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Dr S Smallwood
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Smallwood

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 27 January 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 discussions with students, staff and parents and scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- School managers and staff have a shared commitment to high achievement and wide opportunity for every boy in the school. The school culture encourages and supports students well in taking responsibility for their learning and development, and in developing leadership skills and experience.
- Students achieve very well academically; they are articulate and confident to express their views.
- Students' views are sought formally on some issues. In these cases their voice has led to changes and improvements, for example to the school environment and facilities.
- A number of strategies are used effectively to elicit the student perspective. These include questionnaires and focus groups, and individual means such as the pastoral support system and counselling opportunities.
- Students routinely take responsibility for their own learning through setting academic goals and targets, in discussion with their tutors. Parents are kept well informed on their progress.

- Older students report that they discuss styles of teaching and learning in some classes. Individual projects have also involved a small number of students in a more structured evaluation of teaching styles.
- There are many opportunities for students to participate and take leadership responsibility through: the many sporting activities, their tutor groups, the house system, as team captains and prefects, running clubs for younger students and managing events.
- Students also have good opportunities to participate beyond the school, for example through charity work, many overseas links and visits, and through the curriculum partnership with the neighbouring girls' sixth form.
- The parent forum provides a useful sounding board for the planning and evaluation of the impact of specific initiatives.

Areas for development

- To consider how the views and experiences of students could routinely contribute to the strategic work of the management team and governing body; for example, through seeking students' views formally on key issues that affect them, through involving them where relevant in the decision-making process and in monitoring and evaluating impact and outcomes.
- To review the current arrangements for the school council, in order to: strengthen its status as a representative forum for all groups of students, to engage students more actively in its leadership, and to ensure that students receive feedback on action taken as result of their input.

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

Mary Ryan
Her Majesty's Inspector