



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Williamsburg Preparatory School**

**High School 561  
257 North 6 Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11211**

**Principal: Kathleen Elvin**

**Dates of review: March 15th – 16th, 2007**

**Reviewer: George Wallace**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Williamsburg Preparatory School opened in September 2004 and has 323 students in grades 9 through 11. Their first grade 12 cohort will join the school in September this year. The school occupies the upper two floors of a building which houses three schools in total.

The ethnic make up of students is 51% Hispanic, 33% Black, 11% White, 3% Asian/Pacific, and 1% other. Four percent of the students are English language learners, and eight per cent are special education students. Only about 40% of the students are eligible for free lunches and therefore the school does not receive Title 1 funding. Attendance at school was 92.8% in 2005, but declined the following year. However attendance has improved this year and is currently running at 90.7%.

As an empowerment school, Williamsburg Preparatory School has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development service, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork. The school has useful professional links with the Long Island University. The school is also currently engaged in a research project to design its own Periodic Assessment materials. The first of these assessments have already been used by the school.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has high expectations and sets the right tone for learning so that students make good progress and reach high standards of achievement.
- Students, staff and parents love their school.
- Data drives planning and influences the teaching decisions made by individuals and teams.
- The well respected principal leads and manages the school effectively and has the students and staff welfare at heart in his drive for higher achievements.
- Teaching engages students and satisfies their needs through effective planning, good use of data and a strong knowledge of the curriculum.
- The school runs extremely smoothly and procedures are very clear.
- This is a listening and learning school in the pursuit of continuous improvement.
- Teamwork and collaboration are very strong and highly productive.
- The school uses data effectively to inform new planning with interim evaluations that consolidate existing procedures or lead to immediate change to benefit students learning and progress.
- The professional development program is valued, effective and driven by school needs.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop a common system to aid all departmental long term planning and goal setting which incorporates interim and final evaluation points.
- Continue to refine the whole school plan and the mechanisms by which goals are measured for success at interim and final points during the year.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well developed school.**

Williamsburg Preparatory School is a very welcoming school which is much loved by students, staff and parents. On entry there is a strong feeling that it is a place where students want to be. All members of the school value the learning culture that pervades the building. Staff and students get on well together, show respect and have a great commitment to success. As a consequence the school runs very smoothly and all staff and students know the routines and procedures.

The principal and all staff are highly committed to continuous improvement and students and parents recognize that they work tirelessly to ensure this happens. It is a school that takes reflection and evaluation extremely seriously and as a result there are many times during the school year that interim evaluation leads to revisions to courses, groupings and approaches to teaching to benefit and improve learning. The school engages in active research endeavoring to ensure that the systems and procedures they have in place are working as efficiently and effectively as possible. As such, the school collects a wide range of data from many sources, including 'design your own' tests and uses both hard and soft data very well.

Teaching engages students. Teachers meet with grade and subject colleagues frequently. Their planning is thorough and based on the outcomes of student performance. Departments have developed logical systems, but there is a need to strengthen the consistency of approach to longer-term departmental and grade planning across the school.

The principal is well respected as the leader and manager of the school. There is strength to the devolved leadership across the school, and the lead teacher appointments provide additional support and direction to subject development. This has proved to be successful. Professional development is of a good quality and increasingly is based on the expertise and skills of staff and therefore professional development is highly relevant to the school goals.

School action planning is based on discussions arising from the analysis and evaluation of a wealth of data. There is, however, still room for the refinement of some elements of whole school planning. The caliber of staff and the sharpness of evaluation indicate that this school has the capacity to continue to improve.

## **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 well developed.**

Administration and faculty collect and use of a wide range of data effectively. They generate valuable data that is used well to provide a constantly updated position of the achievements and progress of students in all subjects, grades and classes. As a listening and learning school it recognizes that there are elements of analysis and evaluation that can be improved, but knows that their systems currently in place work well to benefit students. Data of all types, including information about ethnicity, English language learners and special education students is collected, evaluated and acted upon. The information is frequently updated and analyzed. This enables all staff to know what progress has been made and whether it is enough, before planning the next phase of student work. In addition there are other types of data that the school uses, for example, prior to entry academic and social data that aids planning and grouping of students into their advisory classes. Performance data by gender is analyzed and where discrepancies occur in achievement or even participation, teachers make interim adjustments to their planning and teaching to accommodate needs and improve achievement. Since the first graduation class has not yet taken their final Regents examinations there are no comparative results to be made against similar schools. However, the analysis of performance of a wide range of different groups is intensive.

