

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Welsh
Headteacher
Bexley Grammar School
Danson Lane
Welling
Kent
DA16 2BL

Dear Mr Welsh

Ofsted survey: good practice in capturing the user voice

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 6 February 2009 to look at work on capturing the user voice.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: meetings with students and staff, scrutiny of documentation and access to the school's e-learning platform.

Features of good practice observed

- The school's very clear philosophy and vision on student voice is well embedded within the school development plan and whole school structures and makes a strong impact on the achievements of students. The established culture of participation, partnership and trust between the student body, the staff and the wider community supports a wide range of creative and increasingly adventurous student engagement.
- The students arrive at the school having achieved highly in their primary schools. They continue to make good and outstanding academic and personal progress as a result of high expectations and aspirations and the provision of many opportunities to develop personal and leadership skills.
- Students feel it is safe to make their voice heard, to contribute and to participate. Their views have informed developments and led to changes on a wide range of issues, for example the school environment and facilities, academic course provision, the quality of teaching and learning and the school ethos.
- A wide and impressive range of strategies and structures enable students' views to be voiced. These include the routine use of questionnaires, often designed and collated by students, and the school council which represents their views well. The introduction of the academic council has enhanced this work by involving

students in enquiry, observation and monitoring activities which contribute to whole school monitoring and evaluation. These include the evaluation of teaching and contribution to the appointment process for staff.

- Students have many excellent opportunities to participate and take responsibility and leadership. These include through the dynamic and inclusive House system, as school and subject prefects and leaders, and through opportunities to 'front' school and community events. Posts of responsibility are keenly sought and highly prized. Student autonomy and responsibility are nurtured and supported by skilled and subtle staff intervention and targeted training programmes.
- The school's inclusive ethos ensures that activities are open to all; participation in a wide range of enrichment activities across the arts, sports and academic areas is positively encouraged and monitored.
- The needs of specific groups are well identified and met, for example through the outstanding peer mentoring system for younger pupils and the lunchtime language clubs for those who speak languages other than English in the home.
- Communication channels are very well developed and well used, through the student contributions to the school newsletter and through the creative use of ICT to support consultation and feedback, and to encourage participation.

Area for development

- Explore strategies to enable the Governing Body to engage formally with the student body and where appropriate involve them more directly in strategic planning and evaluation.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the user voice in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Mary Ryan
Her Majesty's Inspector