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Mr J Parkinson
Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic School
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Dear Mr Parkinson

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 9 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 the initial meeting with you, further meetings with staff and students, observations of discussions chaired by students, and a scrutiny of planning documents and the results of surveys.

Features of good practice observed

- The school uses a good range of effective strategies to capture the views of its students. These include surveys, questionnaires, reviews of all A-level courses and the work of students in forum groups on a wide range of topics such as sex education, target setting and healthy eating.
- The school development plan identifies the many occasions when students' views are to be sought so that leaders and managers can be perfectly clear what they are. Once students' forum groups have produced their views and survey results are analysed, the school uses them systematically to inform future changes and developments.
- There are many examples of improvements which have been strongly informed by the collection of students' views. For example, all of them now have one to one interviews to review their progress rather than just those who appear to be underachieving. Also, the school has granted their requests for elements of the sex and relationships programme to be taught in single sex groups.

- The school's support for vulnerable students and those at risk is quite exceptional. Its success is reflected in the very good GCSE results that these students achieve and the extremely low exclusion rates. The programme of support enables many young people to achieve academic success against all odds.

Areas for development

- More systematic feedback to students on the analyses of questionnaires and surveys would help to give them greater ownership of the changes that the school eventually makes in response to them.
- Although the school is very effective in capturing students' views on a wide variety of topics, consideration might be given to the development of more regular opportunities for them to raise matters that they themselves want to discuss.

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

John Paddick
Additional Inspector