**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 well developed.**

The school uses its data well. School leaders in different forums, together with teacher teams engage frequently in collaborative tasks to set demanding goals. In particular they use data to pose questions and reach conclusions that often change their practice or even groupings of students. From a review of data, school goals are set that focus on school improvement but the strategies and success criteria in action plans are not clear or easily measurable. In addition, they are not contained in one document for all staff to use throughout the school year. The school's data analysis and mini research projects on students' learning, shows a clear understanding of the progress of each student. In addition, subsequent highly professional discussions review ways to accelerate learning and overcome specific difficulties. Therefore the school is very good at providing particular attention to those students in most need. It is evident from several sources that the school has high expectation of students. The students know this, and although sometimes annoyed by it, they feel totally supported and know that their teachers will give up a great deal of time to ensure they are on track for success. The school successfully operates several activities in the normal school day and extra to it to support students. Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all involved in the school. There is a strong team spirit and one wholly valued by the students. Departments have developed logical systems, but there is a need to strengthen the consistency of approach to longer-term departmental and grade planning across the school.

**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 well developed.**

The school follows the mandated curriculum. However, in addition the school provides enrichment through electives, a wide range of trips, after school activities and important advisory programs to aid students’ understanding about themselves and their aspirations, social and health issues. Teachers know they are accountable for students’ learning. Teachers engage in regular, valuable reviews of planning, teaching, assessment and evaluation that inform ongoing planning to improve students’ outcomes. The approach to and reflection of teaching is of a high quality so the collection and effective use of data to inform teaching is second nature to the teachers.

The principal makes budgetary decisions on the basis of student needs in relation to the school’s overall goals. Staffing decisions are always driven by student needs, and in particular to ensure that what the school provides raises students’ performance. The decision to increase staffing so that four lead teachers are each responsible for teaching and improving a subject area is an example of such a decision. This is proving to be highly effective in raising students’ progress in these subjects and, together with the general high quality of teaching, ensures that lessons engage students. Classroom visits and discussion with students and parents indicate that students enjoy their lessons and want to learn and succeed. The work is interesting and actively engages them. Students feel safe, are respected and show respect to staff. They know several teachers and staff they would turn to if they had concerns or anxieties. Student attendance to date this year is 90.7%; a fraction lower than this year’s target. However, the school takes attendance seriously and has effective strategies to raise attendance, especially that of the most persistent absentees.

**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 well developed.**

Hiring staff is a thorough and fair process involving students, staff and delivering a demonstration lesson. There is a rigorous selection is based on a range of criteria that includes ascertaining whether prospective teachers have high expectations for student performance, understand data analysis and its use and their ability to work hard independently and in teams. Professional development is data based, directly linked to the school goals and is highly valued by all staff. It is valued because it not only does it satisfy specific personal needs, but it is based on planning meetings prior to the start of the school new year and therefore totally relevant to school needs. Variations occur during the course of the school year as a result of staff evaluations of student performance data and to meet issues that require added attention. Increasingly most professional development uses the skills of the staff rather than calling on external personnel but specific higher education personal development opportunities are also valued. Staff are always strongly focused on the effectiveness of their teaching and the strength of correlation with achievement

The principal and subject leaders frequently visit classrooms to observe teaching. The openness and collegiality between teachers is such that peer observations are common and often discussed at subject and grade meetings. Feedback is immediate and where

patterns emerge, or particularly good ideas discovered they are soon shared through internal school management and professional development meetings. All forms of planning take place in teams, although pre-plan issues in preparation for such meetings. Plans, whether short or long term, are a product of teachers' and the principal's findings, often arising from data analysis. As a listening and learning school, staff are receptive to new ideas, and in sharing ways to think about planning, such as analyzing data and other information to identify goals and working out the strategies to achieve these. The weakest element of the process is formal evaluation of plans. The whole school knows the principal's goals and those for the whole school since they helped to set them. As a consequence of the sharp thinking about curriculum and teaching, the school takes every opportunity to ensure that any links with other services or partnerships, such as that with Long Island University, aligns with the school's academic goals and help to improve the progress of all students. The principal is well respected and the school runs very smoothly.

**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 well developed.**

The overall quality of monitoring and evaluation throughout the school is good, and well established. Subject and school plans, although not as sharp as they could be, are a well-established aspect of the school's work and contribute strongly to the academic success of the school. All teachers, and in particular the lead teachers monitor teaching and learning closely, especially through the data arising from the wide range of interim assessments made. All meetings whether grade, subject or other have a specific evaluation and review element to them.

Comparisons of student progress are a frequent aspect of monitoring of lessons and especially of performance data. Such information is discussed at various levels in the school and interim changes made to teaching, and sometimes groupings of students, to ensure that progress becomes more effective. Modification of plans are discussed and made at grade meetings, subject meetings and proposed when the principal is in conference with subject leaders. The principal works closely with teachers and keeps a wide range of useful and expected information about student performance. In conversation with teachers, and especially groups of teachers, decisions are taken to modify aspects of the teaching program based upon accurate analysis of student data. The process of continuous improvement is one shared by all staff so that new agreed procedures, whether for all staff or a specific team, are effective. For example, there are several micro research projects going on in the school to ascertain what is causing blocks in some student's learning as well as why, for others, it is effective. One major project which is both generating much data, but also showing the teaching team that such work can be extrapolated to other students, is the Empowerment Schools Initiative. The school is clear in its thinking about how to improve and has well developed systems to do so.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Williamsburg Preparatory School (HS 561)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* 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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X