

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

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 23 - 25, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Christina Lewis

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, 24% Hispanic, 22% White, and 13% Asian students. The student body includes 40% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 77% of the students enrolled and girls account for 23%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 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. Younger students with autism also attend the school’s annex at PS 295. The school has inclusion classes at three other schools. A visit to the inclusion class at PS 87 formed part of the Quality Review.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed

The Robin Sue Ward School provides an exceptional education for its exceptional group of students. The school’s good use of data ensures that teachers and service providers have a very clear understanding of the individual needs of their students. Individual education plans contain short- and long-term goals that effectively build on what students know and can do. Some students are able to articulate their goals and the school is developing further ways to enable students to assess their own progress and articulate their next learning steps.

An engaging and challenging curriculum provides many opportunities for students to learn and practice their skills. There is a strong focus on functional life skills and work studies. This enables students to prepare for meaningful work once they leave school. For example, one student was offered a position in a local fast-food chain. Other students successfully run a culinary program that provides staff and visitors to the school with refreshments. Students at the school’s inclusion site at PS 87 are making good progress. The host school and an effective inclusion teacher support them very well. Several of them hope to attend high school as mainstream students. As a result, all students are interested and engaged in their learning and make good progress, both academically and socially.

Under the good leadership of the principal, there is strong team of teachers and support staff that are committed to improving outcomes for students. The school provides a range of professional development opportunities. Currently this is based on school need rather than including an element of identified individual teacher need. In addition, the school has yet to formalize systems in order to evaluate the impact of professional development on teaching and learning. The school communicates very well with parents. As a result, they are active partners in their children’s education. As one parent said, this school really lives up to its vision of “We CARE.”

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school consistently collects and analyzes a wide range of data in order to create a clear understanding of each student's strengths and areas of need.
- Effective goals, set for each student, include core subjects and functional life skills that build on what the students know and can do, and identify next steps in learning.
- The school provides an engaging, challenging curriculum, including functional life skills and vocational programs, that very effectively meets the diverse needs of its population.
- Students show interest and engagement in their learning and make good progress personally, academically and socially.
- The school has very strong partnerships with its families, outside agencies and support services that effectively enhance and support its work.
- Strong teamwork and collaboration between staff have played a major part in the school's growth and success.
- The principal provides good leadership and, with the staff team, ensures that the school's vision is shared and understood by the whole community.

What the school needs to improve

- Create more opportunities to involve students in self-assessment, developing plans to achieve their goals and articulating their next learning steps.
- Provide all staff with individual professional development plans that include goals for improving and developing their practice.
- Establish interim and measurable goals for all of the school plans and instructional practices in order to consistently evaluate success throughout the year.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

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

The school consistently collects and analyzes a wide range of available data, including attendance, behavior and teacher assessments. As a result, teachers have a very clear picture of individual student's strengths and areas of need. At the beginning of the school year, assessments in Brigance and New York Alternative Assessments, along with historical data, help teachers monitor progress towards achieving individual education plan goals. This year some classes are piloting Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills with a view to using this school-wide next year, as the school feels it gives a better indicator of skills. Teachers effectively use a range of formative and summative assessments at regular intervals throughout the year to track students' progress. Teachers update individual education plans annually, or more often if necessary following monthly reviews. All this means teachers know their students extremely well and are very skilled at planning the next steps in each student's learning. Good liaison between the various service providers ensures that everyone is fully aware of each student's need. A useful portfolio of individual students' work and achievements, including photographs and annotated work, provides evidence of students' progress towards meeting their goals. However, the school is in the early stages of developing strategies for students to self-assess their own progress and to be able to articulate their next learning steps.

Students at the inclusion sites are regularly assessed along with their peers in these classes on standardized assessments, with predictive and other electronic programs. Teachers use information from these to address any deficiencies through extra academic support. The school has identified different student subgroups and as a result has developed very effective strategies to support these students' learning. For example, English language learners are in two classes with a specialist language teacher. Teachers run clubs for separate gender groups to facilitate their different interests and needs. Excellent communication with parents, via home-school agenda books, allows parents to track their children's progress on a daily basis. A recent outreach program to involve foster parents in group homes has had a positive impact in encouraging their interest and support of the students in their care.

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 well developed.

School leaders effectively involve the whole community in developing the Comprehensive Education Plan and identifying goals for school improvement. As a

result, there is a strong sense of teamwork and a common understanding of what the school is striving for in order to improve outcomes for students. For example, the purchase of new technology equipment, including interactive white boards, has had a positive impact on students' engagement.

The school is divided into cohorts in order to better identify similar characteristics of student need and settings. Weekly cohort meetings give teachers an opportunity to discuss and share best practices towards increasing student performance. As a result, teachers are confident in the use of data and assessments to regularly track students' progress towards meeting their goals.

Through various assessments, teachers generate individual education plan goals for each student according to need. These include academic, behavioral and social skills, as well as functional life, skills. They break the goals down into achievable steps and share them with students. As a result, many students are able to articulate what their goals are and how they are going to achieve them. For example, a student in the work-studies program knows he has to practice using money before he can get a job in one of the local stores. Another student knows he has to recognize street signs in order to complete his travel program. Students in the inclusion site at PS87 are able to explain their long-term goals in core subjects and understand the steps needed to achieve them. The inclusion teacher who liaises with teachers to ensure students are on track to achieve their goals supports them very well. Several students have flourished on the New York state test and are currently working at or above grade level. Other students have been so successful in achieving their goals that they are joining the school as mainstream students. In the main school, students who do well are placed in less restrictive settings. As result, the school is very effective in enabling students to make progress and develop independent skills. The school is currently developing different ways to facilitate self-assessment and to actively involve students in planning their next steps in learning.

