

Queens High School of Teaching

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High School 566

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Queens High School of Teaching was opened in 2003 on a three-school campus with two primary schools, in the Bellerose area of Queens. It is still a relatively small high school, currently with 930 students, from 9th to 11th Grade. This will rise to 1100 next year when the school will have its full intake. The school is organized in three small learning communities, which provide a framework in which students can be carefully monitored and supported, and in which teachers can develop their professional skills. The school is fully inclusive; all classes are mixed ability and students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms. There is a Teaching Institute, and students can apply for internships in one of the three K-12 campus schools.

Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, with just under 30% of students from each of African American and Asian American families, 20% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic and the remaining 7% other backgrounds. Approximately 10% of students have special educational needs. A very few students are English language learners. One third of students live below the poverty line. On entry to the school, over half of students are behind grade level in the core subjects.

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Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is a vibrant, inclusive community which provides a very relevant and effective education for all its students.
- The leadership and management of the school are extremely effective and ensure that all staff shares their focus on students' progress.
- Staff is highly committed to their students' academic and personal development. As a result, students of all abilities make excellent progress.
- Positive and supportive relationships underpin the work of the school. Students and parents appreciate the care and concern of staff, and students respond well to their high expectations.
- The school is harmonious, with a culture based on mutual respect, inclusion and the celebration of diversity. Students behave very well, and demonstrate maturity, responsibility, self-confidence and care for others.
- Professional development is a strength of the school. The small learning communities act as a powerful focus for staff to learn from one another and to further develop their skills.
- The school is reflective and takes appropriate action to address areas that need to be improved.
- In most classes, teaching is innovative and student-centered. It ensures student engagement and develops essential higher order thinking and communication skills. Students articulate confidently about their work and the learning process they have undergone.
- Staff knows their students very well. They gather an excellent range of information about students, which they use very effectively to help students to maximize their academic achievement.
- The partnership with ISA (Inspiring Students to Achieve) is very effective in the analysis of students' progress and in providing support and resources for ongoing improvements in teaching and learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue the development of the curriculum to meet the needs of all students by identifying the periodic achievement of skills and sharing these with students so that they are able to set personal goals and quantify levels of success.
- Continue to develop the skills of teachers to bring all practice up to the standard of the most effective, including in the differentiation of work so that special education students can develop further as independent learners.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school, despite having been open for only three years and not yet having the full range of grades.

The school is a highly effective, innovative school in which mixed ability student-centered learning and teaching are underpinned by a commitment by all staff to continuous improvement. The Principal is an inspirational leader, who is very successful not only in sharing his vision for the school with staff, but also in engaging them in a continuing dialogue about teaching and learning. As a result, staff at all levels assumes responsibility for initiatives to promote students' progress and to develop their professional knowledge and skills. Although many students are less than competent in the core subjects when they enter the school, careful attention to their learning ensures that they make very good progress.

The school very successfully meets its mission statement to develop learners as responsible and productive citizens, promoting their ethical and moral development very effectively. Its designation as a school of teaching is promoted throughout; staff work in a facilitative way to develop students' appetite for and skills of learning. In parallel, students develop the ability to articulate their ideas and explain their thinking, and often learn by teaching others, as well as having the opportunity to participate in the Teaching Institute Program.

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 well-developed.

The school collects a wide range of information relating to individual students' progress and performance including continuous assessment while teaching, students' presentations of their own work and observations of students' participation in classes as well as more formal testing. This information is used very effectively to identify students' specific needs, track their progress over time and to take swift action when necessary if a student begins to fall behind, or has difficulty in mastering a particular concept or skill.

The close working relationships built up in the small learning communities provide the forum for discussion of individual or groups of students' progress and for any difficulties encountered in the teaching a specific topic. Staff uses the information they have gathered, including test scores and assessments of specific pieces of work, to analyze reasons for difficulties, to compare performance in different subject areas and to suggest possible intervention strategies.

