



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

James M. Kieran School

Intermediate School 123

**1025 Morrison Avenue
Bronx
NY 10472**

Principal: Virginia A. Connelly

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Reviewer: Peter Lewis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

James M. Kieran School currently has 550 students enrolled in grades 6 through 8. Almost 16% are special education students and 17% are English language learners, which is a high proportion in both categories. Most of the students come from a Hispanic or Black background. The school has received Title 1 funding for the last four years, with 92% of students eligible. Average attendance through 2005 was consistently below average but has improved recently as a result of the school's work to ensure good attendance and punctuality so that it is almost in line with City and State figures. The number of students who are recently arrived in the country is broadly average for City and similar schools.

The school is a long established school which, following several reorganizations, has changed from including an early childhood program for pre-kindergarten through grade 1 alongside its middle school students. The school now is able to develop as purely a middle school.

The school has established two small learning communities within its overall education program; the Center for Aerospace Science and Technology, and the Gilder Lehrman Center for American Studies. These have enabled a closer focus upon student achievement, as well as provided students with a clear sense of identity within both their academy and the school as a whole.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is an exceptionally strong leader who has successfully motivated staff and students by applying a culture of high expectations across the school.
- Data about the students' performance is being used to inform the school's strategies for intervention and has yielded considerable improvement in achievement.
- The best instruction promotes student engagement and learning at a very high level.
- Students are enthusiastic learners who respond very well to the high expectations that are placed upon them.
- The curriculum is broad and stimulating; recent developments mean that it is much more closely matched to students' needs.
- The school presents as an exciting environment in which learning is celebrated.
- Safety is a strong priority.
- Very good and developing use is made of technology in supporting students' learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure, through focused monitoring and planned intervention, that all instruction is of the same quality as seen in the best classrooms.
- Provide teachers with data showing the achievement profiles of their students at the beginning of each year and use this to establish goals for each student that can be tracked throughout the year.
- Improve teachers' planning so that lessons clearly identify what is going to be learned and the activities that will be undertaken by different groups of students in order to achieve that learning.
- Involve students even more in the assessment of their own learning.
- Define more clearly the roles of senior leaders in monitoring the impact of instruction.
- Refine planning for school improvement so that evaluations of instruction and the curriculum are linked with student achievement, and use these evaluations to establish an achievable number of annual whole-school objectives that are shared with all members of the school community.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

While the James Kieran School is proficient overall, there are a number of well-developed features that demonstrate its good capacity for further improvement. The school has readily, and with considerable success, taken note of past shortcomings and sought rapid improvement in the standards reached by students. Modifications to the curriculum have been successful and have resulted in a huge leap in mathematics and, to a lesser extent, in English language arts scores. This has resulted from the school's increasingly effective use of data to target different groups of students and to track their achievement.

Although there remains too great a variation in the quality of instruction and in teachers' use of assessment information in providing differentiated instruction, monitoring and professional development are increasingly successful in securing improvement. Considerable effort has gone into producing an exceptionally stimulating environment in which different styles of learning are celebrated. Relationships through the school are strong and positive, and students feel safe and valued. They have very positive attitudes towards their work and come to school eager to learn. Parents value the work done by the school in educating their children and in helping them to become well-rounded citizens. They know that the principal and other staff are always welcoming, keen to hear about their concerns, and take swift action to address any problems.

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.

Across the school, teachers and administrators have begun to make good use of data in building their understanding of student performance. The school maintains comprehensive records of students' test and assessment data that are used effectively to identify student and whole-school progress. At present, the systems to track the rates of transition from one level to the next are embryonic, though software to perform this function in mathematics has recently been introduced. Student answers to test items are analyzed to provide a clear picture of aspects of students' learning that are more or less successful, and to inform development of strategies to ensure that comparatively weaker areas are addressed. This approach has achieved success demonstrated by the very rapid improvements made in the most recent results in mathematics and, to a lesser extent, in English language arts. While this use of assessment information clearly has the potential to secure success, teachers' confidence in assessing the development of students' progress throughout the year is not as well developed. The school does not currently make sufficient use of data on the performance of groups within the school to give a clear picture of relative performance or to allow the setting of specific goals. The cabinet are looking at ways to analyze this data more thoroughly and share it with teachers.

In contrast, an exceptionally comprehensive and accessible range of assessments are used to show the progress made by students with identified learning difficulties. File records are color coded according to the progress made by students, enabling teachers to plan work that is precisely matched to the needs of each student. Individual education plans are drawn up by teachers in consultation with specialist and support staff, and the progress made towards achieving the goals identified on these is carefully monitored through assessment and discussion. As a result, these students make rapid progress towards achieving their goals.

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 proficient.

The school is developing its use of the data it has on its pupils. Teachers collaborate well in their teams to compare information about students’ achievement and to identify what has worked well in promoting student learning. The principal involves herself in these meetings and ensures a good level of data focus through the proceedings. This is reinforced by input from the mathematics and literacy coaches, valued by staff. The coaches also create an effective link between each grade across the school. While these meetings are effective in raising awareness and in identifying good practice, their relative informality means that opportunities to identify school-wide issues could be missed.

The information that the school has is used effectively to target students through a range of interventions and support. The pre- and post-testing assessments that are regularly undertaken are particularly strong in mathematics and English language arts and have been very effective in raising standards. High expectations are seen in teachers’ grading of student work, although there is less emphasis on what is needed in order to improve or on establishing subsequent targets. Although the school has identified the need to involve students more in the assessment of their own work, this is at a very early stage and has yet to have an impact on their learning.

Parents are very pleased with the range and quality of information that is made available to them by the school, and feel that they are fully involved in their children’s education. Students with identified learning needs receive exceptional services. The wide range of tests and assessments are accessible and used effectively to identify progress in relation to the established goals. Individual education plans are accurate and regularly updated following discussion between teachers and the skilled support staff who are involved.

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.

Teachers collaborate effectively to ensure that programs align with standards and that there is agreement across and within grades to ensure that that instruction is consistent. New initiatives, such as the re-alignment of the mathematics curriculum to meet State standards, are discussed so that teachers are able to take ownership of developments. The school makes use of assessment data to identify target groups of students, such as

those who have the potential to reach the next level of achievement, as well as those who might regress. The school has made a good start in using data to track the progress made, particularly in mathematics, which has had a positive impact on students' learning. At present, this data comes primarily from testing and is therefore a summary of the impact of students' past experiences. The school has begun to consider ways in which it might be able to address students' needs at an earlier point and to further enhance teachers' skills in assessing student learning on an ongoing basis. The curriculum is planned to be interesting and students describe their excitement at the range of visits and the cultural and technological emphases of the two smaller learning communities. Students respond well to the high expectations placed upon them and concentrate well. As a result, they are well motivated.

Staff know their students well and, in particular, take note of any difficulties or challenges that students face. One result of this is that relationships within the school are strong and positive. Students trust the adults they work with and know that they can seek help if necessary.

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 proficient.

Although the school's overall performance against this quality standard is proficient, there are some well-developed aspects in its practice which demonstrate that the school has considerable capacity to secure further improvement. The principal and assistant principals have very successfully developed a strong sense of the school's identity that is characterized by high expectations, an effective and rapidly developing use of data, and a determination to secure the best for students.

The school's use of data has developed rapidly and has been instrumental in identifying aspects, particularly in English language arts and mathematics, where improvement is required. The school recognizes that more work is needed to refine teachers' use of assessment data to measure student progress more consistently across the curriculum.

The principal's commitment to securing continued improvement is mirrored in the rest of the staff through a clear willingness to consider new strategies and to find ways of consolidating improvements already made. Monitoring by the principal and assistant principals is followed by feedback and support where necessary. Together with learning walks and the scrutiny of student work, these features enable the school to strengthen its understanding of the quality of instruction. At the same time, the principal has demonstrated a willingness to make difficult decisions in the rare instances where support and guidance have not achieved success in improving instruction. However, the areas of accountability given to other school leaders, particularly the requirements for them to evaluate instruction and the curriculum in relation to students' learning, are insufficiently clear. Staff development has a high profile and staff demonstrate a very positive attitude toward ongoing development. A good example of this is in the willingness of mathematics teachers to give up their lunchtime to become familiar with new software to track student progress.

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 evaluation of student assessment information has begun to be used to identify aspects of learning that require improvement. The principal has a very good understanding of the standards reached by students across the school, within and across grades. This information has been used effectively to match the curriculum and instruction more closely to students' needs. The school recognizes that more could be done, through the increased use of ongoing teacher assessment, to refine this process.

Through discussion and focused monitoring, the school has been able to establish an effective sense of its progress in meeting its goals. At present, it is less successful in making full use of interim goals to understand whether planned actions are successful in achieving designed outcomes. Planning for whole-school improvement is broad and makes good use of a wide range of data from tests, other assessments and both formal and informal evaluations of teachers' and students' work. In its present format, this planning lacks sufficient detail, particularly in that it lacks clearly defined "benchmarks" against which progress towards goals can be measured, allowing timely modifications where necessary.

The inclusion of mathematics and literacy lead teachers, the literacy coach, the UFT chapter leader, and the department chairs of content area subjects in the cabinet has enhanced the school's leadership structures. This is a recent development and much of its work remains informal, particularly in relation to monitoring, evaluation and the establishment of a clear, achievable and well understood plan against which the school's improvement could be measured. There is clear evidence of improvement in the school's ability to analyze its performance and to plan for improvement. Attendance has improved over this period, as have student results in English language arts and in mathematics.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: James M. Kieran School (IS 123)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		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	