

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



19 March 2009

Mrs R Harris-Cooksley
Headteacher
Dacorum Education Support Centre
30 Tenzing Road
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
HP2 4HS

Dear Mrs Harris-Cooksley

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 3 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: observations of sessions, discussions with students and parents or carers, discussions with staff from the centre and those from partner schools, and scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- The clear vision for consultation with students, and using their views to bring about change, is very well represented in the centre's strategic planning. The frequent review of how well the centre is achieving its aim of engaging students is part of its everyday processes.
- Effective links and the two-way flow of information with parents and carers support the staff's understanding of the students' needs.
- The centre captures students' views about what constitutes barriers to their learning through a wide range of strategies. Individual mentoring support is sharply tailored to meet every student's different needs. Adults are highly skilled listeners and support students' capacity to air their views, opinions and concerns. Outside agencies, extra support or resources are accessed quickly where necessary.
- The centre uses a wide range of effective strategies to gather students' views. Pen portraits, completed by students, set out what each student wants the staff

to know about them, what they find difficult, what the staff can do to help them and what students intend to do to help themselves.

- Students are partners with staff in decisions about targets for learning and personal and social development. Frequent review meetings with staff give them valuable opportunities to assess their progress towards these targets. Information gained informs staff on how they can best personalise learning for students. Students' aspirations rise in line with their self-esteem as they evaluate their successes.
- The centre's work in supporting partner schools has had a positive impact on reducing the rate of permanent exclusions. Preventative and outreach work has listening to students' voices as its cornerstone. The staff from the centre have provided effective training for staff in other schools to boost their ability to listen to students and find ways of managing challenging behaviour and attitudes.

Areas for development

- Extend students' role in contributing their voice to the centre's strategic development planning.

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

As I explained previously, 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

Barbara Crane
Additional Inspector