



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Queens Academy High School

High School 540

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Queens
NY 11354**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Queens Academy High School (High School 540) is one school that comprises two sites within Queens, Flushing and Jamaica. It is a District 79 school with 441 students who have moved into alternative education to gain their graduation.

Of the students 49% are Black, 33% Hispanic, 10% Asian and other and 7% White. Thirty-five students are English language learners and 31 are special education students, not on the special education register.

At 74% attendance is low compared with similar schools. Only 48% of students have Title 1 eligibility, which is also low in comparison with similar schools.

Although the official grade range is 9 through 12, the majority of students are between seventeen and twenty-one years of age. They have moved into alternative education for one main reason, they have found education within 'mainstream' high schools problematic. Many have had attendance difficulties, some are young mothers, a few have family difficulties that have interrupted their education and many have just found the size and constraints of regular high school difficult.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school does a lot for the personal development of students and they say that the school has given them the opportunity to “regain control” of their lives.
- The school has a good graduation rate for schools of this type.
- Parents appreciate the care, attention and respect shown by all staff.
- Students are always engaged by teaching that has pace and helps them move on quickly.
- Good technological resources support all aspects of the curriculum.
- There is a good professional development program which addresses the needs of long-tenured staff as much as those new to teaching.
- Staff work together well in class and department groups.
- Good work is carried out with students who have language and literacy needs.
- Senior staff make good use of data to identify progress and monitor shortfalls in the curriculum.
- The school is an orderly place where clear rules and procedures contribute well to very good student behavior.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all staff use data to assist in the differentiation of instruction.
- Identify capacity that will better provide an appropriate physical education programme on the Flushing site.
- Place more emphasis on the use of the strong database to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum for all sub-groups within the school.
- Review communication on the Flushing site to confirm that all staff are clear about day-to-day developments.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

It is a tribute to all staff that Queens Academy functions as a single school, with common practices and expectations across the two sites. The school contains many experienced and long-tenured teachers, with 83% having masters degrees and higher. This shows in the good level of teaching seen in classes on both sites. The fact that staff absence rates are lower than those of similar schools and, indeed, New York schools in general bears testimony to the dedication of staff. This commitment is highly respected by students. They testify that “They are always here for us”. Parents echo this, saying that “Staff members know everything about our children without opening a book” and asking “How can one place be so successful”. Data is not always easily come by for many of these students, but the school has a very good system of interviewing when a students enrolls, of gathering and analyzing information collected from teachers and examination item analysis and from students and parents themselves.

The use of data and the Regents examination itself is new to alternative education and it has been a steep learning curve for many staff, as has the consequent emphasis on data-driven instruction. However, in a short space of time good practices have developed whereby all staff are able to use test and observational information to plan for individual students. Not all staff are convinced that this is the best way of working and express some concern at the unnecessary pressure this places on staff. The majority of teachers indicate that, despite the additional pressures, the sharper focus created by the data allows them to plan more accurately and assess areas of weakness in students, both of which contribute well to the essential gaining of credits.

It is a basic tenet of the administration that this school is no different to any other high school. Consequently, expectations are high for student achievement and behavior. High quality facilities have been developed in science and technology and both buildings are physically maintained at a high level with very impressive displays of student work throughout. This is a good example of alternative education and fulfils its remit well.

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 proficient.

Students usually start at Queens Academy with little more than a transcript. At the point of enrolment very good work by the counselors means that a profile is quickly developed indicating what the student has achieved and what still needs to be done. This basic data is rapidly supplemented with classroom observations and work assessment. Indeed, the implementation of a ‘probation period’ means that this type of data is used immediately to check out both achievement and motivation to attend and succeed. Parents testify to the fact that the school very quickly knows their children’s history, potential and preferred learning styles. This detailed knowledge characterizes all aspects of the school’s work and

informs all decisions relating to individual programs, curriculum developments and scheduling decisions.

Detailed knowledge of students is shared well in this small school. All staff show excellent knowledge of each student and the levels of achievement of classes. The very nature of student needs means that grades are not an appropriate form of grouping. The need to gain specific credits dictates both the individual curriculum and the composition of each class. The school is doubtful about the value of ethnic achievement data and, thus, misses one opportunity to monitor its success with its wide range of students. It does, however, keep a very close check on English language learners and special education students.

Staff are very aware of the diverse needs of working students, young mothers and those students in shelters. . Planning for individual personalities and domestic circumstances is at a high level. The school does not yet monitor the progress of some of its sub-groups. However, it does keep a careful check on year-on-year developments, identifying for instance that graduation remains steady at 35%. It links well with other District 79 schools and exchanges a lot of information. It does not yet rigorously compare academic outcomes with these schools.

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.

Collaboration throughout the school is of a high order. Staff need to know all students well as they will meet them within specific classes or need to support them at different stages of their school careers. This means that the regular department meetings, case conferences and planning discussions are characterized by detailed information that can be shared, but, more likely, is already known by the participants. Staff continually seek to re-focus and adjust individual student goals in the light of significant progress or a dropping off in performance. Excellent formal and informal communication assists well in this process.

Observation of these discussions shows the strong commitment of staff, but above all their impressive knowledge and understanding of each student as a person. Thus, detailed discussions concerning a young mother led to the fore-shortening of her school day to accommodate childcare requirements. Many crises develop within these students’ lives. These are dealt with promptly, practically and in partnership with both student and family. One student whose progress has stalled was advised to attend one-on-one tutoring as the result of depressed results in the mock Regents and classroom assessments. When the suggestion was not taken up, staff responded quickly with a review of alternatives and further counseling for the student.

This level of fine tuning arises from the strong emphasis on high achievement throughout the school. Students indicate that it is the fact that teachers expect so much of them, and their parents, that restores their faith in themselves and assists them in buckling down to work. Teacher conferences with students and parents are well supported with samples of work, assessment data and detailed discussions of goals. Not all staff are convinced by the strong emphasis placed on data and there is still work to be done in convincing all staff that differentiation and classroom planning is aided by such information. This is being addressed through ongoing professional development work. The need for all staff to be

clear about strategic and day-to-day decisions is a priority, but not always seen as a success by a few staff.

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.

The urgent need of this school’s students to graduate means that there is a strong emphasis on the mathematics and English language arts. The school has also developed a stimulating arts and science curriculum and enriches this with a range of visits and performance opportunities. Lack of a gym on the Flushing site is a significant drawback.

Students value this diversity in what is for them a concentrated course of study. The success of students arises largely from the good relations between staff and students which contribute to a high level of engagement within lessons. Strong emphasis is placed on the accountability of teachers, with senior staff undertaking many discussions with individual staff and groups to emphasize and model the effective use of data within classrooms. Although a few staff feel uncomfortable with the pace and nature of change, most teachers are seeing the benefits to be gained from using data to develop more precise targets. This means that most teachers use data well to develop appropriately individualized programs of work. The small size of the school has allowed good exchanges of techniques and understanding between teachers.

The curriculum is supported in very practical ways. An excellent science laboratory at Flushing will be mirrored by a similar development at Jamaica and the reverse process has just taken place with an up-to-date technology lab being developed at Flushing as a counterpart to Jamaica’s. The appointment of an art teacher across both sites has significantly enriched the curriculum and stimulated significant literary skills in some students. From day one each student is working with an individualized schedule which is flexible and lies at the heart of the school’s effectiveness.

The respect that staff show for students and parents is outstanding. Parents, in particular, are impressed by the knowledge that staff have, and share, with regard to “my child’s achievement, needs and, above all, personality.” The deciding factor in success for these students is attendance. Counseling and rewards reiterate to students that if they attend they can succeed. An excellent parent coordinator and counselors play their parts in prompt and effective attendance procedures.

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 school runs smoothly. This assists in the accelerated learning of students. Staff also model what is expected in collaboration and behavior around the school. This works well. It is a safe, caring and academically challenging school. The principal is highly regarded by the vast majority of staff and has shown good capacity to initiate and sustain changes. The principal has developed a talented senior team which has worked hard to develop consistency across the two sites, high standards of behavior and good attendance. New

staff have been appointed against very clear criteria, the drive for high performance and the sensitivity to individual students. Staff are increasingly involved in new appointments.

All senior staff, including the principal, undertake classroom observations and there is an increase in teacher inter-visitations to support new staff and share good practice. The desire to improve and develop is common to all staff and the school has a well differentiated professional development program. Staff new to the school value the mentoring and classroom management support they receive, while more experienced staff have been able to pursue areas of interest, such as the use of smartboards and the analysis of data. Awareness of split-site issues has meant that care has been taken to provide opportunities to teachers for site inter-visitations.

The commitment of teachers has seen very good use made of common prep times and the new teacher centers on both sites. Teachers plan and discuss students on a regular basis. Case conferences are backed up with excellent samples of work and relevant data. This is mirrored in the day-to-day discussions, formal and informal, that take place over curriculum development and student progress. To further assist progress, the school has strong working relations with a wide range of external support agencies, from college advisors to 'New York Cares' community artists and from 'Material for the arts' to the 'New York Department for the Aging'. Links to external social workers, counselors and clinicians are developing well.

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 proficient.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is detailed and has clear goals. It is built upon the contributions of all staff and is continually in the thoughts of senior staff. Thus, in the current year, there are clear plans to develop the mathematics curriculum, technology and at-risk services among others. These targets are central to discussions and many meetings and case conferences refer to them and inform developments as the result of achievement and progress data of individual students. It is as a result of this process that a change of emphasis has occurred with regard to the teaching of test techniques, and the co-planning between mathematics and science departments. It is also the way in which the need to identify the progress of resource room students has been highlighted.

The school stresses the importance and individuality of its students and seeks to focus on individual progress and achievement. At the same time it is well aware of how the curriculum is developing in, for instance, the teaching of inference in English language arts. The regularity of meetings together with the ease of communication means that new problems receive new solutions quickly. Concern for attendance levels has initiated the 'adopt-a-student' program for staff and a perceived lack of enrichment has accelerated the electives program, providing a wide range of opportunities from forensic science to care of the environment. The monitoring of student progress is built on the detailed initial planning, midway formative assessments and final summative assessments. All take place with the full involvement of students and parents. At a whole-school management level, there is the same clarity of planning and the same, if more informal, monitoring of targets and institutional progress. All of these procedures contribute to a system that allows students with unhappy educational experiences to "see light at the end of the tunnel".

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Queens Academy High School (HS 540)	∅	✓	+
Quality		X	

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

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

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

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