



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Robin Sue Ward School for Exceptional Children

Elementary-High School 177

**56-37 188 Street
Queens
NY 11361**

Principal: Kathleen Posa

Dates of review: March 18 - 20, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Jo Cheadle

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Robin Sue Ward School for Exceptional Children is an elementary, middle and high school with 432 students from kindergarten through grade 12. The school population comprises 41% Black, 34% Hispanic, 12% White, and 13% Asian students. The student body includes 40% English language learners. Boys account for 77% of the students enrolled and girls account for 23%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 - 2007 was 91.8%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Robin Sue Ward is a District 75 school, serving students with a range of complex learning needs, including autistic spectrum disorders. The main school site is in single occupancy, purpose built accommodation, with an adjacent “mini-building”, used primarily for elementary aged students. Since September 2007, students with autism have also been admitted to the school’s annex at PS295. This new building has been specially adapted to meet the needs of a growing District 75 population. The Robin Sue Ward annex enjoys positive and productive relations with the general education administration, faculty and students at PS295.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal knows the needs of the school very well, and successfully enables others to carry out their jobs effectively.
- Colleagues show high levels of professional respect for each other, supporting the school's development and providing good role models.
- All members of staff care for and nurture students, encouraging increased levels of independency and academic accuracy.
- There are good opportunities for professional development, based on clear data of where individual and whole school improvements are needed.
- The school's curriculum includes a broad range of relevant and interesting instructional programs that facilitate useful assessment opportunities.
- There are good links with a wide range of partners that enhance learning and teaching.
- The school encourages and makes good use of all opportunities to involve parents as partners in their work.
- Leaders and faculty are a committed and responsive community who work to realize the school's vision for development and improvement.

What the school needs to improve

- Carry out detailed analysis of student sub-groups to inform accurate whole school goal setting and provide evidence of success.
- Ensure that precise whole school development goals are explicitly shared with the school community.
- Plan methodically the strategies and timeframes for achieving each of the school's development goals.
- Ensure that there are regular opportunities to use assessment data rigorously to measure the progress of the school towards its goals.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal's very good understanding of her school and clear knowledge of students and their needs ensures that the school continues to develop and improve. Over the past two years, all staff members have begun to look closely at their successes and highlight areas for improvement. There is an unambiguous recognition of heightened expectations, new challenges and more focused attention to detailed analysis of student and teacher outcomes. The school is managing change with relative ease, largely due to the very professional, mutually appreciative and respectful relationships that exist between colleagues. Staff members are open to learning from each other in order to improve continually the opportunities they offer students and enable them to make good progress. The school values the contributions that parents make to their children's learning and actively encourages their involvement. In addition, learning opportunities are greatly enhanced through a wide range of links with external partners.

The school has made good strides in its use of data. Leaders and teachers have a detailed picture of individual students as a result. However, leaders understand that there is not yet detailed enough information pertaining to each distinct student sub-group to enable the setting of long-term goals to ensure increased overall improvement. While the vision for where the school sees its future is very clear, planning to ensure the realization of the vision currently lacks rigor. Through the current work of the inquiry team, leaders see the benefits of strategic planning. In this forum, members have established clear indicators for success within appropriate timeframes. They have measured progress towards success on a regular basis and changed intervention strategies as a result of their ongoing monitoring and evaluation. In this work, leaders have created a good planning and review model for future developments at the school.

Despite analysis of specific groups that remains to be carried out, the school has made good progress since the last Quality Review. The expansion of data collection, organization and analysis has been central to growing success. There is an improved match of work to student needs and leaders have established where there are gaps in learning. Parental involvement continues to be a focus for the school. A large core group of local parents is regularly involved in school activities. They provide ongoing support for student learning and contribute to school decision making. The school does all it can to encourage parents who do not live close to the school to visit and contribute regularly. The role of a parent coordinator is vital in this work. Leaders are currently in the process of making a new appointment to this role. Senior teachers effectively support new members of staff at the school's annex and at the main site. New teachers are very happy to be at the school. In addition, they have brought with them ideas and practices that inspire seasoned teachers.

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 the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Leaders and staff have a very clear understanding of the needs of individual students. A useful range of data supports this knowledge. The data includes measures of past and present academic performance, awareness of students' social and emotional developments, their medical needs and personal likes and dislikes. Information is used to care for each student in the best possible way. Leaders monitor the progress of individual students on a regular basis to ensure that they are working successfully towards the goals from their individual education programs. The tracking of progress made by English language learners is also very good. Close analysis has enabled leaders to highlight successful strategies and adapt programs to meet students' needs more effectively. From data analysis, leaders are confident in the positive influences of bilingual teaching in the special education setting. The work of the inquiry team further exemplifies how data analysis aids the identification of strengths and areas for improvement for specific groups of students. Team members use Scantron to establish where student skills in calculative math are weakest. They adapt math instruction as a result. Interim measures of student progress guide further decisions regarding strategies. Because of focused attention to specific aspects of student learning, overall outcomes are improving. As yet, leaders have not carried out close analysis of the progress made by other pertinent sub-groups. This data would enable them to highlight success of other programs and provide data for use in comparisons with other schools.

