

**Central Park East 1**

**Central Park East 1  
1573 Madison Avenue,  
Manhattan  
NY 10029**

**Principal: Julie Zuckerman**

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Cambridge Education**

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### Part 1: The School Context

#### Information about the school

The school opened in 1974. It had a long period of stability during which it developed a strong reputation for successful progressive education. In 2002 there began a period when there were changes in the leadership. This brought about disruption to the smooth running of the school. The current principal took up her post in September 2005 and the school has gradually begun to return to stability again.

There are currently 188 students in grades pre-kindergarten to 6. The school is housed on the second floor of the Jackie Robinson Educational Complex, which it shares with a high school and a middle school. The local area has significant levels of social and economic deprivation, but not all students come from the immediate vicinity. This is a school of choice for many of the parents who opt for their children to attend for the progressive curriculum it offers. Just over half the students are eligible for free school lunch. Attainment on entry to the school is mixed. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) determined this school's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) status with special procedures as it has fewer than 30 continuously enrolled students in Grade 4. They determined the school made AYP in ELA and mathematics in 2005. The school is part of the Autonomous Zone group of schools.

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## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is thoroughly child-centered in its approach ensuring that it matches its mission statement well.
- The parents wholeheartedly endorse the work of the school and give very good support to the teachers and students.
- Teachers teach in similar ways, they know the students well, and give them good support and encouragement in all their tasks, fostering their confidence and ensuring they become articulate and thoughtful.
- The interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum and the strong emphasis on the creative arts makes the students excited and enthusiastic about their learning.
- The school provides a good range of worthwhile extracurricular opportunities for students to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the wider world.
- The school is rich in qualitative data, which provides a substantial record of the students' achievements.

### What the school needs to improve

- To make the teachers' workload more manageable and effective, seek ways to lighten the multiple demands teachers place upon themselves by limiting the options they offer the students. Allow students to explore fewer choices, but to a greater depth.
- Concentrate on raising standards in reading, particularly for those students who struggle most, to give them greater independence in their learning.
- Examine the support given to students with identified learning difficulties to strengthen the nature of the support they receive.
- Examine the structures and staffing in the daily "project time" sessions to ensure students are able to be work with increased independence.
- Examine the system of reporting to parents to seek ways to make the teachers' workload more manageable and ensure that it tells parents more precisely what their children know, what they can do and what they understand.
- Continue to develop the use of data collection systems, to meet the needs of the school and to better inform the students and their parents of their successes.

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## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation

**Overall, the school is proficient**

**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 and facilitate the student's progress over time.**

**The school is proficient in some of these aspects, but still has elements that need to be developed.**

The school's mission is to educate children to be thoughtful citizens by providing an education that is investigative and reflective, encourages choice and expects responsibility and discipline in all areas of learning and social behavior. The school is rightly proud of upholding this mission and despite the turmoil of its recent history continues to be thoroughly child-centered in its approach to teaching and learning.

Teachers rightly believe that they know their students very well. The school is rich in qualitative data, which provides a substantial record of the students' achievements. For a long time the school has made use of a descriptive review process to record information about each student. This is a structured process developed by the Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research under the leadership of Pat Carini. It is designed to enable teachers to help them understand a particular student as a learner. The goal of the process is for teachers to come away with a deeper understanding of the child and of their classroom practices. However, despite all the substantial time and effort teachers put into evaluating and recording the students' development, it is clear that not all students are developing essential skills, knowledge and understanding as fast as they might.

The principal has rightly identified that for students to be successful in the investigative approach the school follows, they have to be able to operate with a degree of independence. Many of the students can do this, they are particularly good at initiating ideas and planning their projects, but a significant number are less effective at researching and then developing the ideas to a suitable depth. The weak reading and mathematics skills of a relatively high proportion of students are diminishing the effectiveness of their overall work. Teachers are rightly skeptical that too much of a focus on simple assessments will not help to develop the essential skills that the students need, but the appropriate use of some quantitative data would reinforce the systems already in place. It would also help to meet the needs of the teachers in their planning, and better inform the students and their parents of their successes. Even more importantly, it would help to inform the next steps they need to take.

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**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.**

**The school is proficient in most of these aspects.**

The school has proficient systems for encouraging students to attend school on a regular basis and, as a result, attendance rates, are currently running at approximately 90%, right on the lower limit set by the Autonomous Zone. The students openly say that they like coming to school. They believe that it is "special", that it is "different" to other elementary schools, and their parents hold the school in high regard. However, the school gives a lot of freedom to young children and some are struggling to cope with the responsibility this brings, especially those who struggle academically and they do not appear to be as motivated to come to school as those who flourish under this approach. It is also clear that the school is only just beginning to settle back into a more positive routine again under the leadership of the current principal. The new sense of purpose that is becoming apparent may help to improve attendance levels, but the school cannot afford to be complacent on this issue.

The strong philosophical stance of the staff and their commitment to creating classrooms that represent the developmental needs of every child as well as matching their interests, strengths and passions is the hallmark of the school. The strong commitment of the parents to the creative approach adopted by the school is a second element in its success. However, the school has to resolve how it will educate students for citizenship and personal growth, at the same time allowing them the time and space to discover the patterns and organization of their own learning. In addition to this it still has to find ways to meet the demands of the other, more formal goals touted by business and education experts.

The school's principal recognizes that more attention has to be given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement if they are to flourish. Work is developing with the Perceptual Development Center to strengthen the staff's ability to cope with the wide range of needs within every class, and there is a recognition that all children's needs have to be accommodated within every classroom rather than withdrawing some children for special help. More work is still needed if this all-inclusive approach is to become fully embedded in the school's culture and practice.

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

**The school is proficient in most of these aspects.**

The school's commitment to mixed age groups in every class and interdisciplinary learning has clear benefits for most children. Older children in each class help to imbue the routines, practices and procedures for the younger children. The quality of students' behavior in the school is not exemplary, but the problems that arise are relatively small-scale and dealt with sympathetically and positively. The students trust the adults in the school and as a result the quality of relationships are usually very good.

The teachers teach in similar ways, they know the students well, and give them good

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support and encouragement in all their tasks, fostering their confidence and ensuring that they are articulate and thoughtful. Children are given many choices, sometimes too many, as they are uncertain which is the best choice to make. This slows the pace of learning, in some instances by a very significant degree. Allowing children the time to discover ideas and solutions for themselves, giving them the time to make mistakes and to learn from their failures as well as their successes is demanding on the teacher's time as well as that of the students. The children welcome the direct instruction and guidance that they receive in the creative arts program as it allows them to display their achievements. They are particularly excited by their work in dance, art and music.

The teaching in the school is very demanding; the multi-disciplinary, multi-skilled child orientated approach takes a lot of time and much management. Ensuring that the work encompasses the developmental needs of every child as well as their interests, strengths and passions requires teachers to make significant commitments in time and energy. The teachers need to agree how best to gather the key information that will enable them to make tough choices about curriculum priorities for their own classes and the impact these have on improving the children's learning.

The parents wholeheartedly endorse the work of the school and give very good support to the teachers and students. The school provides a good range of worthwhile extracurricular opportunities for students to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the wider world. The school has created strong links with a number of organizations. For instance, the weekly skating sessions throughout the winter in Central Park, the summer camping trips for the older students, the regular visits to places of interest, museums and exhibitions. The commitment and support of the parents is a key element in the school's success and it is vital that whatever developments take place the school keeps the parents onside.

**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.**

**The school is proficient in this respect.**

The school has a long and successful history of creating a professional culture where staff discuss, reflect and give serious consideration to the impact of their teaching on the learning of the students. A significant amount of time is devoted to this work. There is a genuine air of collaboration and mutual respect generated by the process, but there is also a recognition that the school needs to begin to move on to create a more rigorous culture of self-assessment, which examines the wider impact of its work. There is a growing recognition that it needs to establish higher standards in the key areas of English Language Arts and mathematics. This is not about improving test scores, (although that would surely follow) but ensuring that the students have the skills and confidence to be truly independent in their learning. Some already are, but not enough of them.

As a relatively small school it has experienced significant change in the past three years. It is now in a position to redefine its improvement goals and priorities. The leadership team is respected by the students and parents and has the potential, in the long term, to effect the changes that will be essential if the school is to thrive. However, individual lessons, particularly in project time, do not always contribute sufficiently to the systematic development of skills and conceptual understanding as students move

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through the school.

The school's commitment to support the professional development of staff by hiring a consultant from the Perceptual Development Center is a sensible one as it rightly identifies the need to cater for and support the large percentage of children with specific needs.

In a school with both a history and tradition of democratic decision making it is sometimes hard to make significant changes and developments, but the changing demands on the school and the changing circumstances require it to define not only what it already values and wishes to keep, but where and how it is going to develop and the principal is beginning to articulate this vision, but staff too need to own it.

**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.**

**The school is proficient in this element.**

The teachers' in-depth recording of the work and development of their students is highly commendable. They spend a lot of time and effort recording their achievements and progress, and in doing so have amassed a huge, but unwieldy evidence base. Parents appreciate this, but it lacks of precision in telling them what their children thoroughly understand and what they need to do next. Refining this process would cut down on the teachers' workload and provide better quality information. It would also improve the support given to students with identified learning difficulties, as it would allow teachers to strengthen the nature and structure of the support they receive. Good use is already made of the qualitative data in the school, but more work needs to be done on the development of quantitative data to back this up.

### **Other key observations**

The school has had an uncomfortable period in its development. Unfortunately, this was reinforced by the turmoil elsewhere in the school campus. This has now settled down and the school needs time to reaffirm its purpose and commitment. The strong sense of tradition in the school, some of the parents were students at the school themselves, and the commitment to a creative, experience rich environment needs to be capitalized on, but at the same time all the students need to be given the essential skills that will allow to be independent life long learners.

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## Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

Final Evaluation	0	✓	+
<b>Overall Quality of the school</b>		✓	
<b>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.</b>	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"> <li>• standards-based,</li> <li>• consistent across students,</li> <li>• capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice,</li> </ul> <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the performance of different students to be compared, and</li> <li>• learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified.</li> </ul>		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>1.3 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	
<b>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.</b>	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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<b>Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	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.			<b>X</b>
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		<b>X</b>	
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	

<b>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.</b>	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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.		<b>X</b>	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		<b>X</b>	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.		<b>X</b>	

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<b>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.</b>	o	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.4 Information generated by interim assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.5 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.		X	