



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Castle Hill School**

**Middle School 127**

**1560 Purdy Street  
Bronx  
NY 11462**

**Principal: Harry Sherman**

**Dates of review: May 27 - 28, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Louise Kapner**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Castle Hill is a middle school with 663 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 39% Black, 44% Hispanic, 2% White, and 14% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 90.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 79% eligibility.

The school is part of the leadership learning support organization. Before this year Castle Hill's organization included a grade 5. The school provides space for overflow early-grade students from its neighboring feeder school, elementary school 106.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal provides excellent leadership, creating an environment and developing instructional programs to support improving student outcomes.
- The collection and use of data is at a very high level and is used effectively to guide all aspects of the school's programs.
- The school's review of data pays very close attention to individuals, all student subgroups and whole school performance and progress.
- Staff work extremely cooperatively to plan and set realistic goals.
- Students participate in extensive enrichment and extra-curricular activities to broaden their experiences.
- Classroom instruction is rigorous, challenging, and well matched to students' needs.
- Professional development is an integral part of the school's program that successfully enhances teachers' skills.
- Parents very much appreciate the efforts of the school to provide their child with a well-balanced educational experience.
- The school is highly self-reflective and always looks to improve students' learning experiences.
- Clear and high expectations are shared effectively with students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Build on the data collection systems to develop additional ways for teachers to record daily student work.
- Formalize ways in which parents are invited to share relevant information about their child with teachers.
- Expand the student goal-setting process to be more skill specific and include timeframes to revisit and revise goals as suitable.

## 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 well developed.**

The principal, finishing his third year as the school's leader, has made significant strides in developing systems and embedding practices that are positively impacting student outcomes. As a result, scores from the 2008 standardized English language arts exam have increased. He has used the past 18 months, since his school's previous Quality Review, to tackle effectively each identified area for improvement. Data collection is extensive and exhaustively reviewed to understand the performance and progress of students, classes, grades, subject and every student subgroup. The school's use of data influences many facets of its programs, as there is an overarching goal to improve instruction and student achievement. The principal refers to students' results in conferences with teachers to support them in their goal setting for the year. Review of data is used in all decision-making for instructional and social skills programs, school schedules, and professional development. Teachers maintain a wide-range of standardized and interim assessment data, and record ongoing results from quizzes and projects to monitor students' performance and progress. However, not all teachers record efficiently results from daily lessons.

Teachers meet with students and use data to help students' set personal goals. However, their goals are not skill specific and interim timeframes for revisiting and revising goals are not established. Students are actively engaged in well-matched learning activities. They have many opportunities to participate in arts enrichment, sports, and select electives based upon their interest to broaden their experiences. The school is effective in sharing clear and high expectations with students. Teachers post instructional and grading rubrics and display student work with comments that provide good feedback and guidance. Staff work highly collaboratively, meet once a week as a grade, and engage in daily conversation around instruction and student performance to share best practices. Committees comprised of staff from all disciplines of the school meet frequently to discuss and design programs to meet the school and students' needs. The inquiry team's work targeted special education students who performed in the lowest third on the English language arts exam. Fifteen students from grade 6 to grade 8 received extensive support. All students showed progress on the 2008 exam. Parents are highly appreciative of the school's focus on student achievement, the extra curricular activities offered, and the information they receive. However, presently they do not share relevant information about their child with the school. The principal is not complacent and leads the school very effectively. Staff reflect regularly on what they are doing and review student outcomes to plan their next steps to continue, as the principal said, "on the journey."

## **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 well developed.**

The school holds itself very accountable for students' progress. Administrators review standardized and school-generated data to "know what is happening to any student, in any class, across the grade at any time". They disaggregate the data at an extremely detailed level by student, class, grade, and subject and for every subgroup. The school's robust analysis and effective use of the information enables the school to gain a very good understanding of the performance and progress of special education students, English language learners and by gender. As a result, the school is very effective in guiding instruction for these groups. Special education students' performance increased dramatically on the 2008 English language arts exam. Nineteen percent of the students scored on Level 1 as compared to 43% on the previous year's test, a 24% decrease. The school also thoroughly analyzes and compares its overall data year-to-year, and pays close attention to results of cohorts, to monitor their performance and progress. The comparison of two years of State data on the English language arts exam shows an overall increase of 10% over one year and 20% over two years of all students meeting standards. The grade 7 cohort has an 11% increase in proficiency when compared to their grade 5 results. The principal monitors carefully his school's performance relative to his peer group, recognizing the demographic differences that influence students' results. His school has a higher percentage of special education students. The school holds classroom teachers to very high standards in the collection and use of data to support students' learning. Staff maintain comprehensive assessment binders with class and student profiles with longitudinal test results and present year interim assessment data. They use this data to guide instruction, group students, and track trends in performance. Student portfolios contain authentic student work to monitor ongoing results from classroom work. However, teachers do not consistently record precise information from daily instruction. The results of the school's high level of commitment to the collection, review and use of data is supporting effective learning for all students.

**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.**

The principal transparently shares school goals with all members of the school community and holds them accountable to improve student outcomes. Staff effectively review formal and school-generated data and student work during weekly grade conferences and curriculum team meetings to set interim- and long-term goals to accelerate student learning. They work in a highly collaborative manner to develop effective instructional programs and practices and to set challenging goals for improvement. During a grade 6 conference, English language arts teachers reviewed and revised a draft of an end-of-year English language arts task and rubric for assessing student performance and guiding their next steps in instructing the writing of a persuasive essay. This well-matched activity and rubric provides students with clear

instructional and grading guidelines and enables them to self-assess their work. All classrooms display student work with teachers' comments that provide excellent guidance. Grading rubrics in every room convert Levels 1 through 4 into percentages, to convey clear and high expectations to students. School's goals and information are regularly communicated to parents. Progress reports provide parents with an enhanced understanding of their child's work and include them in planning for their child's success. Parents see this "as very helpful as it pinpoints specific needs to focus on". However, parents are not encouraged to share relevant information about their child with the school. The school provides a wide-breadth of support before, during and after school for students most in need and higher achieving students. Students receive focused instruction with suitable materials that enable them to make progress and be prepared for all standardized exams. Special education students using Read 180 showed marked improvement on the 2008 English language arts exam.

**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's highly detailed analysis of data is used very well to select curricula and supplemental materials that are effectively matched, so improving student outcomes. Curriculum maps in each content area are detailed, sequential, and standards-based to provide teachers with clearly laid out plans for instruction. Embedded assessments and authentic student work enable teachers to monitor student performance. The principal holds teachers highly accountable for engaging all students in well-matched activities. The workshop-model approach enables teachers to instruct large groups of students who then work independently or in groups using suitable materials. Students have opportunities to share their work with fellow classmates to ensure that everyone is involved in learning suitable to their needs. Students in a grade 6 science class were working with leaf specimens and differentiated work sheets to complete a classification activity. Students also have many opportunities to participate in vibrant enrichment and sports programs that broaden their experiences. Well-chosen trips support the school's goal to improve student learning. Students attended a Broadway show and now are adapting the script for their own production. Students freely ask for help from teachers and administrators and feel that there are open lines of communication. One student shared how an assistant principal "guided him to a good choice" when faced with solving a personal problem. Decisions for scheduling, staffing and budgeting are data-driven to ensure that students' needs are met. Programming for English language learners' focuses on successful, intense instruction in English. Student attendance which is monitored robustly and given a very high priority, currently hovers at about 93%.

**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.**

The principal emphasizes comprehensive professional development opportunities for staff. An early on survey enabled them to identify areas of need and interest from which

the school's administration developed an effective plan. Teachers attend on- and off-site activities that are well matched to their needs and enhance their skills. Frequent learning walks and formal observations by the administrators successfully include a "deliberate focus" to monitoring instructional practice. They look for evidence of learned strategies that impact effectively on improving the quality of instruction and students' achievement. Teachers use intervisitations to "make connections" and articulate with colleagues on their grade, within content area, and inter-grade. The principal carefully selects new staff and provides them with excellent support to build their capacity as successful educators. Staff are highly appreciative of the ongoing conversations and being involved as they work towards improving student outcomes. Staff are very focused on creating an environment that supports the "whole middle school child". Student service providers know students well and effectively encourage them to be successful. Students develop social skills in weekly assembly programs discussions. The school's emphasis on student behavior is well organized. Their program "ARMOR" (Academics, Respect, Management, Organization, Responsibility), enables students to earn pence that they exchange to attend special events. As a result, there is a marked improvement in student behavior. The extensive collaborations with outside agencies further the school's goals. Students receive intense tutorial support and they engage in many sports and arts enrichment activities. The principal's careful monitoring of the implementation of these programs ensures alignment with students' needs.

**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 well developed.**

The school continually engages in meaningful improvement planning as it strives to achieve its interim- and long-term goals. Twice yearly, the principal formally meets one-on-one with teachers to discuss their personal instructional foci. He uses student data to "set the framework for this meeting." Teachers identify students for whom they have the greatest concern and the professional steps they will take to address their needs. Students also set broad-based goals and use their work and quarterly reports to measure informally their progress toward "passing." However, students' goals are not detailed and therefore do not allow them to monitor their skill-specific growth. Students do not formally revise their goals to reflect mastery as evidenced by their report cards and progress reports. Aggregate collection of student work and review of assessment data is used effectively to adjust instruction and change interventions or programs as necessary. Teachers use authentic student work to monitor the effectiveness of instructional rubrics. As a result, writing rubrics were revised and differentiated to address the learning needs of students. The professional development plan was revised mid-year to include additional activities in instructional strategies so teachers were better prepared to address students' needs. The school is not complacent as it monitors its performance and progress, and plans for the future. The school's rigorous evaluations of student progress and its flexibility to adapt its own plans to reach its goals is continually moving the school forward and raising student achievement. School's goals are well articulated to the entire school community. The principal stated, "I see the school as a 1000 moving pieces which at anytime can move. I am always thinking of what we need to do."

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Castle Hill School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					X

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					X

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>