Teachers now have increased awareness of the usefulness of data. They also have improved skills in data collection and analysis. Continued development of systems for analysis and management is encouraged through in-house training and support from assistant principals and the data specialist. Staff members embrace the new focus on careful analysis and use of data to improve both their own practice and student outcomes. A student case study presented during the current Quality Review exemplified the school's increasing rigor in data interpretation. Careful analysis assisted leaders and classroom teacher to establish the most beneficial strategies to support two students with autism.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Leaders set high expectations for teachers, challenging them to develop in students the necessary skills to live independent lives. The school now gives heightened attention to academic gains that also encourage accuracy and independence. Again, the work of the inquiry team is a good example of this. The team's attention to improving the math skills of students within the culinary program has resulted in good levels of collaboration to develop very specific goals for each student. Regular measurement of progress enables the team to set new goals for students. Two of these goals encourage consolidation of acquired skills and an additional six goals challenge students towards new learning. In this work, the school has a good model of effective practice. The team recognizes that their work and the influence it has on student outcomes can directly affect whole school performance. However, leaders do not yet share regularly enough whole school priorities to ensure that all members of the school community have a clear picture of where the

main areas for development lie. Equally, teachers do not always have an exact understanding of how their classroom practice must influence the improvement of whole school outcomes. Leaders acknowledge that they must regularly communicate these priorities to ensure there is a shared awareness of what the most important issues are for the school at any given time.

Parents play a valuable role at the school and their involvement is appreciated and encouraged. They enjoy good communication with teachers, who they feel regularly review and amend the goals on their children's individual education programs. In addition, many parents feel at ease to discuss with teachers new goals that they see as relevant to their child's development. Teachers work in close relationship with parents to support identified needs. These include goals such as putting on an overcoat without help, or writing a signature rather than printing a name when paying with a debit card. These small skills are vital to the development of independence.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

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

The school has a broad and interesting curriculum that supports student progress effectively. Teachers make very good use of data relating to students' specific needs and their past performance to plan appropriate work for them. Programs include the use of published academic interventions materials, very appropriately used to develop reading and writing skills. Alongside these, there are very interesting vocational and creative programs that motivate engagement and stimulate high levels of interest. These include a culinary program, a horticultural program, instrumental music tuition and a volleyball team. All programs provide good opportunities for regular assessment of student progress. Teachers make effective use of a wide range of information to direct future instruction. They have a rapidly growing awareness of the influence that data analysis has on curriculum mapping and the development of very relevant learning opportunities. Moreover, data review encourages continual curriculum adaptations and amendments to enliven opportunities and make learning fun. At all times, teachers also pay very good attention to ensuring that learning programs support the development of skills for adult life and realistic work placements. As one assistant principal explained, "The best teachers are never satisfied." This extends to the creation of attractive classroom and corridor displays and the use of high quality resources. Leaders make very wise decisions about the use of finances to support teachers in their quest to do well by students. In turn, teachers recognize how well the principal and her assistants support them. They show genuine respect for leaders' knowledge of the students and their understanding of what constitutes quality classroom practice. This ensures that when leaders have discussions with teachers about how to improve their work, advice is readily accepted. The focus on perfecting differentiation through all subjects and in all classrooms is currently high on the school's development agenda.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

Leaders express a very clear picture of what is good about teaching and learning at the school. They also articulate their expectations of ideals for students. Their knowledge of

where improvements are necessary is secure and drives all planning for professional development. Training is very well matched to teachers' individual needs and successfully includes a productive and positive "buddy" system for teachers new to the school. Useful professional development is organized to support teachers working for the first time with students with very specific learning needs. Teachers who are returning to the classroom from a school-wide support role have received very helpful training on curriculum content. Leaders have considered these arrangements carefully, giving experienced teachers the opportunity to share their knowledge and skills with newer members of staff. Long serving teachers have risen well to the occasion, viewing their new accountability seriously. The knock on effect is that a highly interdependent culture of learning from each other has occurred. More seasoned teachers are excited by the ideas and strategies their new colleagues share with them. New teachers have quickly assimilated into the routines of school life and feel very well supported. These productive partnerships are encouraging positive change and evident progress. The school also has many links with valued partners, such as North Columbia Teachers College, who further teachers' instructional skills and knowledge. Partners are also vital to the schools commitment to community based learning, enabling worksite placements for students. The school greatly appreciates these links that support students' academic, social and personal growth.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal knows her school extremely well. Both assistant principals share her knowledge of why the school has had a long-term good reputation. Leaders recognize that everything positive about the school's past is still very relevant to its future. They also understand that intensified accountability, both to the students and other parties, requires them to think in a more strategic way and ensure that outcomes are efficiently measurable. The school's vision for this new future is very clear. The school community shares the vision and is ready to take on board new challenges and refine their way of working to ensure that development goals are achievable. Members of staff are already reflective of their work, but have not had extensive experience of measuring how classroom outcomes influence whole school performance. Leaders know what needs to be done to move the school forward, but have had limited opportunities in the past to document the steps the school will take to ensure that the results are as they want them. They have had, however, very good recent experience in skillfully applying these strategies. The set up of the new annex has given them useful opportunities to agree on desired outcomes, plan ahead, align resources, build capacity and organize timely reviews to monitor outcomes. This learning has established the foundations for the school's future planning, monitoring and evaluation processes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Robin Sue Ward School for Exceptional Children	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?			X		
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?				X	
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped