

Inspection of Focus 1st Academy

339 Bowes Road, New Southgate, London N11 1BA

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils join this school when they have struggled to settle at a mainstream setting. Some join after a period of not attending any school. Pupils enjoy coming here and become keen to learn. They like the small size of the school and all the help that they receive from their teachers.

Pupils form strong working relationships with staff. They are happy to talk to staff if they have concerns. Pupils are kept safe in school.

Leaders have high expectations for what pupils can achieve, both now and in the future. For example, leaders plan for pupils to achieve the qualifications that they need to progress to college or the world of work. However, in some subjects, leaders have not thought carefully about what pupils need to know and remember and the order that they need to learn this subject content in.

Leaders are clear about their expectations for behaviour. Pupils know the rules and they follow them. If pupils struggle to manage their behaviour and emotions, staff respond sensitively. They support pupils to get back on track. Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to exercise and play sports between lessons. They spoke about how this helps them to manage their behaviour and supports their physical and mental health. Pupils said that bullying is rare at this school. Pupils trust staff to resolve any such issues that do arise swiftly.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have designed programmes of study that meet the needs of pupils. Primary-age pupils learn the subjects included in the national curriculum. Secondary-age pupils also have access to a broad range of subjects. All pupils learn physical education (PE) and personal, social, economic and health (PSHE) education throughout their time at school. Leaders' design of the curriculum is underpinned by clear and aspirational goals. They want to make sure that pupils are prepared effectively to return to a mainstream setting if appropriate or to progress to college or work.

Leaders have planned study programmes for all subjects and for all year groups, including those year groups where there are currently no pupils. In many subjects, these programmes are ambitious. Leaders have thought carefully about the knowledge and skills that they want pupils to know and remember. In these cases, they have thought about how to order this knowledge so that pupils gain a deeper understanding over time. For example, in primary-phase PSHE, pupils start to learn about understanding their emotions and feelings in Year 1. This progresses to understanding how their attitudes towards learning can make a difference to their success. By Year 6, pupils learn how to challenge themselves and to be resilient. However, deliberate selection and sequencing of subject content are not consistent across all subjects and year groups. This means that pupils do not build their subject knowledge and skills with the same success and rigour.

Leaders assess starting points in English, reading and mathematics when pupils arrive at the school. They use this information to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and make decisions about how best to organise the delivery of the curriculum based on pupils' needs. Teachers assess pupils three times a year and check the overall progress that pupils are making through the programmes of study. However, during the delivery of the curriculum, there is not a sharp focus on identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge or misconceptions. Teachers ask if pupils understand, but they do not check what they have understood. As a result, teaching moves on to new subject content and ideas, even when pupils might not be ready to do this.

Leaders prioritise reading. Pupils' reading is assessed when they join the school and then at regular points thereafter. Support is put in place for those pupils who are not yet fluent readers. For those pupils at an early stage of learning to read, there are daily phonics lessons. Currently, teaching is not following a formal phonics programme. This limits how well pupils are supported to catch up quickly and become confident readers. Leaders have purchased a phonics programme that will be implemented from September. All staff will receive training on the selected programme, and leaders intend to invest in the books from the scheme. Leaders want to make pupils enthusiastic about reading and are involving them in selecting the books for the book corner.

Leaders quickly identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They work closely with commissioning schools, local authorities and other external agencies to get as much information about pupils as possible. They also undertake their own assessments when pupils arrive. Leaders use this information to generate pupil profiles that are then shared with staff. However, these are not consistently used by teachers in lessons to adapt the teaching to meet pupils' different needs. Systems for leaders to check the use of pupil profiles are still in their infancy.

Pupils are keen to make a fresh start at the school and focus on their learning. They learn in small classes and receive bespoke pastoral support from teachers and teaching assistants. Poor behaviour rarely disrupts learning. If a pupil's behaviour is at risk of disrupting others, staff act quickly to intervene. The system of rewards and sanctions has a positive impact on improving behaviour.

Leaders place a high value on supporting pupils to develop their character and resilience. Leaders aim for pupils to be successful in achieving their goals after school. Pupils learn about careers in PSHE lessons and all receive one-to-one careers advice in Year 11. Pupils can play a range of different sports, including football, swimming, badminton and boxing. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and sex education at an age-appropriate level. Pupils learn about different faiths and different types of family.

