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Mr T M Armstrong
Headteacher
Sunnydown School
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152 Whyteleafe Road
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Dear Mr Armstrong

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: the impact that links between parents/carers and schools have on supporting and encouraging young people's achievement, well-being and personal development

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, students and parents, during my visit on 17 November 2009.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on how the school's work with parents and carers affects a range of outcomes for students.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff, governors, parents and students, and scrutiny of relevant school documentation.

The overall effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers is outstanding.

The impact of parental involvement on outcomes

The impact of parental involvement on outcomes is outstanding.

- Parents feel fully involved in their child's learning. They are rightly confident that their sons make outstanding progress academically and in their personal development and well-being while at Sunnydown School. In particular, parents cite considerable improvements in their sons' attendance, self-esteem, confidence and the development of a much

greater respect and understanding for others. They acknowledge these are the benefits they have experienced as a result of working in very close partnership with you.

- For many parents, working with your school is seen as a significant and often transformational improvement on what they and their sons have experienced previously.
- Parents and students appreciate the very regular and well-targeted information they receive, particularly the weekly 'newsletter', and the way you and your staff respond promptly to their concerns. Indeed, this is a key element of your school's success. Parents and their sons know and trust that there is always someone who will get back to them. Consequently, problems can be resolved effectively, in a personalised manner and as quickly as possible.
- Homework diaries and the home-boarding book are used extremely effectively as a means of prompt daily and/or weekly communication.
- While there are no 'unreachable' parents, you and your staff were able to provide compelling evidence of how it has been possible to work very successfully with those few parents who find it more difficult to engage with the school, improving outcomes for students who would otherwise have fallen out of the system.
- Attendance at the many regular and valued parents' evenings, information, celebration and social events is high. These play a highly valued role in allowing parents and school staff to meet and talk to each other in both formal and informal situations.

The impact of the involvement of parents on the quality of provision

The impact of the involvement of parents on the quality of provision is good.

- All parents are involved closely in assessment and target-setting through the very effective parents' evenings, annual review meetings and the writing of care plans for boarders. Consequently, parents say they receive exceptionally good advice and guidance, but nevertheless feel supported and empowered to make their own decisions.
- You and your staff listen to parental ideas and have acted on these promptly whenever appropriate. For example, there have been significant changes to the school's homework policy, more regular curriculum information and greater opportunities for day-students, who frequently have long distances to travel between home and school, to access extra-curricular activities.
- The involvement of parents in the transition of students from Year 6 is excellent. A comprehensive programme of information gathering, visits, meetings and social events begins 12 months before a student joins the school and continues throughout Year 7. This approach is adjusted very effectively to meet the needs of both day-students and boarders.

- Students, particularly those that board, say that your staff also act as important parental figures and parents say that you and your staff treat the boys as if they were your own sons.
- Parental expertise is used sensitively as a resource for learning. Parents have accompanied school trips, residential activities and have been involved in leading sessions such as a 10-week drama course and sessions on the art of bonsai. Nevertheless, this is an area of the school's work that you have identified for further development.

The impact of the involvement of parents on inclusion

The impact of the involvement of parents on inclusion is outstanding.

- Students, supported by their parents, rightly believe they can achieve well at Sunnydown School and a very large majority do. Any gaps in performance are successfully narrowed, with most making exceptional progress during their time with you and achieving well in their GCSEs.
- Students also make exceptional progress in terms of their personal development and well-being. Consequently, by the time they leave school, students have high aspirations, improved self-confidence and the skills and qualifications they need to go on to further education, employment or training.

The impact of leadership and management on the involvement of parents

The impact of leadership and management on the involvement of parents is outstanding.

- Parental involvement, and indeed that of the boys' wider family, is given a very high priority by you and your staff. This is reflected clearly in the exceptionally high regard that parents have for your school.
- Developing parental engagement is integral to your community cohesion policy and is incorporated clearly into your school development plan. This ethos filters down to your students. For example, one boy in the school council meeting that I observed proposed that the minutes from their meetings should be part of the regular information sharing with all parents. This demonstrated clearly the influence of the school's philosophy towards parental involvement as well as the value students place on the work of the school council.
- The school evaluates its work with parents in a variety of ways. It gathers very rich evidence from the regular parents' evenings and events as well as from more informal contact with parents. It is supported very well in this by the school's parent-teacher association, the Friends of Sunnydown. It uses formal questionnaires less frequently but has benefited from the detailed external evaluations provided when being successfully assessed for the Partnership with Parents Standard and the Inclusion Quality Mark.

- Governors, including parent governors, are fully involved in the life of the school. They also act as a very successful means of feeding back evaluative information. They are actively involved in monitoring lessons and have close links to departments and subject areas.
- You have rightly identified, as part of your self-evaluation, the need to develop more quickly the use of electronic communication and the school website to make communication with parents even better.
- Parental complaints are rare. When they occur they are dealt with very thoroughly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing proportionately the opportunities for parents to support teaching and learning in school
- developing more quickly the use of electronic communication and the school website so that the information you provide parents is even better and more readily accessible.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the impact of the work of parents and carers in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Chris Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector