

Opportunity Charter School

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Part 1: Overview

What the school does well

- The leadership of the school gives excellent direction, has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development and a strong commitment to continued improvement.
- The school serves its diverse population well; there are good relationships and effective and supportive links with parents who appreciate the quality of the education their children receive.
- The school gathers, and uses, good quality assessment data and information about individual students. This is used to ascertain and meet their needs.
- There is a strong shared vision and team approach and key staff carry out their roles effectively.
- Through good classroom relationships and clear expectations, teaching is effective in moving students' learning forward.
- The management of students' behavior and personal development is good, and is successful in raising their self-esteem and commitment to education.
- The management of special education is good, clearly identifies students' needs and prepares effective intervention programs to support their learning.
- The school has a calm and purposeful feel and a positive ethos brought about by a clearly defined set of expectations for students and staff.

What the school needs to improve

- The use all of the available data, including assessment, attendance and behavior records, more effectively to create a clearer overview that will better inform strategic planning.
- Sharpen up longer-term strategic planning so that all involved are clear about their roles, responsibilities, timescales and accountability.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teachers' lesson planning, the differentiation of work and the opportunities for assessment and evaluation of learning during lessons.
- Involve students more actively in setting and understanding their own targets so giving them greater understanding of the steps they need to take to achieve at a higher level.
- Improve the clarity of the language used in students individual education plans to make them more accessible to both students and parents.
- Revise the approaches to teaching handwriting and presentational skills aimed at improving quality and quantity of students' written work and raising their self-esteem.
- Continue to improve attendance and punctuality through target setting, and increase parental understanding of attendance issues through regular updates about the performance of each grade and the overall school.

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Part 2: The School Context.

Information about the school

This Charter School is in its third year of operation and has 162 students from 6th to 8th Grade. Forty eight percent of the students are selected on the basis of having special educational needs. Most other students are also well behind grade levels – often three years - so attainment on entry is much lower than grade level. The school is well staffed with a ratio of 18 students to each class supported by a teacher and a teaching assistant. Each grade has a social worker. The school is popular and has a substantial waiting list for places at all grade levels.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient with many 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 area of the school's work is overall proficient, with many well-developed features.

The school has well developed systems for using data to track students' progress. Data has been used well to identify weaknesses in students' performance in language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, often the result of their underdeveloped language skills. The analysis of standardized test data in language arts and reading the school has identified the main areas of weakness. In mathematics, the information gained from data analysis resulted in a doubling of mathematics teaching time and the development of a 'Mathematics Power Hour' in the after school program.

In parallel to the formal assessment systems used by the school, the school has many other methods of monitoring students' performance. Daily assessments include reading and speech and language, and writing samples are taken three times a year. Regular and frequent formal and informal discussions with students help to set realistic goals and the continual evaluation and revision of the teaching methods are all used to inform the program. As a result, while all students receive the same curriculum content this is tailored for individuals through the development of the school's own 'scope and sequence'.

With many of the students having identified special educational needs, assessments in speech and language and behavior also form a significant part of the data gathering, particularly for the students' individual education plans. Along side these: the physical education teacher tracks students' physical skill development; and social-emotional and behavioral assessments involve parents as well as behavior specialists and outside providers. Where there are other concerns about a student's performance, attendance records are also scrutinized and any poor attendance followed up.

This work in data analysis is proficient, particularly in using the data to identify students who are significantly "at risk". However, all of this data, including assessment, attendance and behavior records could be used more effectively to create a better-informed overview that will help inform future strategic planning.

Quality Statement 2: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and

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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 overall proficient.

Students have well developed plans and goals for academic and behavioral improvement. These are clearly defined through consultation between teachers, support staff, councilors and parents. From very low levels of attainment on entry, students generally make good gains, particularly in language arts. The programs put in place to address these weaknesses are improving the quality of instruction. As a result, for example, 87% of 7th Grade students made gains within their reading score level in the New York City English Language Arts exam.

The intervention strategies that improve students' attitudes and help their personal development are proficient. Teachers know their students so well, they are quickly able to identify any who are at risk of falling behind in their work or who have emotional needs. Additional support for this is through the advisory role of social workers and the behavior team. In partnership with the teachers, they make a significant contribution to resolving students' personal issues and improving their confidence, particularly those who have behavioral or emotional issues to address.

All of this is enhanced by the support shown by the majority of parents who receive regular and detailed reports on their children's standards and progress.

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

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The programs for all students are proficient and the curriculum is planned in line with students' attainments and needs. For example, each reading group has a different curriculum but follows a basically similar content. However, there are differences in teachers' approaches. Where lessons are very interactive and engage students well, they benefit from the discussions and sharing of ideas. Where they are more directed and heavily dependent on worksheets it becomes difficult for students to interact. Where this is seen, students' low level of language skills and vocabulary are exposed and they do not make as much progress as in the more interactive lessons. Alongside these improvements there is also the need to involve students more actively in setting and understanding their own targets which would give them greater understanding of the steps they need to take to achieve at a higher level. The school's leadership also recognizes the need to improve the quality and consistency of teachers' lesson planning so that all is at the quality of the best. This will improve the differentiation of work and create more opportunities for effective formative assessment and evaluation of learning during lessons moving towards a more formal system across the school.

Through good classroom relationships and clear expectations, teaching is proficient in moving students' learning forward. The school recognizes where standards could be improved further and is constantly striving for improvement. It is currently moving forward on improvements to the language arts curriculum by developing their own 'scope and sequence', and modifying the content of the social studies curriculum to make it more

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accessible to the lower achievers, particularly those with poor reading skills. While there is a strong drive to raise reading skills, further attention needs to be given to improving students' presentation and handwriting, which would improve their work rate and further raise their self-esteem.

To support other aspects of students' development the school also has well-developed programs for art, music, physical education and computers. This is helping create a broad curriculum and ensuring that students receive a well-rounded education. The good management of students' behavior and personal development is proving successful in raising their self-esteem and commitment to education.

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 area of the school's work is overall proficient, with many well-developed features.

The leadership qualities and care shown by the co-directors is recognized and appreciated by students, staff and parents. The two school leaders bring different individual strengths to the work of the school and the combination of the two make the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

All involved, from the directors, teachers and teaching assistants through to the behavior support staff have a strong, shared vision and team approach in which key staff carry out their roles effectively. There are well-developed systems for staff to share information about students and plan to address any difficulties that are identified in the work of individual students.

The school has a clear policy of employing teachers who are sympathetic to its aims and goals and most are keen to stay on at the school. Staff are also involved in a proficient program of professional development and the leadership has identified a number of target areas for further professional development. The work of the Schools Attuned facilitator is also providing well-focused professional development for teachers. However, there is a need to involve staff more closely in long-term strategic planning so that all are clear about their role in school development and have clearly defined responsibilities through which they can be accountable.

Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its 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.

Classroom relationships are good and teachers are clear in their expectations of students' behavior and work ethic. The management of students' behavior and personal development is well developed, and successful in raising their self-esteem and commitment to education. As a result, the school has a calm and purposeful feel and a positive ethos brought about by a clearly defined set of expectations for students and staff. The combination of good relationships and high expectations make teaching effective in moving

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students' learning forward. While standards remain low, the success of these approaches can be seen in the gains made by students in Language Arts Examinations in both 6th and 7th Grades. Many students made one whole grade level improvement. The increases for some students were remarkable and equate to several grade levels progress.

The management and organization of special education is well developed. There are good systems for identifying students' specific needs and preparing effective interventions. The individual education plans are well prepared but with the large number of these it may not be sustainable for the special education coordinator to prepare all of these and teachers may need to take a more involved role. There is also the need to make the language more accessible to students and their parents so they are clearer about what needs to be done and how they can help in this. However, the use of in-house services is well developed and used well to formulate programs of work or behavior modification. With all of the experience within the school there is a much-reduced need to use additional external services.

The Therapeutic Crisis Intervention system and the 'safe room' all help to establish the high expectations of students' behavior and response. The regular meetings of the teachers with clinical and behavioral specialists are effective in giving a clearly defined, common approach to developing the whole student. These help students to identify for themselves their triggers and to find strategies for coping with these. Regular meetings of staff in various groupings discuss and evaluate the success of the initiatives in place, including faculty conferences, the child study team, behavior specialist and special education meetings. The school has identified further areas for development in health education and the issues around substance abuse.

Other Key Observations

From strong local opposition in the initial stages of founding the school, the hearts and minds of the local community have now been won over. Parents' views are very positive and they appreciate the progress made by their children, often in a relatively short time. Parents feel partners in the education of their children and the well-developed systems in place are well regarded and supported. The parent coordinator plays a pivotal role in taking the work of the school into the community. However, further work is needed to continue the upward trend in students' attendance. Targets for improvement at all levels and greater flow of information to all parents would help in taking the message that regular attendance is important to students' continued progress.

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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, mathematics, 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.	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

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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
5.3 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
5.4 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	