ISA supports the school effectively in the gathering and analysis of data, testing a controlled sample of students on a regular basis and breaking down the results into an

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easily assimilated form. The initial test data presents a baseline against which overall progress can be judged, as well as an ongoing picture of competence in the core subjects. The school analyzes this data to examine trends in the performance and progress of students, and to plan action where there are patterns of difficulty. Senior staff carefully monitors overall performance, ensuring that the needs of ethnic, racial and ability groups are analyzed. Action is taken when necessary to address individual or group needs. For example, the recognition that African American boys were scoring less well than those in other groups resulted in an initiative linked to African American history.

Teachers routinely share rubrics and lesson plans with students so that they are aware of what they have to do to succeed in class. As well as asking students to review their own and others' performance using these criteria, teachers also require them to reflect on their learning process through discussion and reflective writing at the end of a course of study. Teachers are adept at assessing students' performance on a day-to-day basis, and are regularly engaged in ongoing discussions with other staff and students themselves about the next steps for students' learning. Regular formal assessments are timetabled and are ongoing. School summative data shows clear year-to-year improvement.

School leaders carefully compare the school's performance against that of similar schools, supported by data from ISA as well as from the Department of Education. Because the school is innovative in its approach to teaching, it uses data to provide evidence of the effectiveness of its methods, so that it can be secure that it is meeting students' needs.

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 overall, although there are some areas for improvement.

The wide range of information described above is exceptionally well used to ensure that students make good progress. All faculty staff knows their students extremely well. One of the strengths of the school is the way in which all staff shares a clear focus on students' performance across the whole spectrum of their academic and personal development.

All staff engages in constant dialogue about students' progress, especially in the small learning communities, drawing on their accurate knowledge of each student's strengths and weaknesses. Because these discussions are ongoing, any student having difficulty with a particular class or concept is immediately identified, and becomes the focus of the supportive forum of the small learning community. The Advisory system is an important part of the attention given to each student's overall development. In these discussions, staff compares the student's performance with different teachers, in different classes and over time, share ideas about teaching and management strategies and report their successes and frustrations back to the group.

One learning community is more adept than the other two at analyzing and interpreting statistical data and this good practice should be spread throughout the school. While staff value data which comes from tests and formal assessment, they find their own observations of students most useful for diagnosing difficulties and determining how to motivate and support students to do better.

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Expectations are high, and these are shared with students, their parents and guardians. The Parent Coordinator works effectively to engage parents as partners in their children's learning. As well as staff, parents and students are continually involved in discussions about their progress and the learning process. Because of this, students of all abilities know what they have to do to succeed in a particular assignment or piece of work, and can generally explain their long-term goals. For example, many special educational students and their parents are aware of the targets in their individual education plans (IEPs).

Teachers are less likely, however, to identify in their assessments the periodic achievement of skills, and as a result, students do not always know their specific long-term personal goals. This means that neither staff nor students can quantify levels of success in a systematic way. Despite this, the close attention paid by all staff to their students ensures that they make good progress.

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

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

The school's curriculum is innovative, and is firmly based on very high expectations of students. This ensures that not only do students learn the content of courses, but there is a strong emphasis on their understanding of the processes behind their learning and the application of what they are doing to their future lives. For example, the study of the Civil War in US History was interpreted through the production, in groups, of a newspaper from the time. As well as studying the events which needed to be reported, students were also given roles in production of the newspaper. They very articulately explained what they had learned about leadership roles, and the nature of responsibility for ensuring that they and others met deadlines. One student said, "Here learning is not only on a content level, it's also on a personal level."

Information from the assessment of such activities is fed into the overall analysis of students' progress, and used to identify curricular areas that need further attention. For example, two of the aspiring Principals on internships from the NYC Leadership Academy compared the performance of students from the three small learning communities in English and mathematics, drawing also on evidence from staff discussions to analyze the reasons for differences and to make suggestions for action. One outcome of this study was the piloting of a program of mathematics across the curriculum in one learning community. 'Drop Everything and Read' is another effective school-based initiative introduced to raise standards in literacy because of the relatively low performance on entry of many students. All staff is involved in curriculum development as they review and evaluate the impact of their teaching in their small learning communities.

Because all the classes 'bell to bell' are mixed ability, the school makes very good provision for a wide range of extension and extra-curricular activities to ensure that students are challenged and experience success. In addition, the school successfully pursues and maintains a range of partnerships with other agencies, which extend the range and depth of students' experiences and provide for additional needs. This range from 'College Now' and other university/not-for-profit programs like 'Leadership for a

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Diverse America' (LEDA) to the 'Extended School Year Program' for lower performing students. Partnerships with schools in London and Belfast allow small numbers of students to observe and participate in classes in different education systems.

The philosophy of a school of teaching permeates the school; as well as participation in the Teaching Institute, students are encouraged to learn by teaching content to other students, being peer mentors and assuming various roles in the mixed ability groups in class. They also have the opportunity to observe staff teach and discuss techniques, in line with the school's stated aim for its classrooms to be 'open-door laboratories' for teaching and learning.

All decision-making in the school is based on considerations of improving student outcomes. Staff is moved between the small learning communities to build effective teams. The innovative and student-centered nature of the school's organization makes significant demands on the school budget, and requires extremely careful management.

There are high levels of trust between students and staff, and students are confident that they are known and cared for. They appreciate the attention to their personal growth and the open and searching attitudes encouraged by the school. A student said, "In this school, we learn to see past color and physical abilities." This confidence is shared by parents, who feel that staff "give much more than they have to" to ensure that their children do well.

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.

Staff is carefully selected for their capacity to work collaboratively using a student-centered approach. Expectations of applicants for teaching posts are made clear early in the appointment process, so that there is an element of self-selection. This ensures that all staff is willing to engage with the school's philosophy. The school has a particular philosophy of teaching and learning, seeing teaching staff as facilitators of learning. In their turn, students are expected to take responsibility as learners; classes are organized so that students are engaged and participating in all activities, and they often learn by explaining their work to others.

Teaching is good and promotes learning very successfully. The majority of lessons are carefully planned, challenging and interesting. Plans are shared with students so that they know what they are learning and what they must do to succeed. The most successful lessons are very well organized to maximize student participation and engagement. In their mixed ability groups, students discuss their work and support each other's learning, with more able students teaching their peers and consolidating their own learning as they do so. They are challenged by teachers' open-ended questions which require them to articulate their learning process. As a result, students show enthusiasm for their learning, work hard and progress well. Good teaching is maintained in a culture of high expectation, continual self-evaluation, reflection and improvement. A small minority of lessons are less well organized, and do not demonstrate high enough expectations of students. Although staff pays careful attention to the different learning needs of students, they do not always sufficiently differentiate the work so that special

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education students can access it independently.

Professional development is a strength of the school. In accordance with the school's designation as a school of teaching, all staff have numerous opportunities to observe others teach and to discuss practice. They are frequently observed formally and informally both by senior staff and peers, and receive constructive feedback. The constant discussions about teaching, learning and students' progress, particularly in the small learning communities, provide outstanding opportunities for teachers to develop and refine their practice. This is supplemented by a good level of access to outside courses and conferences. When asked to grade their professional growth while teaching at the school on a scale of one to ten, a group of teachers unanimously responded "ten plus".

During the current academic year, the school has been host to three aspiring Principals from the NYC Leadership Academy. All three judge their experience in the school to have been an outstanding learning opportunity, and feel very well prepared for their future careers.

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.

Staff at all levels constantly keeps the school under review. Through distributed leadership, all staff assumes responsibility for assessing and analyzing student progress, and for curriculum design and review. School development and initiatives are carefully planned, based firmly on the needs of students. Partly because of the school culture of dialogue and debate, the effectiveness of programs is reviewed on an ongoing basis, with amendments and changes as necessary. Administration and staff effectively use data to guide these changes and are responsive to feedback. Despite the school's obvious success, there is no air of complacency, and staff is relentless in their pursuit of further improvement.

Other comments:

The school has a wide range of partnerships with academic and community organizations. In particular, the partnership with ISA (Inspiring Students to Achieve) provides additional support to teachers in improving their skills. Students' personal development has a high priority.

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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, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 			X
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
1.3 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.			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