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Mr F Thirling
Headteacher
Cockton Hill Junior School
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Dear Mr Thirling

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 Tuesday 24 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 the initial meeting with you, further meetings with staff and pupils, observations of assembly and circle time, and a scrutiny of relevant documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- The school uses a good range of effective strategies to capture the views of its pupils. These include class councils and the school council, end of term reviews, satisfaction surveys, working groups on major topics such as healthy eating, and an involvement in the process of appointment of teachers.
- The personal, health, social and citizenship programme provides a secure setting for pupils to give their views about what is right and wrong whilst at the same time exploring their feelings on a wide range of current topics. Regular features are opportunities for older pupils to chair discussions with younger ones and circle time which enables pupils to talk about their experiences and explain how they feel about them.
- The school gives its pupils many opportunities to volunteer to take responsibility and fully involves them in the planning for these. Pupils say that they feel good about being trusted in this way. They are keen to talk about what they have done and do so with confidence and enthusiasm. An example is the buddy system

where older pupils look after the younger ones on the yard and in the garden. Younger children feel reassured by the buddies and know that they can approach them for assistance if they have any concerns.

- Strategies for capturing the views of the more vulnerable pupils are excellent. Members of staff are very good at engaging these children in conversation so that barriers to progress, either academic or personal, can be carefully removed. Frequently, this results in the rapid development of personal skills and an increase in confidence and self-esteem. At the same time there are often big increases in the ability to read and write as the children start to believe in themselves. The quality of this work is reflected in the published academic statistics for the school which show that all groups of pupils do better than might be expected.

Areas for development

- The system of reviewing the progress that pupils make each term could be strengthened. Teachers could check more rigorously the extent to which they meet the targets that they set for themselves during this process.
- The management plan could more strongly recognise the high profile that user voice has in the school. For example, it might indicate where pupils' views are to be sought as part of the procedures for reviewing the relative success of curriculum changes.

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

John Paddick
Additional Inspector