

The Beacon School

THE BEACON SCHOOL

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NY 10023**

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

The Beacon School is a well-established portfolio-based, public High School serving an area with a diverse, multicultural population. There are currently 1,065 students from 9th to 12th grade. The school articulates a clear vision, committed to the creation of a collaborative learning environment that nourishes intellectual diversity, prepares students to attend an institution of higher learning and to become active citizens. The school places a strong emphasis on work that cuts across traditional subject boundaries, encouraging students to discover relationships and connections that offer a rich understanding of their world.

Approximately 95% of students go on to schools of higher education, having thrived in an environment which combines academic excellence with wide-ranging experiences of the arts, technology and global awareness.

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Part 2: overview

What the school does well

- Students attain high standards at graduation after four years of study at Beacon. They are well prepared for extended progress at schools of higher education.
- The curriculum successfully combines academic excellence with attention to the creative, aesthetic and social development of students.
- The personal development of students is outstanding; they demonstrate exceptional maturity, confidence and the ability to take on significant responsibility both within school and in the wider community.
- Much of the teaching is characterized by high expectations of what students can attain. There is a commendable level of intellectual challenge for students in a wide variety of classroom activities.
- The staff are empowered by outstanding leadership. The principal and assistant principal promote a dynamic, creative vision for the school which is shared by the staff and embraced by students in a powerful collaborative ethos.
- The school has a strong commitment to improvement, evidenced through the identification of appropriate priorities for development, including the increasingly effective use of data to accelerate students' progress.
- Individual students, and their personal areas for improvement, are well known by their advisers who provide effective challenge and support.
- A wide range of outstanding overseas visits contributes effectively to global awareness and collaborative action by students and staff.
- Students and parents make an excellent contribution to school governance and policy development.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the development of school-wide procedures for the evaluation of whole-cohort performance data, to include:
 - comparisons of the performance of different groups of students, including different ethnic groups;
 - analysis of cohort progress over time;
 - comparative analysis of differences in attainment between subjects;
 - comparisons with the performance of students in similar schools.
- Use this analysis of data to identify areas of improvement in teaching, learning and the assessment of student performance.
- Seek opportunities to develop an analysis of how the school 'adds value' to the attainment and progress of students.
- Consider the extension of the use of assessment rubrics, shared with students, to all grades and in all subjects.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school with some outstanding features.

Beacon is a school which implements its vision successfully through an innovative and creative approach to the development of young people. Students graduate from the school with a pride in their academic performance, together with a self-awareness which equips them to become effective, participating citizens.

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 proficient with many well-developed features.

The school uses a variety of approaches to assess the attainment and progress of students. Teachers regularly record results from assessment tests, from the grading of written transcripts, from students' research papers and from panel presentations. All students compile a portfolio of their work which forms the basis of summative assessment at the end of each grade. The rubrics for portfolio assessment are shared with students, and used as the criteria by which assessment grades are produced. Students have a good understanding of the requirements of each assessed item and know what they must do to improve their performance. They are well supported with the drafting of their work and provided with appropriate time and encouragement to develop and refine in line with the subject rubrics. This approach to teaching and assessment places a strong emphasis on students' responsibility to develop and improve their performance. It also generates a dialogue between teachers and individual students, which ensures that teachers have a very good knowledge of the strengths and areas for development in the work of each individual student.

Teachers have a good knowledge of the comparative progress of students within their classes as a result of this regular and continuous assessment process. Teachers are able to identify students who are working at 'honors' or 'high pass' standards, together with those who are currently 'not passing' a particular project or paper. The nature of the assessment rubrics enables teachers to demonstrate to students what they must do to improve on the current or future assignments. Students are able to identify the small next steps, either of subject content and structure or of work habits, which are required to move their performance on to the next level.

The Academic Standards Committee of teachers provides a forum for the maintenance of consistency across the various subjects of the school curriculum. Internal rigor is ensured by the moderation of standards across teams of teachers within the same subject. This committee encourages the regular up-dating and refreshing of projects, ensuring that assessments are multi-faceted and developing cross-subject integration.

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The school is beginning to generate whole-cohort aggregated data which illustrates trends over time in different subjects, together with the ability to analyze comparative performance between subjects. The early stages of this analysis are already generating questions for further evaluation and issues for action. The aggregated data for 11th grade students, for example, has raised questions about the comparative percentages of students attaining honors and high pass standards in different subjects. Further consideration of the issues raised will provide an agenda for action for the Academic Standards Committee.