Teachers review individual education plan goals at least monthly. Students and their families are actively involved in any modifications. Parents support the school very well and agree that the school actively encourages parents in participating and understanding its work. There are regular opportunities to meet with teachers and service providers, and, in addition, regular workshops provide a wide range of topics. For example, a recent workshop on the law and guardianship helped parents in making decisions about their children's long-term future. As a result, parents know how they can help their children in achieving their goals and value the high expectations the school has for their children. As one parent said, "Sometimes it's a bit scary to know what to do, but the school is always there to help and advise."

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

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

The school effectively provides a challenging and engaging curriculum in all subjects including the arts and functional life skills. The school aligns its curriculum through a program called Functional Academic Curriculum (FACE). Teachers adapt these materials to plan differentiated instruction based the individual need of students. This is done through a range of instructional strategies that effectively engage and support

students. For example, Teaching and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped methodology provides structure for all students. Students communicate throughout the school using Picture Exchange Communication Systems. Learning functional life skills is a high priority in the school. For example, a class of 6 year olds regularly has breakfast together to learn social skills. In another class, students take turns serving each other and playing “host”.

Older students visit the local community and practice shopping. Very effective vocational programs ensure that students have many opportunities to prepare for work. Several students work in local food stores and restaurants. The school runs a culinary program, in addition to other internal work-study programs, to prepare students for more challenging roles in the community. As a result, students are able to develop valuable life skills that have a positive impact on their confidence and self esteem. An artist-in-residence enables students to work together to complete major projects in different media. These are displayed around the school and enjoyed by the community. For example, a large sculpture has pride of place outside the school. A strength of the administration is that it is always looking for new ways to engage and motivate students. Recently a grant allowed the school to create a sensory room where students are able to go and unwind. Another program that teachers are currently piloting, “Getting ready to learn”, enables students to move to music at the beginning of the day. The impact of this has been very positive in building concentration and the school plans to make it available to other students. As a consequence of the varied and stimulating curriculum, students are fully engaged in their learning and make good progress, both socially and academically.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

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

Professional development mainly focuses on identified school need. For example, this year the school introduced professional teaching standards. The main aspect that all staff are focused on is “engaging and supporting all students in learning”. Teachers have internal and external professional development to support the development of this standard. School leaders confirm that evidence from formal and informal observations indicate that this has had a positive impact on the way teachers plan lessons and has increased student engagement. The school acknowledges that it is in the early stages of teachers having individual development plans, but does set individual goals through regular performance reviews to improve teaching and learning. Teachers value the professional development opportunities offered by the school and their district and say it has helped them become more reflective in their practice.

The enthusiastic members of the inquiry team have a positive impact on promoting school-wide collaboration and teamwork. They are effectively building on last year’s work, and this year the focus is on two groups of students with different needs. The team agrees that the in-depth analysis of data has helped them develop strategies to focus on small learning steps for students. For example, they have developed a computer-based assessment program that allows students to test their recognition of coins and gradually builds to introduce simple computation. As a result, students in the target group have grown in their confidence and ability to handle money. The other group, working on vocabulary skills, has found that the goals for this group have been exceeded, with some students making one grade progress. Because of these results,

school leaders realize that sometimes they underestimate the potential of students. Consequently, they are using research from the inquiry team to focus more closely on communicating higher expectations for all of their students. This supports the principal's belief that, "Everyone can learn something - it's just finding the right key."

School leaders implement an excellent guidance plan, with internal and external providers that support the academic growth of students and support their families. Very effective liaison and communication between different service providers, teachers and other partners ensure that there is a common understanding of each student's needs. For example, speech therapists work alongside class teachers to support students in the classroom. An effective transition program for older students ensures that they are in the best placement when they leave Robin Sue Ward School.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 and the staff team ensure that the vision of the school, which they sum up with the words "We CARE", is understood and supported by all members of the school community. Regular newsletters and displays throughout the school are constant reminders of this motto to the school population. Effective self-evaluation and reflection are fast becoming part of the school culture. As a result, school leaders set realistic, measurable goals to achieve the school's vision and improve student outcomes. However, the school has yet to establish interim goals for all of the school's plans so that they can be monitored and revised throughout the year. Currently school leaders have no formal systems in place to accurately monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of professional development or to guide them in setting individual goals for teachers. This hampers the school in accurately assessing improvements in teaching and the impact that this has on learning.

Teachers, alongside other service providers, review individual education plans at established checkpoints throughout the year. Teachers use a wide range of data and assessments, as well as individual student portfolios, to efficiently monitor student progress. Regular discussion with cohort leaders and the individual education plan coordinator ensures that students make progress toward achieving long- and short-term goals. Teachers, in consultation with parents, revise and adapt short-term goals where necessary. Teachers also support each other in developing new strategies for differentiating their instruction. For example, a student who was not reaching his short-term goals was given time at the beginning of the day to relax and unwind through the "Getting ready to learn program". As result, his concentration and focus were much improved and he achieved his goals.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Robin Sue Ward for Exceptional Children	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				X
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				X
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?				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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?				X
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				X
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?				X
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?				X
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?				X
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent do school leaders...	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?				X
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?				X
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed