



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Public School 234**

**30-15 29 Street  
Queens  
NY 11102**

**Principal: Thea Pallos**

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**Reviewer: Stephen Walker**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

PS 234 is a large elementary school of 701 students, pre-kindergarten through grade 5. It is located in the Astoria section of Western Queens. The school is housed in a modern four-story building which was built in 2003 and shares the top floor with IS 235. The school population consists of a rich mixture of cultures with over 68 countries represented in the school. The school population is 41% Hispanic, 27% Asian, 27% White and 5% Black. Over 15% of the students are recent arrivals from the Bangladesh, Mexico and Ecuador. English language learners comprise 36% of the school population and 10 of the students require special education students support. Around 80% of students are Title 1 eligible which is broadly equal to similar schools, but above the City average. Attendance is 94% which is higher than either similar schools or the City average. The school mission emphasises that all children come to school with a natural curiosity to learn and that 'a school is four walls with tomorrow inside'.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is well developed in using assessment data in order to monitor and improve student performance.
- The school is successful in raising the achievement of all students including English language learners and special education students.
- Intervention services are very well managed and give targeted support for students who require additional help with their work.
- The principal provides strong, professional and committed school leadership so that parents, staff and students greatly respect her focused vision for the school.
- The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis supported by committed and cohesive teams of teachers and support staff.
- The positive culture in the school encourages a high standard of behavior and students enjoy their time at school.
- The majority of teaching actively engages students and all teachers differentiate their instruction to respond to the specific needs of students as identified through data analysis.
- The school works closely with parents who greatly value the support for the academic progress and personal development of their children.
- There is an excellent program of professional development for teachers that is clearly focused on improving instruction and raising student progress.
- The school is continually evaluating its performance and seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of the students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Further analyze and use student performance and progress information with particular reference to gender and similar schools.
- Continue the sharing of good practice in order to maintain and raise further the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
- Develop further a program of professional development for the paraprofessionals and school aides in order to increase their effectiveness in the classrooms and the school.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The school is well developed in using assessment data in order to monitor and improve student performance. PS 234 is currently recognized as a 'high performing/gap closing school. Intervention services are very well managed and give targeted support for students who require additional help with their work. Parents greatly value the work of the school and feel welcomed partners in the education of their children. Teaching actively engages students and innovative curriculum programs meet the individual learning needs of students. The positive culture in the school encourages a high standard of behavior and students enjoy their time at school. The principal provides strong, professional leadership and her supportive approach encourages staff to work collaboratively in the interests of the students. Excellent professional development encourages teachers to focus on improvements in instruction that will support student progress. The school is continually evaluating its performance and seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of the students. The school has identified raising further the quality of teaching and learning as well as professional training for the support staff as key priorities for the school. The school is an important part of the local community and the principal and staff should be very proud of its significant success.

#### **How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria**

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The school uses assessment data very well in order to track and improve the progress of individuals and groups of students. It is actively using this information to inform intervention, instruction and student groupings. The school is clearly focusing on raising the performance of the students in State and City standardized assessments. All groups of students make good progress in the school.

The school is using a wide range of data to provide a real understanding of student performance and progress. Classroom records and conferencing provide detailed records for reading and writing. The principal and vice principal regularly meet with grade teams and individual teachers to discuss student progress and variations in progress between classes.

The school analyses previous performance and notes any trends or variations in performance. The slight dip in reading results in 2006 has resulted in the school producing a more structured program for English language learners and special education students. Comparisons are made with similar schools in the district, but little analysis has been undertaken on more successful, similar schools within the City. The school has developed very good systems to record the performance and progress of English language learners and special education students. All intervention programs screen students using reading and mathematics assessments in order to address the needs of level 1 and 2 students as well as the low level 3 students. There is good tracking of higher attaining students

through the enrichment activities. The detailed analysis of differences in ethnic groups has highlighted the greater progress of Hispanic students compared to Asian students, although their overall performance is lower. Gender differences in performance and progress have not been fully explored. The school is constantly seeking new ways to interrogate data to find new patterns and trends in order to improve student progress.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

Valuable detailed records are kept on individual students for each subject area. Student progress is reviewed at regular grade conferences. Data is used precisely to enable timely and accurate diagnosis of needs of individual students. Regular teacher assessments ensure that skill levels are recorded for each student. Individual conferencing provides opportunities for teachers to set goals for students and explain how they can improve their work. The principal and assistant principals share ‘bottom-line expectations’ with their colleagues regarding challenging targets for students based on previous performance.

Academic intervention programs successfully support students who require additional help with their work. The academic intervention team meets once a week and quickly identify students who are at risk and scoring below grade levels. There is a very effective three tier system of interventions including a wide range of support such as ‘push in and pull out’ instruction in mathematics and reading, after school enrichment, the extended time program and Saturday Academy. There are additional at-risk services outside the classroom such as the Wilson phonics program, the Foundations word study instruction and the Triumph intervention program. All of which are making an effective impact on the progress of the students. The main partners in intervention meet regularly as a pupil personnel team, to review the success of the support strategies and seek additional help as required.

Communication with the parents regarding student progress is very good and this supports student achievement. Attendance at parent-teacher conferences is excellent and many parents attend the ‘First Thursday’ visit to the classroom and frequent workshops in order to develop their understanding of the grade requirements. Parents and caregivers are provided with regular progress reports that are detailed, informative with clear statements of student performance levels. Students and their parents know what they have to do to improve and can articulate why goals and targets have been set. Parents are alerted quickly if their child is having learning difficulties. All members of the school community believe that every student can achieve success and the Student of the Month awards celebrate success and positively raise expectations.

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

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

Curriculum programs meet mandatory requirements and are sharply focused on raising the academic performance of students. A wide range of highly relevant programs supplement

the Teachers' College materials in order to address the needs of specific groups of students, such as English language learners and students in the early grades. For example, kindergarten through grade 2 use the Open Court phonics based program which enhances the decoding capabilities and phonemic awareness of students. The additional programs of visual arts and music enrich the experience of all students.

The assignment of teachers and the scheduling of classes are clearly guided by the drive to improve student progress. Teachers are encouraged to move between the grades to support continuity and all teachers are allocated two planning periods per week for preparation with colleagues. Budgeting decisions are clearly focused on improving students' performance. Additional staffing for intervention, the reduction of class sizes and the investment in the library are all targeted to accelerate student progress. Grants are used creatively to effectively extend the use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning.

The majority of teaching actively engages students and all teachers differentiate their instruction to respond to the specific needs of students as identified through data analysis. Many teachers are now identifying the preferred learning styles of their students. Lessons are well planned and students demonstrate high levels of concentration and attention. The high quality display work provides a stimulating environment for learning. Students enjoy the lessons and really appreciate how the teachers motivate them in a calm yet challenging manner. The workshop model encourages students' active involvement in lessons. The school acknowledges the importance of sharing of good practice in order to maintain and raise further the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

There are good systems of guidance and pupil personnel which support both the academic performance and personal development of students. Students speak highly of the support and guidance from the principal, teachers and councilors. One student said, 'we love the school, it is like a home to us'. Excellent attendance reflects highly on the teachers and students, and is rigorously monitored by the school aides and guidance councilors.

**Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The principal provides strong, professional and committed school leadership so that parents, staff and students greatly respect her focused vision for the school. Her supportive and enabling approach encourages staff to work in a spirit of cooperation and adapt a very positive attitude to their work. She is well supported by an innovative cabinet team that facilitates improvements in the school.

Staff are selected on their potential to improve student performance. All new teachers have to demonstrate effective classroom skills and high quality staff are appointed to positions of responsibility. There is a supportive program of external and school based professional development that is clearly focused on improving instruction and raising student progress. New teachers receive ongoing support through coaching and mentoring. The common preparation grade meetings provide excellent opportunities for teachers to exchange good practice and teaching materials. The mathematics and literacy coaches provide excellent support for teachers with planning and instruction. However, there is a lack of a comprehensive program of professional development for the

paraprofessionals and school aides in order for them to be consistently effective in the classrooms and the school.

Lesson observations are well established in the school and all teachers have a formal observation by the principal and assistant principal with feedback at least twice per year. There are regular 'walkthroughs' and teachers appreciate the constructive advice on how to improve their students' learning. Inter-visitations between teachers provide helpful opportunities to share good classroom practice and some teachers are allocated a 'buddy teacher'. Teams within the school meet regularly to evaluate and review plans. Grade teams have been proactive in modifying the curriculum to meet the needs of the individual students. The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis supported by committed teams of teachers and support staff.

The school is well supported by a number of outside bodies such as universities and arts organizations. Local businesses help with the 'Adopt A Unit' initiative' involving students writing letters and sending supplies to troops in Iraq. Students are regularly involved in environmental work in the local community. Positive support from the Teachers' College and community organizations help the school achieve its academic goals.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

There are clear expectations for all teachers on student targets, planning of work and recording of performance data. The principal and assistant principal continually scrutinize the student progress across teaching groups and grades. There is a well-defined assessment program throughout the school so that individual student progress can be monitored and evaluated. Students who need extra support are identified and intervention strategies are quickly implemented. Teachers use regular assessments to constructively adapt their teaching plans and modify student groupings.

The common planning periods provide opportunities for all teachers to contribute to developments and take a full part in evaluation and planning. Intervention strategies are regularly monitored in order to evaluate the effectiveness of support strategies for students at risk. There are clear priorities, targets and well defined success criteria within the Comprehensive Education Plan which are agreed and shared with the subject teams. The plan is based on student progress and it provides an impressive working document for whole school improvement. The school leadership team has a good understanding of the plan, but their role is not yet fully understood by a significant number of parents.

The school is continually reviewing progress and adjusting strategies. For example, the school has recently provided more staffing and teaching resources to target the weakness in reading and writing amongst the English language learners. The school has an excellent understanding of its strengths and weaknesses resulting in accurate and effective strategies for improvement.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Public School 234</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.</b>	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		<b>X</b>	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			<b>X</b>
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			<b>X</b>
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.			X
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X