



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

MIDDLE SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS

Public School 587

**790 East New York Street
Brooklyn
New York 11203**

Principal: Susan Hobson-Ransom

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Reviewer : Lysbeth Bradley

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school reopened in 2004 as a Middle School for the Arts (Grade 6 through 8) in order to provide its students with opportunities to develop their talents in dance, drama, music and the visual arts alongside the mandated curriculum. There are 446 students on roll and the school is admitting grade 8 students for the first time this year. The school serves a community where all students are eligible for Title 1 funding, a greater number than for similar schools and much greater than the City average. Over 92% of students are Black with the remainder being mostly Hispanic. A very small number of students are English language learners. The percentage of special education students is much the same as similar schools but growing as the school becomes more focused on identifying those who need additional support. The school's attendance rates match those of City schools and are higher than similar schools.

While progress has been made in implementing some of arts strands, limited access to resources has meant that the introduction of music has only just begun. The school has also experienced instability in its staffing and was still without a full complement of staff at the time of the review.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and assistant principal give strong and enthusiastic leadership.
- The principal has a good grasp of where the school's strengths lie and where improvements are needed.
- The school's child-centered vision and clear goals are known to students, staff and parents.
- Staff have successfully created a secure learning environment where students can develop personally, socially and academically.
- Students are keen to come to school, generally behave well and follow the dress code.
- Staff use an effective range of intervention strategies to support special education students.
- Creative approaches to developing a range of learning styles through an arts focused curriculum are beginning to pay dividends.
- Students have great respect for the principal and know she has their best interests at heart and high expectations of what they can achieve.

What the school needs to improve

- Build the capacity of staff to understand and make effective use of quantitative and qualitative data to develop the curriculum and instructional practice.
- Develop formative assessments, target setting and students' self-evaluation to inform lesson planning and meet the needs of different groups of students in the same class.
- Raise achievement in mathematics.
- Implement formal structures for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's priorities for improvement.
- Continue to widen parental participation in their children's education by building on the good range of strategies already established.
- Increase opportunity for teachers to work collaboratively to improve consistency in leveling student work.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school but has made good strides in establishing an effective learning environment for its students in the two years it has been open.

The principal has correctly made the establishment of a secure learning environment, where students feel safe and are interested in learning, her top priority. Good attendance, particularly among the new Grade 8 students, mannerly behavior and good levels of active participation in lessons are evidence of the school's success in this area. Parents speak warmly of the principal's ability to communicate her vision for the school and can bear testimony to the positive influence exposure to the Arts is having on their children.

The school recognizes that it has some way to go in making good use of available data and in establishing manageable and effective forms of formative assessment that enable teachers to meet the needs of students of different abilities and aptitudes in the same class.

Since it opened, the school has employed a wide range of helpful strategies to encourage parents to work in partnership with the school to raise their child's achievement, but too few parents have taken up these opportunities. A further barrier to raising achievement stems from the school's need to share spaces with another school. This limits the ability to program as flexibly as the school would wish.

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 undeveloped.

As the school has only just admitted its full complement of students, the principal and her cabinet have had limited data to work with, particularly for monitoring the progress of individual students over an extended period of time. Progress has already been made in developing the use of internal assessment to provide interim and summative information to teachers, students and parents. The school has begun to provide opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively to agree the level of students' work in order to ensure that internal data is standards-based and consistent.

The school has had reasonable success in tracking the progress of its most needy students and can provide evidence to show that the intervention strategies instigated by the school are beginning to bear fruit. The school has an uphill struggle to involve many parents in supporting their child's education, but used data effectively to encourage attendance at summer school for those students who needed additional instruction. This ensured that no student was held over in the first year the school was in existence and very few were held over last year.

Staffing issues and limited curriculum leadership in the last two years in part explain why achievement in mathematics is significantly lower than English language arts. The school

has recently appointed a knowledgeable mathematics coach who has rapidly identified the reasons for poor results and has correctly focused plans on tackling weaknesses in instructional practice.

The school has correctly identified the correlation that exists between results and instructional practice and its next step is to introduce greater rigor in the use of grade and class-related data in order to refine professional development programs for groups and individual teachers. The administration acknowledges that it has not yet made effective use of the data to focus on meeting the needs of those students who are gifted and talented.

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 undeveloped.

The principal and assistant principal place a strong emphasis on developing a collaborative approach to planning but readily acknowledge that staff collaboration is not sufficiently structured to ensure either consistency across grade groups or subjects. This is partly because this small school has grown incrementally and also because there has been a significant turnover of staff since it opened.

The principal has communicated her high expectations to students and parents alike. Students know that she will do everything in her power to help them make something of their lives; that she wants the school to get high scores and to be a place where students have fun. Those parents who work closely with the school know precisely what she stands for and how she intends to do the best for their child. However, there are many parents that the school has still to reach.

The administration also ensures that parents and students have access to information which identifies an individual student’s strengths and areas for improvement. Great efforts are being made to encourage parents to take an active interest in their child’s education and to work with the school for their child’s benefit. The setting of individual targets is encouraged but has not been formalized and there is inconsistency of practice across the school.

