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Deaf teenager tells of assault

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A DEAF TEENAGER yesterday described how he was sexually abused, at the age of 12, by his house parent at a special school. Hidden behind screens and speaking in sign language through an interpreter, he told the Old Bailey: "I couldn't stop him, I listened to him and obeyed."

Graham Gilford, 30, who worked as a house parent at the Oak Lodge School for the deaf in Wandsworth, south London, denies assaulting 13 boys, aged between 10 and 15, over a seven-year period. He faces 21 charges, mainly of indecent assault but including buggery and inciting a child to commit an act of gross indecency. The teenager alleged that Mr Gilford assaulted him three times. "It was always the same. I often had stomach aches and went to the medical room to lie down. Mr Gilford said he would make my tummy better, he rubbed it and then his hand would move down," he said.

Mr Gilford warned the teenager not to tell anybody about the assaults. "He was like a teacher to me. It was a school and I thought that was what I had to do," he said.

Peter Ader, for the prosecution, told the jury that Mr Gilford's method was to contrive an opportunity to be alone with a boy, then start some form of horseplay or make an excuse to remove the boy's clothing before sexually assaulting him.

Mr Gilford assaulted his first victim in 1982, Mr Ader said. The boy was hungry so Mr Gilford invited him into a storeroom and made him some toast. He then locked the door and abused the boy.

The boys remained silent for seven years as they were too embarrassed and frightened of Mr Gilford. "Not only was he much bigger and stronger but he was in a position of authority within the school and was a special constable in the Metropolitan Police and thus in a position of authority in society," Mr Ader said.

But in September 1989 a deputation of boys complained about Mr Gilford to the headmaster.

Mr Gilford joined the school in 1980 as a handyman. He was promoted to a house parent in 1986 after learning sign language and impressing the authorities.

As a house parent he was responsible for the 30 children who boarded at the school. He was on duty all night and would sleep in the building.

The trial continues today.

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