

Focus 1st Academy Ltd

339 Bowes Road, New Southgate, London, N11 1BA

Inspection dates 9–11 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Systems and policies for keeping students safe have not always been sufficiently rigorous and robust, and kept fully up to date.
- The structures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school are still new and have not yet had time to show positive results.
- The school does not involve work placement providers sufficiently in tracking the students' progress.

The school has the following strengths

- Students, most of whom have been unsuccessful in a mainstream school setting, become much more confident learners than previously. They achieve well during the time they spend at Focus 1st Academy and make good progress in their personal development.
- Good teaching ensures that all groups of students, including the most able and those who find learning difficult, make good progress. Students are well prepared for moving on to the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is good. They develop good attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed in the world of work.
- The experienced headteacher, who is the sole proprietor, provides inspiring leadership. She is well supported by all the staff, who are committed to working with a wide range of vulnerable students.
- Students say that the school is a safe place to be and that the school deals very effectively with any problems that may arise.
- The positive impact of the work placements in creating a work ethic is enabling students to be well prepared for both their future education and for life in modern Britain today.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the independent school standards, and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed six lessons or part lessons. Most lessons were jointly observed with a member of the school team. Discussions with all of the staff and all of the students took place, and staff responses to a questionnaire were analysed.
- The majority of the Year 11 students had already completed their examinations and were not on site during the inspection.
- The school's documentation was examined, including all of the policies, the website, planning for subjects, records of students' progress and the welfare and safeguarding of students.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector visited the offsite physical education provision and also a work placement.
- There were insufficient responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, but information was gained from feedback given to the school from parents, carers and the referring organisations.

Inspection team

Sandra Teacher, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Focus 1st Academy was set up in 2000 to provide education and training. It was awarded Independent School status in August 2014 and this is the first inspection.
- The school is located in Arnos Grove in the London Borough of Enfield and at present there are 21 students, 12 boys and nine girls, all of whom started at different times during this academic year (2014–15). All of these students are on roll at their secondary schools.
- Eleven students are from mixed backgrounds. There are eight White British students and two of Turkish origin.
- The students who attend the school have all been referred by 14 different local education authorities or schools in London. The school will generally accept disaffected young people with a history of disrupted schooling, including those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school's aim is 'to empower students to become effective learners and experience success'.
- Students, who are aged between 14 and 16 years, attend the school for three days per week. Where possible, appropriate work placements are organised for them by the school for the other two days.
- There are no students who have Education, Health and Care plans or who do not have a good command of English.
- In addition to the headteacher, who is the sole proprietor, there are two members of the teaching staff and one mentor.
- The school's accommodation is a converted house, but some specialist facilities, such as for physical education, are shared with local schools and other providers.
- All students are taught in one classroom but all follow their own individual programmes.
- Where appropriate, students sit early entry GCSE examinations to spread the workload, and special mentoring and tutorial arrangements are put in place.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all the policies and procedures for safeguarding are rigorous and robust, and fully up to date with all the latest legislation
 - putting in place more formal procedures for monitoring and reviewing the work of the school.
- Raise attainment by:
 - agreeing with the work placement providers in advance how students' progress will be tracked and their achievements recorded, so that there is a positive impact linked to their school studies, particularly in English, mathematics and computing.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because there were weaknesses in meeting the detail of the safeguarding requirements. These were rectified during the inspection and did not compromise the welfare, health and safety of the students.
- In other aspects of the school's work, the quality of leadership and management is strong and has been well established since the school opened. There is a constant drive for improvement which has led to positive successes and, in particular, ensuring that all students achieve well and make good progress in their learning.
- The headteacher has high expectations and ambition for the school. Most policies and procedures are up to date and successfully promote the welfare, health and safety of students. Risk assessments are in place, and health and safety checks are regularly completed.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and the headteacher has a strong understanding of the strengths and areas needed to improve the school. She communicates her high expectations and ambitions to staff. Continuing professional development, including safeguarding and mentoring, supports the good teaching in the school. This, in turn, secures good, and sometimes outstanding, achievement for the most able students.
- The senior teacher also fulfils the role of a middle leader and has developed a suitable curriculum which is tailor-made to meet the individual needs of each student. The safeguarding officer is still very new to the school, and as yet has not had time to make an impact.
- There is a suitable range of subjects on offer to all students that covers all the required areas of learning for independent schools. Teaching in the different subjects is underpinned by planning that appropriately engages all students' interest and participation. Each student has a tailor-made programme for English, mathematics and information technology. This enables every student to achieve according to his/her potential. The subjects include academic, technical, scientific, performing arts and sporting opportunities, as well as learning about safety matters.
- Monitoring of lessons is carried out informally on a regular basis, but teachers would benefit from more rigorous targets for improvement. All staff say they feel very well supported. They have regular meetings to identify targets to enhance their teaching and personal development as well as annual appraisals.
- Students' progress in school is carefully tracked and there are regular formative and summative tests which are carefully considered when planning for future lessons.
- Formal records of progress made at the work placements are more limited. As a result, the impact of this work on students' school studies, particularly in English, mathematics and computing is difficult to check.
- Personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons are provided for all students, ensuring their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Within the class, students come from families with differing cultures and beliefs, and these are shared and celebrated. Daily discussions occur in class to enable students to learn the importance of valuing the opinions of others and how their actions may affect others.
- Students learn about British institutions and values, so that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, a visit to the Houses of Parliament and discussions about the recent elections formed the focus of their work on democracy.
- Equal opportunities are promoted well within the school and there is no discrimination. Each student has a full role to play and they listen to each other well. There are constant discussions and conversations with the adults about their own issues and concerns, whether it be sex and relationships or ways to motivate them to attend school, be on time and fully participate in the learning.
- The school meets all of the requirements in relation to the premises. Adequate external areas for play and relaxation are available in a nearby public park for which the school has conducted regular risk assessments to ensure students' health and safety. The local leisure centre is also available for physical activities, where students have access to showers and changing facilities under appropriate supervision.
- All of the requirements regarding complaints procedures and the provision of information for parents and carers are met. Parents, carers, schools and local authorities are wholly supportive of the school and there is excellent daily communication, as well as detailed school reports and students' progress meetings.
- The school identifies the provision to match each student's individual needs and interests well to enable them to gain appropriate knowledge and skills.
- The school appropriately identifies the safety of the provision and has most recently put in place

