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27 February 2009

Mr Glenn Mayoh  
Headteacher  
Abbs Cross School and Arts College  
Abbs Cross Lane  
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Essex  
RM12 4YB

Dear Mr Mayoh

### **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 10 February 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 meetings with staff and students, and scrutiny of documentation.

### **Features of good practice observed**

- Student voice permeates the work of the school and is embedded in its planning and evaluation structures. It is driven and supported by strong leadership from senior management, and well-established trust and partnership between students and staff. Senior managers are totally committed to using the views of students to shape and improve developments; they seek constantly to improve the ways in which they do this.
- The three student charters on teaching and learning, behaviour and the environment, were drawn up by students and are used routinely to shape, evaluate and improve practice. They are displayed prominently in all classrooms and in student planners. The implementation of the charters has led to improvements, for example the reduction in incidents of low level disruption in lessons and a wider range of teaching styles, more finely honed to students' needs.
- Through the well-developed representation, consultation and feedback systems via the charter year and tutor group representatives, all students make a very active contribution to planning and decision-making. Examples include the fortnightly completion of the environmental logs by tutor groups and the open discussion of teaching lesson criteria.

- Students demonstrate very effective personal and communication skills, for example those on the student voice executive are highly articulate and display a mature understanding of their role and achievements.
- The leadership skills of student representatives are developed well through the comprehensive student voice training programme, run in partnership with the University of East London. Sustainability is planned for and talent and independence nurtured through the vigilant and enabling support from staff in the school.
- The pastoral support for all students has recently been strengthened through the introduction of regular scheduled mentoring sessions with small groups and individual students.
- The school's inclusive culture and ethos encourage all to participate and contribute their views; the progress, achievement and participation of specific groups including looked after children and those at risk of disaffection is closely monitored.
- Students from all year groups are actively encouraged to take on leadership roles as sports and arts leaders, as form leaders and as student voice group leaders. They also take full advantage of the many opportunities for participation and leadership provided by the school's wide enrichment programme. These include international links, arts and sports activities and opportunities offered by extended school status. In addition, student leaders are increasingly involved in dissemination of their experiences to external groups.

### **Area for development**

- Formalise the arrangements for the student voice representatives to present their views directly to the governing body.

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

**Mary Ryan**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**