

**International High School at Kingsboro
Community College**

755, East 100 Street, Brooklyn, New York 11238

Principal: Mr. Michael Soet

Dates of review: 24 – 26 April 2006

Reviewer: Roger Brown

Cambridge Education

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PART 1: The School Context.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school opened in September 2005 and presently teaches students in the 9th grade only. There are 89 students and class sizes vary between 20 and 25 students. The school is expected to double in size in September 2006 and cater for 9th and 10th grade students. Over the next three years the school will take in two more grades until it is a four-grade high school catering for students from 9th to 12th grades. Students come from all over New York City to attend. All students are English language learners, but at present none have identified special educational needs. The students are all immigrants who have been in the country less than four years when they enter the school. All the students score below proficient on the New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Test (NYSESLAT) meaning that they have limited English skills.

As part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools in New York City, the school belongs to a group of eight similar high schools working to a common model. The model was begun over twenty years ago when the first International High School was established.

It was intended that the school should be opened in the buildings of Kingsboro Community College in the south of Brooklyn, but this proved to be impractical despite the student recruitment that had taken place in that vicinity. The school is now temporarily housed in a shared school building nine miles away. The temporary nature of the site, there is insufficient space for the school to expand beyond two grades, and the uncertainty this has engendered, is the most significant problem facing Kingsboro.

PART 2: OVERVIEW.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- The school has made a good start since opening in September 2005.
- The school's adoption of the Internationals' 'Mission and Vision' for education is effective and is already having a positive impact across the school. The accelerated rate at which the students learn and acquire skills in English is a notable strength of this approach.
- Elements of teaching are very imaginative. In good lessons, teachers engage the students very effectively with creative topics and tasks that challenge and interest them and at the same time catering for the differing skill and ability levels of the students.
- Teachers make good use of computers to support collaborative working at the same time encouraging individuals to learn at their own pace.
- Attendance is good, already above target and being sustained.
- Students view the school positively; they feel safe and believe that it gives them better opportunities than they would get elsewhere.
- Students value the support and guidance they get from the advisory program.
- Relationships within the school are very positive. The diverse cultural background of the students is seen as an asset, differing groups mix well and the longer established students are supportive of newcomers.
- The Principal has empowered the staff and students to participate in the development of the school. It is clear, that in this school, everyone's opinion is valued. There is good teamwork, strong commitment and a wish to improve on the successful start.

WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- Create systems and procedures to consolidate the good practice at the same time planning for the development and expansion of the school.
- Develop the use of assessments, which enhance the school's approach to teaching and learning.
- Develop the use of data to support learning and accelerate the progress that the students make.
- Continue to develop the creative use of technology to support and extend individualized learning.

PART 3: MAIN FINDINGS

Overall Evaluation

Overall this is a proficient school, with some well-developed features.

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

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.

This aspect is proficient.

The school only opened in September 2005, so it does not yet have a large amount of information about students' attainment and progress. It is not yet possible for the school to compare current results with past performance. However, the school's records already indicate that students are making good progress in the key aspect of acquisition and development of English language skills. The school deliberately plans every class as a means to extend students' proficiency in English. The use of "heterogeneous cooperative learning groups" in every session means that every group of students contains a variety of home languages. Every room is set out to accommodate the students in small groups. Every class, whatever the subject, involves group discussion. Therefore, with only one common language, they discuss their work in English. The students find this approach both challenging and supportive. Whenever possible, students with the weakest levels of English are paired with a more competent English speaker who also speaks their home language. The discussions that take place within the groups ensure that students have to explain their understanding of what is being taught. In doing so, this both allows the teachers to assess how well students are doing, and very effectively reinforces the concepts for them.

This common structured approach across all subjects is a powerful way of ensuring that language skills are learned and acquired within a proper context for the students. The intense levels of collaboration build and reinforce the high quality of the relationships that characterize the interactions in the school. The students state clearly that they like this way of learning and value the skills it is giving them. Nevertheless, the approach is not yet universally successful. The school is keenly aware that students' math skills are weaker than they would like them to be and that although teachers work hard to scaffold the instruction there are still weaknesses in the academic development of some individual students.