additional safeguarding checks.

- The quality of the support whilst at these placements has not always been sufficiently clear and further systems are now being developed to regularly measure the impact.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - As the headteacher is the sole proprietor of Focus Training Ltd, she has good knowledge about all aspects of the work of the school, including the quality of teaching and students' progress.
 - She works tirelessly with all of the staff and ensures that they are given the best opportunities for professional development, and that their performance is linked to salary progression.
 - She ensures that all of the relevant information is on the school's website, although the safeguarding policy needed updating and some of the required safeguarding checks were not fully in place.
 - She ensures that all of the independent school standards are met and invites a range of appropriately qualified consultants to support her in keeping up to date with all the latest changes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good and records show that there have been dramatic improvements in their communication and social interaction skills. These improvements are carefully recorded so that the clear plans can be constantly modified to guide responses when students' behaviour sometimes dips. These strategies have worked very successfully.
- Learning takes place in a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Students have positive attitudes to learning, moving between short periods of intensive teaching and their chosen reward activities without difficulty.
- The management of students' behaviour is very effective. Members of staff know students very well and are adept at recognising triggers that indicate increasing stress and anxiety.
- Staff are skilful at managing transitions, both during the day and to new activities, to minimise upset to students and to maximise the time for learning. For instance, preparations to support independent travel, manage the world of work or to take examinations are carefully and thoughtfully managed, enabling students to succeed.
- Students have the opportunity to contribute to a number of advocacy groups, where a range of school and local issues, environmental problems and community projects are discussed. Through decision-making, negotiation, listening and interacting with others, the students have a strong voice within the school. They are very proud of the range of visiting MPs, including the Prime Minister, who have come to encourage them in their endeavours.

Safety

- The school's work to keep the students safe and secure requires improvement. Policies and procedures are now fully in place to safeguard students and to ensure that safe recruitment procedures are followed.
- However, a few weaknesses relating to the detail of the safeguarding requirements had not been addressed prior to the inspection.
- High levels of staffing mean that students are very well supervised whilst at school, but they are given complete independence whilst on their work placements. Members of staff are alert to the harm which students may cause themselves as a consequence of their special needs. Praise and constant rewards are used well to reinforce positive behaviours.
- Considerable emphasis is placed on extending students' understanding of risk. This includes consideration of sexual health, internet safety, including cyber bullying, homophobic bullying and preventing indoctrination to extremism. For example, in science, students learn about healthy lifestyles and in drama, they evaluated the production, *'Mother of a brown boy'*. This included themes of racism, death and gang violence.
- Attendance and punctuality improves significantly for many compared to their previous schools and is improving month on month. However, there are those who remain persistent absentees and there is a constant drive to improve attendance and punctuality further.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good because it is generally closely matched to the personal and academic targets of each student. Lesson planning ensures that students work consistently towards their personal and academic targets. However, literacy and numeracy targets are not always emphasised sufficiently in the learning time. This leads to some missed opportunities for students to develop these skills in all subject areas, and

in particular to reinforce these skills when at their placements.

