the care children receive. They talk about the considerable progress that children make from attending the residential provision. Staff support parents to understand their children's needs including sharing strategies used in the school to ensure that children receive consistent care and help them to develop their independent skills.

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

### **Recommendations**

- School leaders should appoint a permanent head of care to provide management oversight of the residential provision.
- School leaders should ensure that the new recording system for maintenance and regular fire checks is embedded in staff routines to provide clear management oversight. School leaders should ensure that the additional planned repairs on the emergency lights proceeds at an appropriate pace.

### **Information about this inspection**

Inspector has 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

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Dorothy Thompstone, Social Care Inspector

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