A longitudinal study has fed back to the school positive messages, in comparison with other schools, about the performance of Beacon students as they progress through college. Apart from this, the school has not yet undertaken any evaluative study of student performance in comparison with similar schools. Similarly, the school's data is not currently analyzed to provide information about comparative performance between different ethnic or racial groups within the school.

The wealth of data currently recorded and available within the school could be fruitfully presented and evaluated in these additional, comparative terms. The results of such analysis would enable the school to consider whether the curriculum and opportunities for learning are equally appropriate for all interest groups within the school. In addition, the school would benefit from an analysis of the comparative progress made by individuals entering the school with similar starting points. By raising questions about 'how much progress do individuals typically make over two or four years', it is possible to work towards a measure of the 'value added' by the school to students' educational experiences. The school has achieved a level of maturity which suggests that it is ready for the lessons to be learned from a more sophisticated analysis of data.

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 of the school's work is well-developed.

Student attainment is high because teachers have a good knowledge of what individual students know and are able to do. They also have a good understanding of what needs to be done to enable students to progress to the next level of proficiency in individual subjects. Additional strategies have been put in place to accelerate learning for students with particular needs. Additional opportunities are offered, for example, through PM school and summer school. Individual students are targeted for this additional support and are encouraged to make effective use of these additional resources.

Teachers are aware of the need to feed back to students on specific areas for improvement. In the best practice, teachers communicate through comprehensive written advice on students' work, reinforced through personal dialogue and attention to the understanding of subject rubrics. Students benefit enormously from the use of performance based assessments which require evidence of learning in a variety of styles. The use of problem solving, product creation, research papers and panel presentations, ensures that students are able to demonstrate their achievements against a wide variety of criteria. Teachers use the feedback from these various assessments to improve the quality of their teaching. There is much collaborative planning and assessment, which

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ensure consistency of expectations between teachers, and confidence in the outcomes recorded.

The involvement of parents is another feature which contributes to the creation of a well-rounded picture of individual needs and progress. Teachers prepare 'anecdotes' twice yearly which provide a focus for intervention and support by advisors as well as the basis for a dialogue with parents.

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 well developed with some outstanding features.

The school's curriculum provides extensive opportunities for all students to experience a variety of academic, creative, aesthetic and cultural activities. The core curriculum of English, math, science and social studies is complemented by a range of additional compulsory courses. The overall experience for all students provides a balance between academic learning and practical experiences. Students are encouraged to take part in a variety of extra curricular activities which enhance motivation and broaden the development of social and cultural skills. The curriculum is designed to ensure that all students can make progress in diverse ways. For example, students demonstrate considerable success and commitment in art, music, dance, drama, media and sporting events.

The school is reflective about the opportunities provided and how these are adapted to meet identified needs. The school has, for example, completely revised its science curriculum over the last three years. This has included the introduction of a published research paper for each grade 12 student as part of their portfolio assessment. The results are publicly displayed in the school and illustrate high standards of attainment. An additional math class was offered last year to attend to the particular needs of a group of students. This was in response to feedback from subject assessments. New textbooks have been purchased for use in history to provide differentiated resources to attend to the identified needs of students.

Additional time is provided through the use of lunchtime and after school classes to ensure that students have every opportunity to complete missed assignments or to develop their understanding to a higher standard. Occasional decisions have been made to allocate students to particular classes to take account of their varied learning styles. A collaborative teaching project has been introduced as an additional strategy to respond to the findings of classroom research, ensuring that the school's resources are appropriately targeted to meet identified needs. The principal ensures an active presence around the school, including the observation of teaching and learning. The majority of teachers have also taken advantage of opportunities for peer observation, feeding back developmental issues to enhance learning for students.

An outstanding feature of the school's curriculum is the use of overseas visits, integrated with the curriculum, to enhance students' first hand experience and awareness of cultural diversity. Recent trips to South Africa and Venezuela are superbly illustrated through a detailed photographic record displayed in the hallways of the school. A further group of students was in Spain at the time of the review visit. The effective use of film to portray vivid images and personal responses to the South Africa trip was displayed for parents

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and the school community through a celebration evening.

Students' responses to this wide variety of curricular opportunities are evidenced in the ethos of co-operation and good behavior throughout the school. Students also organize a range of cultural and community activities in response to the lessons learned from the wider curriculum of the school.