- Sessions are carefully timed to make the most of students' concentration spans. This was seen in the way they practise for their examinations, and an able student made strong progress in numeracy, converting gallons to litres and pounds sterling to euros. This is because rewards are used very effectively to mark each small success in learning. Short breaks are then created in which students enjoy choosing their own activities.
- All members of staff make good use of a range of communication techniques that build well on encouraging literacy skills. They speak clearly and appropriately, encouraging students to recognise social cues and listen to others. This was observed in a computing lesson where a student had to explain how to formulate a spreadsheet.
- There are specific sessions for guided reading and improving the use of grammar and punctuation. These are well planned and organised, and students work in different ability groups. Achievement and progress are good because teachers make the learning relevant. Students answer comprehension questions successfully on 'Alternative therapies for hay fever' or 'How to rent a flat'.
- A range of successful approaches, including questioning, is very effective in gauging how securely students have grasped what is taught. In a GCSE English lesson, students were required to write a piece of persuasive text. The lesson aim focused on giving them the required skills through clear explanations and reminders. The structure of the lesson and the skilled support of the teacher in responding to students' questions demonstrated good learning and teaching.
- Students record their work in a variety of ways, with good use being made of a range of technologies. All work proficiently with computers. However, there is not always enough encouragement for the most able students to record their work independently. Some activities do not sufficiently inspire students and so the pace of learning slows.
- Teachers generally mark students' work promptly and there is good immediate spoken feedback. However, at times, written comments about students' next steps in learning are unclear. This means they are not always sure about what it is they have to do to improve their work. In addition, teachers often write comments about the quality of students' written work, but are inconsistent in checking whether students respond to them.
- All the parents, carers, schools and local authorities are pleased with the quality of teaching and the students' enjoyment of learning. One parent said: 'I like all the staff at Focus and that they always keep in contact, regardless on whether he's doing good or bad – I would also like to say that they are so supportive of my son.'
- Students told the inspector that they are given individual help when needed and the support provided by the teachers is particularly valuable. They enjoy coming to school and are 'learning loads'.
- As one student said, 'Students feel they can learn because of the ethos provided by the school and because of the freedom to make their own choices.'

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The achievement of students is good because of the consistent progress they make whilst on roll at Focus 1st Academy. Most students are not working at expected levels before they start the school, often as a result of persistent absence from school or breakdown of previous placements. Their rate of progress then accelerates rapidly. For example, all of the students by the end of Year 11 will have gained appropriate qualifications, according to their ability in English and mathematics and computing. There is a 100 per cent success rate in achieving functional skills in mathematics and English, and vocational information technology qualifications.
- The abilities of the most able students are recognised. Where appropriate, they sit early entry GCSE examinations to spread the workload, and special mentoring and tutorial arrangements are put in place.
- All students are given the opportunity to learn Spanish. This promotes good cultural development and they are engaged by focusing on Spanish footballers and famous actors from Spain.
- Achievement in personal development is very strong and lies at the heart of the school. Students are very well prepared for their future lives through personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons. Together with the mentoring programme, this makes an important contribution to students' moral, spiritual and cultural development, and personal development. In one mentoring session, for example, students were developing skills for independent travel through planning the best route to their work placements.
- There is a major focus on developing the whole person, supporting good achievement in literacy, both reading and writing, numeracy and computing skills. Careers guidance is strong and their achievements

are enhanced by opportunities to fill in application forms for colleges and work placements, write their own CVs and by taking an active part in mock interviews.

- The work placement experiences, which include working in hairdressing, car mechanics, catering and child care, are preparing them well for the world of work.
- The use of the mentoring programme effectively supports the ways in which students are given opportunities for learning and working with their peers. Both the one-to-one and the group work give careful consideration to students' barriers to learning. Excellent progress has been made by helping students to be motivated and keen to learn. This has a positive impact on their overall progress and achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement
	Grade 1	Outstanding
	Grade 2	Good
	Grade 3	Requires improvement
	Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	141247
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DfE registration number	308/6003

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Alternative Provision
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	21
Proprietor	Marina Savva
Headteacher	Marina Savva
Date of previous school inspection	First Inspection
Annual fees (day pupils)	£7500
Telephone number	0208 361 5658
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