

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 for young people aged 10 to 19 years. It is operated by the London Borough of Wandsworth. It provides an inclusive multi-modal communication environment for deaf young people and hearing young people who have speech, language, communication and/or auditory processing difficulties. All the young people have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school offers up to 100 educational places and up to 17 residential places. At the time of this inspection there were 79 pupils on the school roll, of which 13 were accessing the boarding provision. Pupils come from 29 separate local authorities from around the country. The school is a signing community. The residential provision is in the school building. Young people may reside there for up to four nights a week during term time.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 November 2019

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| Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account | outstanding |
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| How well children and young people are helped and protected | outstanding |
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| The effectiveness of leaders and managers | outstanding |
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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: 11 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Young people make exceptional progress in the residential provision. Recently, a deaf-blind young person overcame significant challenges to complete a successful work experience programme with a local supermarket. Her social worker supported this and said that the young person has 'flourished beyond all recognition'.

Learning to communicate via sign language is key to the young people establishing warm, trusting relationships with staff and with each other. For many, this is their first experience of making friends and feeling accepted. This results in excellent behaviours and a strong sense of camaraderie.

Outcomes for most of the young people are extremely positive. All of the young people who left the school at the end of the last academic year moved onto planned further educational provision. Some of the young people return to visit staff and maintain contact after leaving the school.

Young people are very well supported by a very committed staff team. Most of the staff are deaf and, therefore, have a unique insight into the needs of the young people. Young people engage very well with the staff and view them as role models and a genuine source of inspiration.

The excellent integration between residential and the day school staff supports high levels of progress for the young people. The completion of homework is well supported, and day staff regularly visit the residential unit and work in close partnership to support the young people to achieve their full potential. All of the pupils accessing residential met their individualised communication targets as opposed to 77% of pupils solely accessing the day school.

Young people enjoy a broad range of activities which help them to develop important independence and communication skills. Activities have included a visit to a 'deaf club' and outings to community events such as a recent fireworks display. One young person spoke enthusiastically of his delight at meeting a deaf young person from abroad at a recent outing.

Staff consult closely with the young people and regularly seek their views. Young people offer feedback on issues of importance to them such as the content of key-work sessions and the weekly menu. Elections are planned for a newly formed residential council of young people and a new head boy and head girl.

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

This service offers vital assistance to families and helps to prevent family breakdown. Parents value this input immensely. One parent commented, 'I would give the staff 100/100, they are amazing, they have helped our entire family.'

Support for parents is a major strength of the service. The school provides signing lessons, therapeutic support, advice groups, access to holiday provision and mentoring for the young people. The impact of this support is extremely positive and helps to safeguard the young people at times of potential vulnerability such as the long summer holidays.

Staff are highly innovative and access a broad range of resources to support the young people. This includes the use of technology to assist the young people in communicating with others and managing their personal hygiene needs.

Young people benefit from a range of specialist resources and facilities provided by the school. An occupational therapist recently supported staff to develop a range of hand-strengthening exercises for one young person, who is now able to dress himself each morning.

Admission procedures are outstanding. The head of care visits each young person at their home prior to admission and conducts a thorough assessment of their needs and how these can be met. Despite facing many complex challenges and health concerns, young people settle in quickly in the school and really enjoy their first experience of living away from home.

Safeguarding practice is highly effective and is monitored by a dedicated team. Concerns are shared quickly with key partner agencies and regularly reviewed. Staff benefit from an excellent range of training to support their care of the young people.

Staff advocate proactively on behalf of the young people. However, at present, the young people do not access independent advocacy. This limits the specialist advice that they receive.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Management of the home is exceptional. Since her arrival in 2017, the head of care has worked in close partnership with the headteacher to create and nurture a strongly committed staff team. She expects to complete her management qualification by the end of November 2019.

Managers are extremely ambitious for the service. An exciting service development plan is in place. Managers recently worked with the young people to secure a grant for the purchase of games equipment. Young people now benefit from an extensive range of new sports equipment.

Managers are highly visible and lead by example. The headteacher knows the young people well and supports the breakfast club each Wednesday. The head of care is extremely popular with the young people who relish the activity evening which she manages every Thursday.

Staff feel engaged, supported and highly valued. They speak of receiving effective supervision which addresses both their professional development and any personal issues they may have. Staff contributed to a recent staff restructuring. This promotes

a sense of shared ownership and a close team dynamic.

The service benefits from excellent support from the governing body and the independent visitor. Governors access work placements for the young people and have recently completed a sponsored walk to raise funds for the school. The independent visitor offers rigorous challenge to support ongoing service improvement.

In general, case recordings are of high quality. However, one case file failed to fully reflect the progress achieved by a young person. There was no impact on the care offered to the young people.

Currently, written policies including the statement of purpose are not available on the school website. This limits the range of information available to current and prospective parents.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that all case recordings are kept up to date and offer a full assessment of risk.
- Ensure that the young people enjoy access to independent advocacy, when required.
- To assist the parents of prospective learners, key documents such as the children's guide should be placed on the school's website.

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: Derek Kitchen

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 020 8673 3453

Email address: info@oaklodge.wandsworth.sch.uk

Inspector(s)

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector (lead)

Victoria Jones, social care inspector (shadow)



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