All teachers collect data about students' progress and attainments, they use a variety of approaches, and at the same time this works well in the close knit community that currently exists, but it will not be as successful when the numbers of teachers and students grows. Daily and weekly records are used effectively in the staff discussions to identify many of the students' specific needs within subjects and to follow their progress over the short time they have been in school. These team meetings ensure that those students with the greatest needs are targeted. Some students were surprised that staff not only focused on students with specific problems, but also on those who were attaining relatively well yet not making significant progress.

Students' attendance is analyzed closely, general patterns are noted and action is taken to deal with problems. All unexplained absence is immediately followed through. The students understand this, and point out that staff vigilance on attendance is such that they recognize that they are checked on throughout the day. The goal for attendance is 90% this year and the school is already consistently above this; maintaining a regular level around 93%. This is despite the fact that almost all the students have a significant distance to travel to and from the school. As yet, there has been no analysis of students' academic and attendance records for patterns or issues relating to gender or ethnic group. However, teachers regularly compare the performances of individuals across the subjects and modify their teaching as a result.

Quality Statement 2: 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 aspect is proficient

Given that the school has only recently come into being and that all its students are new to the country, it has done well to quickly establish that it demands rigorous standards from its students. Despite the hugely diverse range of experiences and understanding the students arrive with, and the fact that some are still settling in to the way the school does things, teachers are constantly challenging the students to do more and to progress even faster. In the best classes, students investigate different sources of information for themselves, and are then required to support each other and their group in producing work to a high standard. The need for students to be creative and to be able to communicate is constantly being stressed and fostered.

The school is working to the model developed in the other International Schools where academic achievement and progress is assessed principally through defended portfolio presentations. The students have to prepare and then present their work to a panel that includes teachers, students and other adults who are able to question them about what they have learned. The students do not believe that this is a soft option. Far from it, all who were questioned about it said that they felt it would be less onerous if they could simply hand in their work or go through an individual assessment on what they knew. Nevertheless, they recognized that in placing the demands that it does, the school is actually equipping them well for a place in American society. Given that some staff and all the students are new to this approach it is evolving well, but the students would still like more help and guidance in preparing for the presentations.

Good attention is given to the most vulnerable students; they are able to progress at a reasonable pace thanks to the regular guidance meetings and the follow up interventions from the staff. Teachers do share a common perception of what is to be expected from the students, but as yet, not all classes are functioning on the same level. In part this is down to varying levels of teachers' experience, and in part the need for greater clarity that could be gained by establishing rubrics to give concrete guidance about the expectations.

There is well-developed personal support for students, for example, through the advisory program. Students find this aspect of school life valuable and helpful. They stress that all teachers know their students well and that everybody knows who to turn to when they have difficulties. The students are very positive about the school, and without exception those who were asked would recommend it to others.

Parents are adequately informed about their children's standards and the progress they are making and they appear to support the school. The Principal recognizes that there is much more to be done to keep parents and the community well informed about the school's work. This is difficult for a number of reasons. Those parents who live with their children often have poor English, they work very hard over long hours, and sometimes they have to do two or three jobs to earn sufficient money. Few have easy access to transport and as most do not live close to the school they are reluctant to come to school.

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

This aspect is proficient.

The school is at an early stage in its development, but it has adapted itself effectively to making good use of the International Schools' model. The emphasis on heterogeneous and collaborative working is apparent in all classes, as are teachers' attempts to provide carefully scaffolded and well differentiated instruction. However, the effectiveness of this approach varies from teacher to teacher. With such a diverse population of students it is hard for teachers to keep track of what has been covered by individuals and what has been well learned and understood. More work is needed to develop the use of assessments which would enhance the school's approach to teaching and learning. This would provide the school with better data to support learning and accelerate the progress that the students make.

It is very clear that on the whole the students enjoy school and respond well to the challenges of the collaborative experientially based curriculum. Despite the difficulties of attending a school outside their community no students have dropped out and attendance is consistently good. There were many good examples seen of students in class co-operating in small groups on a range of themes and subjects. This approach enhances their language and social skills and allows them to learn effectively from each other. The school has sufficient computers for all students to have individual access to one. Teachers design their classes to make good use of this resource. For instance, in a science class, groups were researching information on natural phenomena such as hurricanes to put together a presentation about disasters that occurred as a result of these events. The level of engagement and cooperation was high, with different students negotiating various roles. Some were using the internet to find information others were recording it and one member of each group was leading and coordinating the work. In a music class, individual students were combining work on a computer program with experiments on electronic keyboards to produce their own compositions.

