

VANDYKE UPPER SCHOOL – ANNUAL SCHOOL SURVEY, January 2014

Introduction

This is the 19th year of our annual school survey. Through the survey we seek the views of students across all year groups, parents, support staff and teaching staff. It is conducted anonymously and collated in a form that is then published. Questions have been kept broadly the same to facilitate comparison over time.

This year we changed the way the survey was conducted from a paper-based survey to an electronic version using a survey tool completed on-line. This change meant the survey was carried out in January rather than December, but nevertheless it still took place mid-way through the school year and in the “darkest days” of the winter as we have always done.

In designing the survey, we included an option to respond as “neither agree or disagree” which ultimately has been unhelpful and makes comparison with previous years more difficult when this option was not available to respondents.

Overall responses remain largely positive but are generally a little below overall satisfaction rates in recent years. This may be for reasons related to the changed format and style and additional response available as outlined above and may be due also to the inspection judgement last April and associated poor press coverage. It may simply truly reflect a lower level of satisfaction with aspects of the school's performance in what has been a challenging year.

The survey is extensive and responses are grouped into a smaller number of categories. It also includes an opportunity for respondents to make additional comments using free text. The on-line survey has certainly generated more such comments. These are always interesting and are all carefully read but are not reproduced here.

Comments cover every conceivable aspect of school life and tend to highlight how difficult it would be if the aim was “to keep everybody happy”! The café attracts a great deal of comment, as does homework and the section on staff satisfaction.

One student wrote that “The café food is expensive and under-cooked and covered in fat”. Prices in the café are certainly a concern to some students and are a source of frequent discussion between the school and the catering company. Price is an important feature in the current process of selecting a new contractor to begin in September 2014. The comments also remind us of the need to maintain a dialogue about such matters with students, because objectively prices are quite reasonable, especially the set meals which frankly offer fantastic value but tend not to be taken up by so many students. The pick ‘n’ mix/ grab ‘n’ go approach will generally be more expensive, whether at McDonalds or the Vandyke Café. Food served in the café meets the government's school meals nutritional standards and I can say from personal experience that the quality of food is high. So this comment has provoked consideration of important issues in the café. I am content that the views of the respondent are not accurate and yet the comment has served a useful purpose in reminding us that these matters are important to students and we must continue to address them seriously.

Some comments are lovely to read. Student comments include “For me, all the staff get the job done”, “We have amazing support staff who really help you” and “Unbeatable teachers, truly first class!” Others are understandable, such as “We need a separate Sixth Form library”, “When it rains we need more places to go” and “I think I have tried hard and got a good report but have never had a praise postcard”. Others are disappointing such as “There are no extra activities to do” and “The headteacher always blanks us and never says hello” (I know this is not true!), while yet others are bizarre including “I just hate sprouts” and “The school is clean apart from the Art sink”.

Reading all of the comments provides a flavour of opinion and spurs us to value Student Voice work and to continue to work hard at communication with students and parents to build our shared understanding of our shared world here in school.

I wish to thank everybody who took the time to participate.

Tim Carroll
21 March 2014

A paper copy of the full survey results, including graphs, is available by contacting the school office: office@vandyke.cbeds.co.uk.