Most teachers identify clear learning objectives for the lesson and encourage students to evaluate how well they have succeeded. In the very best lessons, students are taught explicitly how to evaluate each other’s performance in relation to specific criteria. For example, in one Grade 6 class, students in the roles of stage director and playwright demonstrated a maturity beyond their years in providing astute critiques of how the actors could improve their performance. However, accurate interpretation of data is not yet making sufficient impact on instructional practice in most classrooms.

The school has been most effective in providing support for those students at risk of falling behind and can identify which of its intervention strategies have been most successful. It has not given enough thought to how changes in instructional practice are needed to enable students working at level 3 to aspire to level 4 or how to enable its most gifted students to realize their potential.

Quality Statement 3 – Build and Align Capacity: 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 school has not been daunted by the constraints imposed by the budget restrictions or the limited availability of space and resources in the recent past. The principal and assistant principal are continuously striving to find ways of ensuring that students have access to quality experiences in dance, drama, visual arts and most recently music. The school has not yet considered the best way to introduce rigor into the monitoring of its students’ progress in the Arts and the impact that this specialized curriculum has on their achievement in English language arts, mathematics and science.

The literacy and mathematics coaches use data effectively to group students according to their needs and to target groups for additional support during the extended day. Teachers are successful in providing lively and meaningful contexts for learning that really engage students and make them want to succeed. Few teachers are at the stage of modifying their lesson plans to provide different activities with the right level of challenge for students of different abilities in the same class. The newly appointed mathematics coach has been quick to identify the lack of opportunities for accountable talk in groups. She has already identified ways in which to support teachers in developing the workshop model and to introduce mechanisms that will enable students to reflect on what they have learned, what helped, what hindered and why. Many teachers are keen to engage in curriculum discussion and acknowledge the difficulties involved in fusing the school’s arts curriculum with the mandated curriculum for the benefit of the students.

The school has been most effective in establishing a warm and secure environment where students are keen to attend and are motivated to learn. The principal ensures that all staff are consistent in their expectations and a zero tolerance policy to behavior and dress code provides students with the security that they need to learn effectively. Students and staff alike have great respect for the principal and recognize how hard she and the assistant principal work on their behalf. Students are encouraged to see beyond the classroom and identify goals to aim for in life. Attendance is better than similar schools and behavior in lessons is good and, at times, exemplary.

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 undeveloped.

Although this area of the school’s work is undeveloped, the principal’s astute assessment of the qualities, abilities and interests that are needed in the staff she appoints augurs well for the school’s capacity to develop staff teams. The principal seeks teachers who turn students onto learning, who work collaboratively in sharing good practice and who question critically the impact of lesson and curriculum planning on the achievements of students of different abilities and talents. A significant number of the staff are new to teaching and the majority is new to the school. In appointing a large number of new staff, the principal has been able to ensure that every member understands the high expectations the administration has for each and every student and how the school’s philosophy informs all aspects of the school’s work. Teachers are left in no doubt about

the part they are expected to play in providing a curriculum that engages students in learning, enabling them to raise their sights and put in the effort required to move forward.

The principal and assistant principal provide energetic and committed leadership in pursuing the school's goals. They recognize that there is much more work to do in holding staff accountable for their responsibilities and the need for the two of them to step back and enable other senior and veteran members of staff to develop the capacity to lead initiatives, to take responsibility for checking on progress and to be held accountable for outcomes.

Faculty teams are at an early stage of forming and it will take time before they are at a stage to evaluate the impact of their decisions relating to the curriculum and instructional practice objectively. The school runs well on a day-to-day basis, not least because the principal and assistant principal spend time upholding the school's expectations for attendance, behavior and dress code. Support staff have a clear understanding of the rules and play their part in conveying a consistent message about acceptable behavior and the need to adhere strictly to school policies.

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.

In her first two years, the principal has achieved her initial priority in establishing effective systems to provide a safe and secure learning environment, to promote good attendance and to communicate to students and parents the school's high expectations for effort and behavior. The school has made effective use of data to monitor and reward good attendance. Students know exactly where they stand and appreciate the consistency and fairness with which the administration applies sanctions.

Staff and parents in the school's leadership team have been actively involved in developing a comprehensive education plan that has clear and measurable success criteria. However, the school is not yet able to track the progress towards its goals or assess the extent to which action plans have made a difference to students' achievement because there are no formal procedures for checking on progress or evaluating the impact on student achievement on a regular basis.

The school is most effective in monitoring and evaluating its plans in relation to those students in the greatest need of support. The principal acknowledges that although informal monitoring provides information about the effectiveness of individual members of staff, there is insufficient rigor and objectivity in the use of comparative data.

The school also has a long way to go in making the comprehensive education plan a relevant tool that has the capacity to influence the development of the curriculum and instruction. The principal and assistant principal have identified the importance of enabling classroom teachers to develop a better understanding of how to make effective use of data in order to increase their appreciation of where they fit into the scheme of things and where they are accountable. The administration also has some way to go in enabling teachers to understand how what they do in the classroom relates directly to the goals in the comprehensive education plan.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Middle School For The Arts (PS 587)	∅	✓	+
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		