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Mr I Kellie
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kellie

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 12 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 pupils and staff, and scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- The school recognises that pupils have a significant role to play in contributing to school improvement. The leadership team continues to review and adapt its approach to the user voice, for example through the introduction of the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme.
- In lessons there is a strong emphasis on the use of assessment criteria to support pupils in achieving their targets and in developing self-esteem and confidence. They have many opportunities to express opinions during discussions in lessons.
- The thorough departmental management reviews take into account pupils' views and have revealed that they prefer lessons that include opportunities for discussion, role-play and practical work. This feedback has resulted in changes to teaching and learning approaches in many classrooms.
- The smaller pupil consultative groups such as the learning council and the Year 7 climate change group, are well organised. They focus successfully on specific

projects which help pupils to take on greater responsibility for their learning and make a positive contribution to the school and wider community.

- The Key Stage 3 council is a dynamic group continually involved in review, feedback and prioritising future projects. This has resulted in the adoption of initiatives such as warning bells and new benches.
- This is an inclusive school, knowledgeable about individual pupils' needs, and ensuring that all are able to make a valued contribution. The majority of pupils feel they are listened to.
- The sixth form students take on a wide range of leadership responsibilities both within the school and the local community, for example as peer mentors, prefects, 'observers' (senior prefects) and school captains. Many of the sixth form are involved with helping in science lessons in feeder schools and in a local special school.
- Pupils state that they benefit from taking part in user voice initiatives. These benefits include improved grades and the development of self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills.
- The widespread use of information communication technology supports the administration of pupil surveys and feedback to pupils on outcomes. Examples include surveys on the SEAL project, on personal, social and health education, as well general pupil consultation.

Areas for development

- Enable pupils who are members of focus groups to take greater responsibility for management within those groups, including feedback to teachers and the parents' association.
- Develop the wider strategic role of the full school council.

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