

The International High School @ Prospect Heights

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High School 524

**883 Classon Avenue, 4th Floor
Brooklyn
NY 11225**

Principal: Alexandra Anormaliza

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**Reviewer: Roger Brown
Cambridge Education**

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Part 1: The School Context

Information About The School

The school opened in September 2004 and currently has 216 students in 9th and 10th grades. Over the next two years the school will continue to grow to take students in 11th and 12th grades and will have doubled in size. The school is situated in the Prospect Heights campus of schools and currently shares the building with four other schools. Students come from all over New York to attend school.

All students are English language learners. The students are all new 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. The school is part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools in New York City. This is 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.

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Part 1: Overview

What the school does well

- In the relatively short time this school has been open it has won the hearts and minds of its students. They believe in this school and what it can do for them, and aspire to its ideals.
- The clear, confident leadership of the school by the Principal has established a strong vision for the direction of the school and the staff team gives excellent support to this.
- The school has well-developed, very effective systems to support the students.
- Teachers teach in similar ways and in doing so the staff teams model the skills and attitudes they wish the students to follow. As a result, the school produces confident, articulate students.
- Relationships in the school are excellent; a climate of mutual respect among staff and between students enables high levels of collaborative working.
- The multi-racial, multi-lingual nature of the student body is a source of pride to everyone at school. Students enjoy and value the school and consequently are thoughtful, caring and respectful.
- Students respond well to the challenge of the innovative curriculum and as a result the levels of attendance are high.
- It provides a good range exciting extracurricular opportunities for students to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the wider world.

WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- Provide greater clarity when defining the expectations for each subject to give students better information about the progress they have made and the next steps they need to take.
- Make clear the links between the thematic approach and the skills that are being taught through this process.
- Develop the use of data, to meet the needs of the school and the students. Encourage all staff to use this data to analyze what is working well and what is working less well.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This school is a developing school, which is currently operating at an overall proficient level.

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 area is developing and at present is at a proficient level.

Students begin at the school with a wide variation in background and experience. Some have had little formal education, some have had interrupted education with significant periods without any schooling. Other students who have been in full time education in their home country are able to graphically describe the huge differences between their previous schooling, which was often formal and reinforced with corporal punishments, and their much happier experience at the International School.

At International, the school aims to give all students the same quality of experience regardless of their circumstances. The first priority is that all students should become fluent in English, even though around one third have never had to speak in English before they arrive. The school is very clear that with these starting points it is not appropriate to begin to measure progress just by testing. Instead, progress is also assessed by teachers at weekly guidance meetings, and sessions when the teaching teams analyze performance of the student groups. The school has created formats for determining what acceptable evidence should look like, and what protocols should be followed for assessing the groups. These elements are reported on the students' report cards. Students' work in class and in tests is graded, but the main assessments take place by students' portfolio presentations at the end of each semester. These are very effective; teachers use a rigorous rubric covering six aspects to determine the levels that students attain.

Report cards are used to record individual students' progress. This leads to the production of an improvement plan for every student at the end of every semester; the student fills this in with the help of staff and together they identify what they need to do, and what the students' parents need to do. The results have at times been a wake up call to some of the students. Teachers believe that although most students are working at a high level, some do not yet achieve their potential and the discussions around the report cards allow them to reinforce general class feedback.

The school has begun to build its use of data into a series of useful indicators about the success of its students, but as yet, this work is not fully integrated into the daily routines of the school. There are careful records of attendance and lateness for all students and attendance is high, 93% overall. Academic performance is also monitored and evaluated. For instance, the higher attaining 10th graders are given value added assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and math to help prepare for the Regent assessments in these subjects. Presently, much of the information is collated by the

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Principal and information fed back to the staff and students. However, the process is not yet formalized in the sense that there is a structure that can be easily replicated and built upon next year. At present, materials are analyzed one by one and have to be copied and distributed, whereas a computer-based system could be more easily shared, refined and replicated. It would also be easier to question, to determine gaps, trends and successes. Hence the longer term recommendations in this report about developing and extending the use of data, to meet the needs of the school and the students.

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 area is proficient.

The school sets broad goals for itself based on the analysis of student achievement data. Much of this is of a qualitative nature and therefore not easily analyzed to be transferred into objective statements or grades where patterns and trends can more easily be determined. The current work is valuable, the portfolio projects, teachers' portfolios and self-reflections along with the descriptive reviews do give valuable insights into the development of the students and their achievements. Nevertheless, it is harder for the school to determine what levels of attainment the students are at, and it is harder still for the students to determine how well they are doing in comparison with their peers in the wider world.

At present, the school has identified 21 students, less than 10% of the whole school, who are underachieving in comparison with their peers; staff are working with these students to accelerate the progress they are making. Support is given by the teacher teams that are working with these students mainly on the academic aspects of their development and by the vice principal who has an important counseling role in terms of the wider social aspects of their development. The students are grateful for the support that they receive, but are not always clear why they are the focus of attention. The school has limited success in involving the parents in this process as few of the parents readily come into the school. As with the other international schools, parents trust the school, they find it hard to get to school as they may have to juggle several jobs and many do not live close to the school. Some parents have poor levels of English themselves, so are even more reluctant to be involved even though the school is able to provide support in a variety of languages.

The Principal recognizes that there is much work to do in this respect, and has already begun to discuss with teachers how the report cards that are issued at the end of each semester to all students can be made more specific about the progress students have made and the next steps they need to take to advance further. The Principal is also clear that teachers need to make stronger links between the thematic approach the school uses and the skills that are being taught through this process. Teachers try hard to make students in their classes fully involved by making the work exciting and interesting. Often teachers are less concerned by the students' mastery of the curriculum content than they are by the students' mastery of the processes involved. Not all students understand this, many come from backgrounds where the rote learning of facts is seen to be all that is important and therefore they are unclear as to how they can be successful if they do not have to regurgitate specific information.

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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 students come from such a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances that the school recognizes that it must take this into account in all its classes. The range of English language competence is very wide; in addition there is a wide spread of attainment and ages. To help students adapt quickly, the school makes very successful use of vertically grouped classes incorporating both 9th and 10th grades together. This has two major benefits. Firstly, it speeds up the process of socializing new students, and secondly, it allows all students to begin to work at their own level of attainment, whatever this may be.

The teachers work in teams planning units of work co-operatively around themes, topics and ideas. Their classroom teaching is highly structured to allow for the differentiated nature of the class and there is a significant focus on group work and the need for students to collaborate in their learning. The student teams are effective as teachers are skilful at getting the students to think deeply about the topics or aspects they are covering. This approach has two distinct advantages; firstly, it simultaneously develops both reasoning and language; secondly, it creates high levels of student engagement. The down side of this thematic approach is that it does not necessarily give strong support to the logical step-by-step development of academic content. However, as the school makes very good use of the portfolio assessment process developed and used by the more established schools in the Internationals network, this is less important than in schools which only use the Regents exams. In the portfolio process the student presents work they have developed to a panel that includes teachers, students and outsiders. The students recognize that this is a very demanding and rigorous process and they say that they would happily escape from it if there were an easier option. However, the school also has to ensure that the students undertake the Regents exam in ELA and math. The fact that many students are on track for passing these confirms the overall success of the school's approach. Nevertheless, there is concern among the teachers and students that they are to a degree under-prepared for these standardized tests and that they may not do as well as they could in these tests if they followed a more rigid curriculum.

The Principal believes strongly that the lesson from the other Internationals is that the school should persist with its current approach. The indications are that she is right in this belief as it is apparent from talking to the students that they have both a desire and a very strong commitment to graduate. The International schools have significantly higher graduation rates and lower drop out rates than students in schools in the full New York City system and an even higher level of success for students with English Language Learning (ELL) requirements in any part of the system.

The Principal and teachers visit classes on a regular basis to assess the effectiveness of their work. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses within the staff teams. They recognize that although some staff have well-developed teaching skills, some others are still developing their practice. All staff are hardworking and clearly committed to the success of the school and the students. There is an effective program of professional development to support the teachers' development.

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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 already proficient and is developing well.

The Principal has a very clear vision for the school and the students. She has a strong presence in the school and is also an important member of the campus team. The calm atmosphere that pervades the upper floors of the building where the International School is based is not reflected on the lower floors where others are based. Yet despite having to negotiate the sharing of facilities with schools with different parameters for behavior and deportment the Principal still works tirelessly to ensure good relations are maintained. The emphasis on teamwork in the school is very effective; all staff see that they have a role to play in ensuring the school's success. The staff teams are currently busy interviewing and selecting new staff to accommodate the growth of the school. The small size of the current school and the cohesive nature of the staff teams has meant that communication within the school is good and that there has been little need to develop formal structures for the effective management of the school. However, next year, as the number of students increases along with the introduction of new staff and it needs to occupy more floors in the building more formal processes need to be developed to accommodate this.

The Principal and the staff have high expectations of the students in terms of teamwork and collaboration, and although sometimes there have been minor problems; the tone of the school is a happy one. The successful integration of multiple nationalities, speaking multiple languages in a calm and harmonious atmosphere where students are motivated and enthusiastic is no mean feat, and has to be applauded. This school runs smoothly as the administration of the school is efficient and effective.

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 area is proficient with developing strengths

The Principal and the teachers know the school well; they recognize their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, they understand that more has to be done to involve the parents. They know that although they try to give the students as broad an educational experience as possible by often taking them out of school; that the take up of after school activities needs to be improved. Although the girls' participation in the campus soccer team is one particular success in this area. They recognize that the advisory program is strong and that although they intervene effectively with students who are underachieving, they still have work to do in developing systems to challenge and encourage other students to reach their full potential. Good use is already made of the qualitative data in the school, but more work needs to be done on the development of quantitative data to back this up.

This is a reflective school, staff have already begun to think about how the school should develop, and how they should assess and measure the effectiveness of their work. They are willing to see what lessons can be learned from other the International schools

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and elsewhere.

Other key observations

Although not yet two years old, this is a school that is building towards success. It has created a good foundation for itself. The students and their parents believe in the school and what it can do for them. With the continuation of the strong teamwork their faith should be justified.

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Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

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>1.1 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		

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Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	0	✓	+
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

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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	