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Ms T Campbell  
Headteacher  
Plantsbrook School  
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Dear Ms Campbell

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: observations of lessons, a pupil focus group and lunchtime activities, discussions with students and staff, and scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- The school motto 'Be the Best That You Can Be' firmly underpins its strategic vision for user voice. The strategy is embedded across this inclusive school, and students take full advantage of the opportunities to provide a wide range of opinions on how aspects of school practice affect them.
- The school's leadership team has undertaken a thorough evaluation of the place and the impact of user voice within its existing whole school structures. This has helped considerably to improve the learning experiences that students receive.
- Students enjoy school, are interested in their work and receive many opportunities for their voice to be heard. In the lessons observed during the survey visit, there was a strong emphasis on the use of success criteria to ensure that students are aware of what they are trying to achieve and how to achieve their targets. These opportunities to exchange opinions during class-based discussion give them ample opportunity to take responsibility on a day-to-day basis.

- A wide range of well-organised student groups including the school council, learning groups, year councils, “eco warriors” and other consultative groups are well-focused on specific projects to help improve the school environment, enable the pupils to take on greater responsibility for their learning and make a positive contribution to the school.
- All students’ views are sought as an integral part of reviewing and improving every aspect of school life, from teaching and learning to school meals. The students interviewed during the visit said that as a result of taking part in these processes, they had improved their self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills.
- Information and communication technology is used widely to undertake student surveys and provide feedback, for example on the sixth form website.

#### Areas for Development

- To consider how to support student members of consultative and focus groups to contribute to action planning and manage a budget.
- Establish closer working between the students’ learning group and teachers’ learning group in order to build on existing good practice and contribute to the development of the learning policy.

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

David King  
Additional inspector