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Ms L Sinclair
Principal
Hills Road Sixth Form College
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Dear Ms Sinclair

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 24 September 2008 to look at work on capturing the user voice. I am particularly grateful to the managers and teaching staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and for giving up their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to the students who gave up their time to talk to me.

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: interviews with staff and students and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- High profile given by the Principal and senior management team to the importance of the user voice in maintaining and improving the college's outstanding provision.
- Very well established and high quality formalised systems to capture the voice of learners and parents.
- Good analysis of student and parent survey information, to help identify issues and bring about improvement. This information is also used effectively to track and report on any trends over time.
- Highly effective use of societies and committees, often student-led, to encourage student contribution and to develop high level academic, personal and social skills. For example, a non-academic peer mentoring initiative, that supports those new to the college and/or who may lack confidence.

- Good use of pilot projects which involve students directly in observing and evaluating teaching and learning styles and reporting their findings to teachers. Teachers involved in the pilot have, in several cases, adjusted and further improved their lesson planning as a result.
- Strong links exist with local partner schools to engage learners directly in improving transition and curriculum delivery. This is particularly the case in biology, where students have the opportunity to meet with teachers from their previous school to feedback on how they could be better prepared at GCSE.

Areas for development

- Ensure that the impact of all aspects of the learner voice, both formal and informal, are fully captured through the college's self assessment
- Further encourage all learners to be involved in the strategic decision-making processes through a balance of surveys and forums.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector