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Mr N Weller
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Weller

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 2 March 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 a tour of the Academy, scrutiny of documentation, observation of a review of the A-level English Literature course and interviews with staff and students.

Features of good practice observed

- The academy has an excellent range of mechanisms for capturing students' views on all aspects of its work. These include questionnaires, reviews of teaching and learning in subjects, reviews of all A-level courses and the work of focus groups on a wide range of topics such as anti-bullying and curriculum issues.
- Once captured, the students' views are analysed and used exceptionally well to help to inform planning for change and improvement. For example, views on aspects of teaching and learning in all subjects have a high profile in subject and whole school development planning.
- There are very many examples of important actions taken in response to the collection of students' views. Curriculum changes involving the distribution of ICT lessons, the provision of more healthy options in the canteen, extensions of the extra-curricular programme to include more participants. Also, reduction in the use of paper and a more efficient use of energy within the academy have all resulted from consultation with the students.

- The Eco-council, the sports leader programme and the focus group on teaching and learning are all examples of real responsibility enabling students of all ages to help to manage change and improvement. Students involved in these and many other activities such as the organisation of shows have a sense of pride in their achievements and grow in confidence and self esteem as a result. The Eco-council has become such a powerful and effective group that the Academy is planning to remodel the School Council along similar lines.
- The Academy's programme of support for vulnerable students and those who encounter difficulties at school or at home is quite exceptional in quality. Its success is reflected in the very good GCSE results which they achieve and the fact that in recent years only one student has been permanently excluded. Students of all ages speak very highly of the individual support that they receive and the fact that members of staff really do go more than the extra mile on their behalf.

Areas for development

- Systematic feedback to students on the analysis of survey returns, coupled with the academy's intended response to them would give them greater ownership of the review process and would help to keep them better informed about intended developments.

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

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

John Paddick
Additional Inspector