Despite the strong emphasis on group work, students are also encouraged to personalize their learning and to maintain strong links with their own culture. Teachers are creative in their approach and inventive in the tasks they ask the students to work on. Where students lack confidence in written English, they are encouraged to record their work in their native tongue. When they are undertaking creative work, they are encouraged to bring in ideas and themes from their own cultures. The richness and diversity of this approach is something both teachers and students are justifiably proud of.

Teaching is proficient overall with some particularly effective features. The school's culture is one of shared responsibility and team-work. The students readily mirror the example of the faculty and work together harmoniously. Teachers plan with students as to how they are going to achieve their goals, and these plans are reviewed regularly. However, partly because the school is new, and partly because staff are still learning and bringing a range of experience to their roles, a minority of students complain that the school is too rigid in its approach. They believe that they cannot take as much responsibility for themselves as they would like. The majority like the firm line the teachers take, but recognize that this is partly the nature of being in a small school and worry that they will lose support as the school grows.

Quality Statement 4: 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 aspect is proficient.

The school prides itself on the strong sense teamwork among the staff. The Principal is respected and well liked by staff and students. He has adapted the International Schools approach very effectively. The collegiate style of leadership he has embraced ensures that most decisions are discussed openly and all courses of action agreed. The shared vision has created a common set of expectations, but these are not yet consistently applied in all classrooms, although there is a shared commitment to improving things. The teachers are reflective and committed to improving their students' achievement. The teachers' plans, their classroom practice and the effectiveness of their work are regularly reviewed to see what can be improved. Teachers receive feedback on their teaching and they value what they are told.

The school runs smoothly despite the difficulties it experiences with its location and facilities. There is no complacency, but the uncertainty over where it will be in the future is distracting the faculty from setting out some of the important details and minutiae of what should be done to plan for its expansion. The whole staff involvement in the appointment of the additional teachers who are needed for next year is very effective in reinforcing the team approach, but detailed systems and procedures are also needed to reinforce the process of expansion and ensure the smooth transition when the school moves to a permanent base.

Quality Statement 5: 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 aspect is proficient.

The school employs a range of systems to assess and evaluate students' progress. This is effective for those students who are struggling, but it is less effective for the majority who are not. Individual teachers evaluate students' work in their classes and this allows them to contribute towards discussions as to how individual students compare class by class. The system of regular teacher conferences where these discussions take place allows an effective follow through on this information for the struggling students, and the planned interventions that arise from this work appear to be effective for these students. However, despite end of semester grades, and student progress reports, nobody has an easy and complete overview of student progress overall. Different teachers record their grades in different formats. Some use a computer program, but others use a grade book. As the systems do not relate to each other it is not possible to seek overall patterns of success or difficulty.

The student counselor plays a very effective role in the school and gives good support in addressing the students' social and emotional needs. There are regular meetings between students and the counselor to review the information provided by teachers. All parents also receive progress reports, which along with parent teacher conferences give opportunities to enlist their help in tackling any underperformance.

Other key observations

The school has done well to establish itself with a real sense of community and cohesion despite the difficulties with the site and the facilities. The biggest hurdle it has to overcome is the uncertainty about its future. This has an impact on staff and student recruitment. It is unsettling for the present students and staff and makes planning for the future problematic. Nevertheless, with the secure beginning and the support of the International Schools network, the prognosis for the future of the school is optimistic.

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PART4 : EVALUATION CRITERIA GRADE SUMMARY

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Final Evaluation	0	✓	+
Overall Quality of the school		x	

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, math, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 		X	
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>	X		
<p>1.3 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>	X		

Quality Statement 2: 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.	o	✓	+
<p>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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>		X	
<p>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 warranting attention.</p>		X	
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>			X
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>			X
<p>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.</p>		X	

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.		X	
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.	X		
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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	
3.6 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	
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	0	✓	+
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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.		X	
Quality Statement 5: 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.	o	✓	+
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 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	
5.4 Information generated by interim 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	
5.5 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.		X	