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Ms K Bedford
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Bedford

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 13 November 2008 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, including external presentations, meetings with staff and children, scrutiny of documents and video evidence.

Features of good practice observed

- The school places its children at the heart of its work, ensuring that they all achieve as highly as possible. Children make outstanding progress in their educational achievement, personal development and behaviour. School leaders are seeking constantly to develop and improve practice.
- The user voice is at the core of all this work, in terms of equipping all children with the skills and tools to make their voice heard, in listening actively to what they say and in nurturing their independence and confidence.
- Their individual needs drive the work of the school. A very high proportion arrive with few communication skills; during their time at the school they acquire the ability to communicate well using, sign language, speech, symbols or writing.
- Staff are adept at 'active listening' ensuring that every child has a voice, for example through the enthusiastic participation of all children in the news, commendation and music assemblies.
- Children are taught to use symbols, words and speech to articulate and manage their feelings and emotional responses, for example in the school's work on anti-bullying.

- The introduction of person-centred learning has transformed the annual review process, ensuring that the child's views and experiences are the driver, while retaining rigorous targets for further improvement.
- Choice underpins the teaching methodology, ensuring that children are empowered to make decisions and take responsibility for their actions as well as express preference, for example in relation to their preferred learning styles and healthy life choices. They are also supported in reviewing their learning, using a variety of support tools and resources to chronicle their learning journey.
- Many children also develop their voice and confidence through participation in a wide range of activities including sport and outdoor activities, the sports leadership programme, borough-wide initiatives, and regular presentations about their achievements.
- By the time children reach Key Stages 3 and 4 many demonstrate their independence through travelling independently, making choices about educational progression, managing projects and undertaking work experience.
- Photographs, video and power point presentations are used routinely and successfully to record their views, and discuss with pupils their progress and achievements.
- The school's inclusive ethos is outstanding. All children, whatever their ability and needs are actively supported to achieve their very best. Strategies and resources tailored to individuals enable children to communicate, participate fully in their own development, support their peers and contribute to the work of the school as a whole. Barriers to participation are broken down through one-to-one work with individual children.
- Children are consulted and involved routinely in strategic planning and development, for example improving lunch arrangements, shaping curriculum provision, appointing new staff and contributing to the design of the new school.

Area for development

- Extend the already excellent practice, through the introduction the planned pupil leadership group approach to mirror that already introduced for staff.

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

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

Mary Ryan
Her Majesty's Inspector