



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Public School 231
5601 16th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Laura Giannino

Dates of review: February 26 - 27, 2007

Reviewer: Helen Donnellan

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 231 is a multi-sited special education school in Brooklyn, serving elementary-aged severely disabled students. Three hundred and nineteen students from kindergarten through to 6th grade are taught in a variety of teaching ratios. This includes self-contained and inclusion classes in a community school, a special education school and a joint agency working with the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. Standardized assessments are taken by 215 students and the remainder have alternate assessments. Forty-six percent of the students are Black, 28% Hispanic, 21% White and 5% Native American. Twelve percent of students are English language learners and a bilingual class is provided for these students. Symbols and assistive communication devices are used to support communication with non-verbal students.

Relocation to another site is being planned as part of determining the priorities for the goals of the coming year's Comprehensive Education Plan.

The school administration team consists of the principal and three assistant principals.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a clear focus on moving the school forward, through the use of data to identify issues and priorities and monitor progress.
- She models lifelong learning through her expressed desire to develop her leadership skills to support the school in moving forward.
- The school collects wide-ranging data on the progress of students in both standardized and alternate assessment programs.
- A range of strategies are in place to establish effective working relationships with families.
- Disruptions to learning are minimized through the use of positive behavior management, which limits and addresses challenging behavior.
- Effective relationships with community-based organizations enrich the curriculum and provide support for students and their families.
- Students are clear about what is expected of them in terms of behavior, work and routines.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all teachers use assessment data routinely, to track students' progress, identify areas for them to improve and to establish longer-term goals.
- Make the use of data to plan differentiated learning more consistent across classroom teams and sites.
- Use data to compare progress made by students or groups of students, to identify variations or similarities.
- Increase collaborative planning to produce long-term plans for improvement and communicate these to staff at all sites.
- Encourage staff to share good practice through observing and evaluating each other.
- Ensure that the goals in school plans are focused, contain measurable outcomes and interim goals and relate to the school's priorities for improvement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The principal is in her second year in the position and was previously an assistant principal at the school. She leads change to move the school forward and uses the self-review process to identify areas for development. A diverse range of data is gathered and gives a full picture of each student's performance. However, this is not exploited fully in planning or comparing the performance of groups of students. Data is under-used in setting goals in school plans; currently goals are neither measurable nor include interim goals. Whole-school plans do not relate securely to departmental plans, which leads to a lack of cohesiveness.

Student behavior is well managed through positive behavior programs. As well as being clear about what is expected in terms of behavior, students also understand what they need to do in classes. High value is placed on relationships with families and the school is creative in how it makes contact with parents. Working partnerships with community-based organizations support this and also enrich the curriculum.

There is a range of professional development opportunities for staff, but this does not maximize the sharing of expertise between teachers.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school gathers data on all relevant students using standardized test scores. In addition, for the majority of students alternate assessments are used. The information from these assessments covers academic and developmental progress and is complemented by informal records to give a holistic picture of what each student can and cannot do. Staff also note accommodations, adaptations and support needed by each student, so a full indication of students' capabilities is available. The principal now provides each teacher with copies of formal assessments, which form part of the student portfolio. This is updated by teacher assessments and informal record-keeping, to provide up-to-date information on each student's progress.

While the school is vigilant about tracking all students, data is not analyzed to highlight variations in the progress of different groups. For example, the difference between the progress of boys and girls is not known, even though boys outnumber girls and tend to be referred to special education at an earlier age than girls. While much relevant data is gathered, comparisons are not made to identify variations or similarities in progress made by different students or groups of students. This means that the school is not able to highlight patterns and trends, either for groups of students or for the school as a whole.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Staff have common planning time and informal meetings where they share data, set goals and plan their implementation. The current focus is the achievement of short-term goals and collaborative planning time is not fully utilized to align short- and long-term goals. This results in some disconnected plans that do not link well with school-wide plans. Some staff resist the use of data so goals do not match securely to students’ current needs. Brigance assessment scales are well used to identify next steps for students and these are often linked with the goals in individual education plans. Individual work is also provided through adapting the Everyday Mathematics program content to meet the needs of grade 3 students on alternate assessment. Where anticipated progress does not occur, plans are reviewed at grade meetings to consider possible causes for this and appropriate intervention is agreed.

The administration team monitors the appropriateness of goals and their implementation during their class observations and walk-through observations at all sites. In addition to checking that goals offer sufficient challenge, they are alert to the possibility of over-high targets which might lead to students becoming frustrated and disruptive.

School routines are well established, and expectations about behavior are made clear to students. Some staff are effective about explicitly sharing expectations about work to students, so that they know what they are aiming for, but this is not consistent. The school is active in trying to establish effective relationships with all families, so that they are aware of what their children need to develop and learn. At each site, meetings are held every month to provide information on relevant topics to support children at home and school. Meetings are also held at locations outside the school, for example, community libraries, and at family social events. The Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services works with the school to offer an integrated service to families and students, to further strengthen links between home and school.

There is close liaison between service providers, relevant to each student’s needs, who work closely with teachers, paraprofessionals and administration to provide integrated services. The school has recognized the need for school transport staff to be made aware of the students’ needs and their triggers for disruptive behavior, so that incidents on journeys to and from school can be reduced or better managed. Although training has been offered for bus drivers and school matrons, this is not followed consistently and issues with school transport continue to adversely affect student attendance and performance.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The mandated curriculum is followed for students on both alternate and standardized assessments. Creativity is shown through specific projects which all students access at levels appropriate to them, for example monthly fun days which widen the curriculum and

bring opportunities for extending vocabulary. Technology is available in all classes but teachers do not maximize the opportunities for students to apply and extend their computer skills. The principal negotiates with the host schools for student access to facilities and special resource rooms, since these are not always perceived as a fundamental need for special education students, although success is variable.

Brigance assessment information makes clear the skills students need to master and maintain and teachers incorporate these into their classes. For other students, the use of assessment information is used to allocate students into groups, but it is not consistently used to determine the content and style of what is taught to the individual students. Consequently, instruction does not always match the students' needs.

The principal matches spending to the needs of students as they follow the curriculum. She also takes into account the stated individual education plan goals, so that resources are provided to enable students to achieve these. She has increased spending on technology, seeing this as valuable tool to support students in their learning. External funding is used to extend the work of the school. For example, the New York Mets baseball organization supports for work with families on the importance of a male presence in family life.

In matching teachers and para-professional staff to students, their strengths, preferences, approach to instruction and behavior management skills are considered, to provide effective class groupings. Scheduling accommodates access to shared facilities and the working arrangements with the host schools. Teachers build in visits to the community within class time and arrange follow-up work from this.

It is recognized that limiting disruption and managing situations that occur are a crucial part of supporting students. The crisis intervention program is effective in dealing with challenging behavior and developing staff skills so that future crises can be minimized. This means that students can fully participate in classes. Where teachers are vigilant, match instruction to the needs of their students and inform students of what they are learning and why, student engagement is high and students appear eager to learn. Where teachers do not make clear the reasons for activities and tasks, students are less willing to engage and instructional time is less productive.

Parents value the ways in which staff are pro-active and contact them to check that all is well with students, when they notice small but significant changes in behavior. Staff recognize that this can be an indicator of a child being worried and unable to express that worry or concern. The school is active in addressing low attendance through an effective team approach. Student absence is followed up promptly, to establish the reason. A barrier to raising attendance comes from the incidents on school transport. Parents' concerns and lack of confidence in their children's safety leads to reduced attendance and, is a factor in much of the work of the attendance team.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

New off-site school locations mean that changes are necessary in the allocation of the administration team; the principal is taking into account the skills and strengths of the team in making decisions about changes. She is planning the change well in advance so that

the transition is smooth and students will be well-supported during that time. The principal takes care to hire staff who will support the students in their learning and development.

Professional development continues throughout the year in a variety of ways. Staff from all sites receive professional development together on the three days designated for this each year. They also attend District 75 focused training and in-house training; all training is shared with colleagues through turn-key sessions for grade level groups. As the attitude of teachers to using data ranges from being positive to resistant, the principal provides a consistent emphasis on the use of data and professional development.

Lesson observations are carried out by the assistant principals and principal with some paired observations, to ensure consistency in the use of the observation rubric. Strengths within the administration team are used appropriately, for example the assistant principal with a background in physical education observes staff in that subject. Where under-performance is seen, class inter-visitations are used to support teachers in making improvements.

There is a strong sense of collaborative work at the inclusion site where general education staff work with the inclusion team. While teachers from the same grade meet informally to review instruction and student outcomes, this does not lead to formal sharing of data to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The principal has a clear focus on moving the school forward, through her use of data to identify issues and priorities and monitor progress. She models lifelong learning through her desire to develop her leadership skills to support the school in moving forward. She is accessible to staff at all sites and takes their views into account. Assistant principals at off-sites are not always as accessible, so some staff feels remote from the main school site.

The school runs smoothly with challenging behavior managed effectively. Procedures are made clear to staff, along with the expectation that they will be followed through at all sites.

The school makes good use of resources in the community to extend the opportunities for students to learn. Visits to stores are used to apply learning about mathematical operations and the use of money, as well as practicing social skills. Effective relationships with community-based organizations effectively enrich the curriculum and provide support for students and their families.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

This is an area that is acknowledged as in need of development by the school. The goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan are not sufficiently specific or measurable to enable progress against them to be monitored. Interim goals are not defined against time scales, which further reduce the effectiveness of any monitoring.

When standardized and alternate data on student performance becomes available, it is shared with staff who compare progress against goals in individual education plans. Following this, changes are made to student groupings to match intervention more closely to the students' needs. Due to the characteristics of the students, it is difficult to compare

groups of like students, but meaningful comparisons are made on an individual student basis, comparing progress against goals. Data is not analyzed to show progress over time; consequently it is not possible to identify changes in rates of learning. Monitoring is carried out against student goals at a number of levels: the administration reviews progress against goals at a whole-school level, while at student level, progress against the goals in the individual education plans is reviewed four times each year, and changes made to instructional practice or additional support when this is deemed necessary.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 231	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 	X		
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X		
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.	X		
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.	X		
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5	X		