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## Promoted deaf school worker 'abused boys for seven years'

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A HANDYMAN promoted to a house parent at a school for deaf children sexually abused boys in his care for seven years without being suspected by the authorities, a jury was told yesterday.

Graham Gilford, aged 30, a police special constable, joined the council-run Oak Lodge school in Wandsworth, south-west London, as a handyman in 1980. He was promoted to a house parent in 1986 after learning sign language and impressing those in charge, said Peter Ader, prosecuting, at the Old Bailey.

'None of the boys consented to what he did, yet the sexual assaults did not come to light for years,' Mr Ader said. The boys had been 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.'

Finally, in 1989, a deputation of boys complained to the headmaster.

Mr Gilford pleads not guilty to 21 charges, mainly of indecent assault but also including buggery and inciting a child to commit an act of gross indecency. The alleged offences, between 1982 and 1989, involve 13 boys aged between 10 and 15.

Judge Stephen Mitchell banned identification of the boys but allowed the school to be named in reports.

An alleged victim who was 12 at the time told the jury through a sign language interpreter: 'I just couldn't stop him. I was small and I was frightened. He told me what to do and I obeyed. It was a school. I thought that was what I had to do. I didn't know better.'

The trial continues today.

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