The school has developed an effective network of external support agencies that contribute to a range of productive experiences for students and staff. 10th grade students are required to complete 50 hours of community service. Approximately 30% of students complete at least one college course before graduation, for example through undergraduate courses offered by the school or at partner institutions including New York University and Fordham University. These student opportunities are identified on the basis of the school's knowledge of their individual needs.

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 well developed.

The principal demonstrates outstanding leadership of both the staff and students. With strong organizational support from the assistant principal, she has created a school ethos which values individuals, encourages collaboration and achieves commitment from students and staff. The staff have high expectations of what their students can attain and what they can become. Many students respond with a unique level of appreciation of what they can contribute to the school and to the wider community.

As a result of a common focus on the quality of experiences offered to students, much of the teaching is of very high quality. A lesson in English, for example, provided a high level of intellectual challenge for 9th grade students as they discussed deeper meanings and messages conveyed through a variety of literature studied. Students in algebra classes were confident in their explanations of how they had resolved problems; well structured questioning by the teachers ensured that all students were challenged to identify and clarify misunderstandings and uncertainties. Students in an 11th grade class came well prepared to a lesson on the development of the labor market; they analyzed the reasons for change and demonstrated the ability to offer personal interpretations of the historical context. In another grade 11 lesson, students worked with keen interest on the use of software to edit films; there was a sense of anticipation about the opportunity to develop their own work. These lessons illustrate the high expectations of teachers and the respect shown for the contributions of students. The school has created an effective culture for learning.

The school has a commitment to the professional development of staff. External consultants, for example from New York University, work with teachers to develop the curriculum. There is much collaborative working amongst the staff which contributes, in particular, to consistency in teaching and in assessing students' work. A range of meetings, including grade level and advisory meetings provide opportunities for staff to develop school policies and practice in a coherent and consistent manner. The school's PPR document includes an agenda for regular weekly staff development activities.

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Students play an active part in significant aspects of the leadership of the school. The Students Organizing Students (SOS) group implements a program of social responsibility activities which are well supported by their peers. These students are currently identifying ways in which the profound experiences gained from trips abroad may be developed through local and international action. The school is well run, procedures operate effectively, and all members of the school community understand their roles and responsibilities. Parents are also involved effectively in the school leadership team. Parents believe that they have a meaningful voice in the affairs of the school, both in relation to the progress of individual students and in the development of policy and goal-setting.

The energy of the school community is strongly directed towards providing a wealth of opportunities for students to grow and develop academically, and socially. It is very effective in identifying themes for improvement and acting collaboratively to address these.

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 of the school's work is well developed.

The school is developing increasingly sophisticated ways of recording and evaluating data about students' performance. It operates from a strong base of knowledge of individual students, which is used appropriately to direct resources and to address perceived weaknesses in the curriculum. The school's PPR identifies a number of strategies for the development of student achievement, educational equity and use of resources. Key priorities are supported with planned arrangements for staff development. The PPR contains no sense of timescales or how the success of new initiatives is to be measured. The school would benefit from the prioritization of existing plans together with the identification of success criteria for the achievement of each of its priorities.

The school responds flexibly to identified need, whether for cohorts or individual students. There is a strong commitment to *'forge expectations and standards for achievement from the creativity, strength, integrity, and power that inherently exists within each child'*. The school is very successful at responding flexibly to student and parent ideas and initiatives, whilst retaining a commitment to providing a structured and secure environment in which to achieve.

Secure systems for the continuous assessment of students' performance have been established in the school. Planning and development proceed from a sound awareness of areas in which new opportunities should be offered or existing activities enhanced. The formative approach to assessment, in particular the development of a coherent approach to the individual portfolio, enables students to meet the requirements of summative assessments at key points in their school careers. The school is well placed now to refine its analysis of cohort performance in order to support the identification of additional strategies for improvement for particular groups of students.

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Other key observations

The Beacon School has established a strong tradition of innovation and success. The use of rubrics, shared with students, is a very powerful tool which enables students to understand what next small steps they need to take to improve their performance in individual subjects. Students would benefit from the extension of subject rubrics across all grades and subjects in order to develop their understanding of continuity and progression in their learning throughout their four years in the school.

The school's dynamic for continued improvement is derived from its culture of inclusion and collaboration. The school is a strong community within a wider community of schools. There is scope for extension of the relationship with partner schools within which each can learn from the others, particularly through the identification and comparison of individual strengths.

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Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

Final Evaluation	0	✓	+
Overall Quality of the school			X

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, math, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 			X
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.		X	
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.		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	✓	+
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.			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 warranting attention.			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. 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.			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

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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
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.	0	✓	+
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