

# First Rung Independent School

333 Edgware Road, London NW9 6TD

197–205 High Street, Ponders End, London EN3 4DZ

## Inspection dates

16–18 October 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders are unwavering in their quest for pupils to have access to effective learning and subsequent employment. They make sure that pupils' needs are supported well. The positive and nurturing relationships between staff and pupils is key to the school's success.
- Effective leadership has ensured that the independent school standards are met.
- The board of trustees provides effective governance. Members share school leaders' ambition for pupils to improve their life chances and work opportunities.
- The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs and interests of pupils. Its vocational dimension, together with English and mathematics, prepares pupils well for the next stage of their employment, training or education.
- A strong commitment to pupils' personal development and welfare exists at this school. This enables pupils to regain their self-esteem and improve their attitudes to learning.
- Pupils learn effectively. Assessment of pupils' needs and prior learning is particularly strong, and underpins good teaching. Sometimes a few pupils are not challenged enough to reach high standards.
- Pupils' outcomes are good. Pupils make good progress from their starting points, and they achieve more than might have been expected before they joined the school. Some pupils' development in science is not as strong compared with their other subjects.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. This is because everyday routines are in place, and pupils are aware of the school's high expectations for behaviour. The newly introduced system for checking pupils' behaviour is not fully implemented across both of the school's sites.
- Attendance is low. Despite this, pupils' individual attendance improves over time because leaders encourage all pupils to be punctual and attend school regularly.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve pupils' outcomes so that they achieve their individual potential by:
  - ensuring that pupils are suitably challenged to reach high standards
  - developing the learning of science.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
  - ensuring that pupils' attendance rises towards the national average
  - embedding the new system to monitor behaviour across both of the school's sites.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Good leadership ensures that First Rung Independent School places pupils' needs at the heart of the school's work. Leaders are uncompromising in their aim for pupils to receive a personalised education, which develops life skills and prepares them for the world of work.
- Before their arrival, many pupils have gaps in their education for various reasons, including poor attendance and previous disruptions to their learning. Shortly after joining the school, many pupils make positive changes in their outlook, social skills and outcomes.
- Effective school leadership, supported by the chief executive officer and the board of trustees, has ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The professional development of staff is strong. Leaders promote improvements effectively via staff monthly reviews and training. Teachers value the support they receive as it impacts positively on their teaching and engagement with the pupils. Staff questionnaires completed during the inspection show that staff enjoy working at this school.
- The school's work to provide information, guidance and support for careers is a noteworthy part of its work. The use of work experience linked to pupils' vocational studies helps raise pupils' aspirations. The school has close links for work placements in a variety of sectors, including retail and hospitality. Most pupils are very clear about the career paths they wish to follow when they leave school.
- The curriculum is effective. It provides pupils with an individualised study programme that is tailored to their needs. Pupils develop basic skills through their learning of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). This programme of study, alongside work-related learning opportunities, equips pupils well for the next phase of their lives.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and preparing pupils for life in modern Britain are promoted throughout school life. Extra-curricular activities provide pupils with new experiences, including visits to restaurants and to the Houses of Parliament. Leaders make every effort to ensure that pupils take part in weekly physical and creative activities.
- Pupils actively support the local community, which demonstrates their regard for other people and the protected characteristics, such as gender and age. For instance, some pupils helped to clear the garden of a childcare nursery. Notably, some pupils placed poppies at the Tower of London to remember those who served in the war.
- Communication between the school and the pupils' mainstream schools or other provision is effective. This helps to support the success of pupils in terms of attendance and the progress they make. A 'learner voice forum' encourages pupils to discuss topics, such as how they learn effectively and which charities to support.
- Pupils learn science through their physical education studies. This does not enable all pupils to achieve greater depth in their scientific knowledge, understanding and skills.

## **Governance**

- A board of trustees provides effective governance for this school. Members share school leaders' ambition for pupils to thrive and meet the needs of the local community. The board of trustees commits to improving pupils' life chances as a result of their time at this school.
- The board has a clear and accurate view of the school's performance. This is because sub-committees of the board regularly monitor specific activities of the school's work, including the curriculum and pupils' achievements. The board is proactive in formulating policy, including safeguarding. Individual members use their professional skills to evaluate and challenge the work of the school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safeguarding policy, published on the school's website, reflects current government requirements. Parents and carers receive essential written literature providing information on safeguarding when their child starts at the school. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are given priority to make sure that pupils are supported and safe.
- Pre-employment checks ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Staff are suitably trained, and they receive regular updates on current issues affecting pupils' safety. Staff know what to do to manage concerns about pupils at risk of possible harm, including any risks associated with radicalisation and gang affiliation.
- Close partnerships with parents, the local authority, pupils' schools and external agencies ensure that safeguarding matters are addressed quickly and effectively. Written records are carefully maintained and evidence this.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Pupils learn well at this school. The nurturing approach and high expectations of committed staff ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Secure teaching of basic skills, including English, mathematics and ICT, supports pupils' learning in their vocational studies.
- Assessment of pupils is strong. A comprehensive assessment programme helps leaders and teachers ascertain pupils' prior knowledge and learning needs. This supports teachers' planning, particularly for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Good relationships exist between teachers and pupils. Teachers know the pupils well, and they organise learning and teaching methods to suit their individual needs. Teaching fosters a positive learning climate where pupils are confident to ask questions or request help when they need it.
- Teachers challenge pupils' thinking. They use various techniques to probe understanding so that they can support pupils' development of new concepts. Tasks are closely matched

to pupils' interests. For instance, in one activity, pupils explored their skills and qualities linked to their career goals.

- Teaching and pastoral assistants provide strong support for teachers and pupils. They play a vital role in the success and progression of pupils, particularly for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- The school provides regular information on how well each pupil is doing in their learning and personal development. Parents, the local authority and representatives from the pupil's school (as pupils are dual registered with another provider) are invited to attend progress meetings. These meetings include discussions on the next steps for pupils to improve.
- Some pupils are not sufficiently challenged. This is evident in their books and through talking to them. These pupils have limited opportunities to aim for the high standards of which they are capable, particularly in science.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**Good**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff show a strong commitment to pupils' welfare. They are excellent role models for fostering mutually supportive and positive relationships. This enables pupils to regain their confidence, and to begin to have the self-belief that they can succeed. Pupils spoke about receiving a 'fresh start', and this makes them try harder in their learning and be the best they can.
- The school adopts an appropriate approach to promoting pupils' physical and emotional well-being. A carefully designed induction programme enables leaders to assess pupils' needs as soon as they start at the school. This leads to the identification of appropriate help and professional services, including mental health, to support individual pupils' needs.
- Pupils are well informed about personal safety and the different forms that bullying can take. Pupils' work is displayed in classrooms to show information on 'positive behaviour', and leaflets on how to tackle bullying confirm this. The curriculum supports pupils' awareness of safety, including e-safety, and keeping their personal information safe while using the internet. Additionally, pupils are reminded that staff are available should they have any concerns or issues they wish to discuss.
- Bullying is rare at this school. The school's records show no bullying incidents recorded at the time of the inspection.
- Staff are successful at encouraging pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. A nutritious breakfast and healthy snacks are on offer to prepare pupils for their learning day. Pupils enjoy participating in regular exercise during their visits to the local gym, and stated, 'It helps us to keep fit.'

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. For most pupils, this represents a vast improvement compared to their behaviour before attending this school. Staff are fully committed, through routines and high expectations, to support pupils to strengthen their interpersonal skills and behaviour.
- The school's calm and nurturing environment is conducive to learning. This, together with the individual support which the pupils receive, results in lower levels of disruption. Pupils conduct themselves well around the school sites, and during their learning activities.
- The school's records show very few incidents of poor behaviour, and exclusions are non-existent. A recently introduced programme helps leaders to monitor pupils' behaviour more efficiently. Leaders track pupils' behaviour well. However, they have not had time to implement the programme to track pupils' behaviour across both sites.
- There is a focus on improving pupils' attendance and time-keeping skills. The majority of pupils' individual attendance improves over time and, for some pupils, improves rapidly, when compared with their previous attendance. Despite this, overall attendance is low. The local authority, parents and the pupils' dual provision hold school leaders in high regard for their persistent work to follow up pupils' absences.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Pupils make good progress from their starting points, despite often having gaps in their education when they join the school. The school places a strong emphasis on preparing pupils for employment, and on acquiring appropriate personal skills. This enables pupils to achieve academically and socially.
- Pupils' outcomes are good, because of the individual support and good teaching they receive. Pupils gain accredited qualifications, including functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics and ICT. Expert teaching enables a few pupils to make gains towards GCSE examinations.
- The school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their employment, training or education. Leaders identify learning programmes to support pupils after completing their key stage 4 studies. Vocational studies enable pupils to be aspirational about their future career choices.
- Pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, develop secure knowledge and skills in subjects such as English, mathematics, history and drama. Additionally, pupils gain an understanding of some scientific concepts through their physical education studies. They do not have enough knowledge of scientific principles to make good progress in science.

## School details

Unique reference number	145472
DfE registration number	308/6012
Inspection number	10080531

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	Independent day school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	First Rung Ltd
Chair	Michael Johns
Headteacher	Beverley Jones-Leka
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,440–£7,400
Telephone number	020 8803 4764
Website	<a href="http://www.firstrung.org.uk">www.firstrung.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@firstrung.org.uk">info@firstrung.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- First Rung Independent School offers an alternative education programme for pupils in Years 10 and 11. First Rung Limited, a registered charity established in 1983 and a provider of 16 to 19 study programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships, runs this school. The post-16 provision was not part of this inspection.
- Pupils are referred to the school because they are unable to access mainstream secondary schools. This includes pupils who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of this. Often, pupils have spent a considerable time out of education by the time they join the school.

- All pupils who attend this school are dual registered with a mainstream school or a pupil referral unit.
- The majority of pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A very small number on the roll have an education, health and care plan.
- The Department for Education registered this school on 27 June 2018, and this is the school's first standard inspection.
- The school is located on two sites, approximately 19 miles apart. One site is based at 333 Edgware Road, London NW9 6TD, in the London Borough of Brent. The second, located in the London Borough of Enfield, is at 197–205 High Street, Ponders End, London EN3 4DZ.
- The school uses no alternative providers.
- Breakfast is provided for pupils on both sites, each morning.
- The school's ethos is reflected in the provision of bespoke learning and pastoral support that meets the identified needs of individual pupils.



## Information about this inspection

- The inspector viewed pupils' work across various subjects and observed learning jointly with a middle leader.
- To check compliance with the independent standards, the premises on both sites were examined, and a range of documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding procedures and school policies.
- Meetings were held with the deputy chief executive officer, headteacher and centre managers at both sites. The inspector met with teachers, other staff, a parent and pupils.
- Discussions took place with the chief executive officer, the chair of the board of trustees and two representatives from councils/schools who refer pupils to the school. One representative was from the London Borough of Enfield, and the other from a local school.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire or pupils' survey. The views of 16 staff who completed the staff questionnaire were considered.

## Inspection team

Rosemarie McCarthy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2018