Leaders have implemented the statutory guidance on relationships and sex education, including consulting with parents and carers on the related policy.

Leaders, including the proprietor, have not ensured that the independent school standards related to assessment and adaptive teaching have been met. The proprietor has made sure that there are staff in place who can bring about the necessary changes, and as a result, there is capacity for improvement at the school.

Staff are happy in school and they feel well supported by leaders. Staff do not have concerns with their workload.

The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are aware that many pupils at this school are especially vulnerable. They work closely with parents, outside agencies and the police to keep pupils safe. Concerns are identified quickly. No time is wasted by leaders and staff in making referrals to relevant external agencies where necessary.

All staff receive regular safeguarding training and understand the local risks that pupils face. Staff know how to report concerns and who to report them to. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online and in the wider world. Pupils trust staff and speak to them when they are worried.

The safeguarding policy includes the most recent statutory guidance and is made available to parents on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have invested in a systematic synthetic phonics programme, but staff have not been trained to use it. As a result, this programme is not being implemented and phonics teaching is not being delivered systematically. This means that pupils are not supported to catch up quickly in reading. Leaders should ensure that the phonics programme is implemented as soon as possible and that staff are suitably trained in delivering this programme and supporting pupils to become confident and fluent readers.
- Leaders have developed pupil profiles so that teachers can adapt their teaching to respond to what pupils are finding difficult, including the barriers faced by pupils with SEND. However, these profiles are not being used regularly by staff. This means that staff are not adapting their teaching and some pupils do not build on their prior knowledge in lessons. Leaders must enhance their systems to monitor how teachers adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all pupils.
- In a few subjects, teachers are not as clear about expectations for pupils' learning. Teachers do not rigorously check whether pupils have understood what they are learning in lessons. Teachers miss opportunities to correct

misconceptions or to fill gaps. Leaders should clarify their expectations for what pupils should learn and when. They should make sure that staff have the right training to check for pupils' understanding of subject content and respond appropriately to any difficulties that pupils may face.

- The proprietor and leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards have been met. Leaders must ensure that all the independent school standards are consistently met.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	141247
DfE registration number	308/6003
Local authority	Enfield
Inspection number	10267668
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Marina Savva
Headteacher	Marina Savva
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,500
Telephone number	020 8361 5658
Website	www.focus1stacademy.org.uk
Email address	marina@focustraining.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 to 14 March 2019

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with a history of disrupted schooling. Typically, pupils are referred to this school by local authorities. Pupils may join the school at any point during the school year. A significant number of pupils have education, health and care plans. Pupils typically remain on roll at their home primary or secondary school while attending Focus 1st Academy.
- The school is currently operating from two sites: 339 Bowes Road, New Southgate, London, N11 1BA and the Laura Trott Leisure Centre, 44 Windmill Lane, Cheshunt, EN8 9AJ. The school is also registered to operate from St Paul's Church, High Road, New Southgate, London, N11 1PL. There are currently no pupils located at the St Paul's Church site.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The headteacher is the sole proprietor of the school. There is no governing body.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place in March 2019. It received a progress monitoring inspection in January 2023 which included a visit to the proposed new site at the Laura Trott Leisure Centre. The Department for Education (DfE) has since approved the opening of this site.
- The school received a material change inspection in June 2022 to consider its application to increase its capacity to 89 pupils. The inspection also considered the school's proposal to use additional premises within the Laura Trott Leisure Centre.
- In January 2022, inspectors considered the school's material change application to increase its capacity to 49 pupils. The inspection also considered the school's proposal to open the site at St Paul's Church. The DfE has since approved this material change application.
- The school received an additional inspection in July 2019 to consider the school's material change application to extend the age range from 14 to 16 years to five to 16 years. The DfE has since approved the school's application to extend the age range.

Information about this inspection

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

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the head of curriculum and other staff. Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation provided by the school to check compliance with the independent school standards. They also toured the school's premises at all three sites.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics, PE and PSHE. Inspectors visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work, met with pupils to discuss their learning and met with subject leaders and teachers. The curriculum in other subjects was considered as part of the inspection.
- Through discussions with leaders, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. Inspectors also looked at records related to safeguarding, including records of employment checks carried out before staff are appointed.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and at playtimes was observed.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff about safeguarding, pupils' behaviour and staff workload. Inspectors looked at parent responses to Ofsted's survey.

Inspection team

Mark Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nigel Clemens

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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