

Parent & Carer Survey – 2017 Results

The Parent & Carer Survey this year followed exactly the same format and methodology as it has for the past four years, with parents being offered the chance to complete the on-line questionnaire through emails and reminded through a letter home. The participation rate was, however, lower than ever before with only just over 150 parents or carers choosing to respond. We have to accept that this means the authority of the survey is compromised this year, although it still represents the most significant “thermometer” of perceptions that we have. The reasons for the reduced participation are difficult to gauge. The survey always goes out at the same stage in the College year, but this year it over-lapped with the public consultation of the proposal to convert into an academy and merge with The Ninestiles Trust, so there may have been too many surveys and emails arriving home at the same time. We also feel that after five years, it may just be time to revisit the way we do this and try a new approach.

Within the disappointing context of so few returns, we also have to acknowledge a less positive response from parents who did respond compared to recent years, with the proportion of parents placing us in the top two categories for all questions slipping down. There are still many very positive scores, and lots of parents chose to use the open text sections to comment positively on the way the College works. Nevertheless, we must be concerned by a reduction in the level of satisfaction suggested by the results. Some of this may be to do with the wider context the College is facing, with constrained funding, massive and often confusing curriculum change, and the uncertainty of the proposal for academy conversion and leadership change. But we must not hide behind these factors.

The percentage of parents placing us in the top third of the range for teaching quality dropped from 61% to 54%. Detailed comments further suggest that many of the concerns people have are related to cover staff when our normal teachers are absent. We acknowledge that we are finding it increasingly difficult to secure good quality temporary staff, and although we make every effort to do so, the national picture on teacher recruitment makes this ever more challenging. Some parents also express frustration that students do not always keep the same teacher between the first and second year at College. There are several practical reasons which would make any guarantee regarding this impossible. Staff leave, retire and are promoted, and we also need the flexibility to re-structure groups between years to keep all timetable options open and maximise efficiency. However, we also have in place good systems to ensure teams transfer details of students to the new teacher, and Curriculum Leaders ensure that the experience of students transitioning between years is seamless. Some students actually enjoy the opportunity to have a different teacher with different enthusiasms and approaches, so this is by no means seen as an issue by everyone.

The College continues to face a serious squeeze on funding for enrichment activities, both in terms of reduced income for this from the government, and rising costs. For example, the College faces a substantial rise in the cost of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme which has had to be passed on to students, and has meant that we no longer recruit a viable group. We still manage to support vibrant team sports and a wide range of student activities, but there is no doubt that we have had to pull back in some areas. This probably explains the reduction of people placing us in the top third of survey from 34% to 30%. Given the massive funding cut this area has faced, we are perhaps doing well in that only 12% of respondents have registered it as a serious enough concern to place us in the bottom third. Enrichment opportunities within the curriculum have also been constrained by the

demands of introducing new A level specifications, often with ridiculously short lead in times. This has meant that staff priorities have had to be on preparing core material, rather than on the additionality of enrichment activities. As the new specifications are embedded, this focus should be able to shift.

Career and university application advice remains a key job for the College and one that has come under more scrutiny from Ofsted in recent years. 47% of parents placed us in the top two categories for this, down from 53% last year. This needs to be seen in the context of the highest level of student applications to university in recent years, significant increases in the work we do for non-university progression through Career Passport and specialist academies, and record levels of offers from highly competitive HE destinations. Our staff involved in these areas do have to manage a massive peak in work-load as we approach the UCAS deadline each year, and whatever we do to encourage students to apply as early as possible, we face a wave of last minute forms which are dealt with in strict order. We do manage to keep to our published deadlines, and do secure fantastic success rates for university application well above national benchmarks. The checks and double-checks this requires do sometimes lead to frustration, but I am confident that this is an area the College does very well, and despite the drop in satisfaction indicated above, over 60% put us in the top-half, and only 12 parents registered serious concerns by placing us in the bottom third.

In our question about communication with parents 85% of respondents put us in the top half of the options, and although this still includes a drop from 65% to 55% for the top two slots, the majority of parents responding are positive about this important area. We know that it is impossible to get this right for everyone all of the time, but our core systems of Academic Coaches and Tyber have helped us to maintain good levels of communication over recent years. Only 12 parents put us in the bottom two categories. It is a similar picture regarding perception of the pastoral support we offer students. 77% of replies put us in the top half, but there was a drop from 57% to 51% putting us in the top two. Like all schools and colleges we are facing increasing demands related to mental well-being, anxiety and stress. We do our best to support students with limited resources, and I am very pleased that Sixth Form Colleges are to be allowed to bid for funds from the “sugar tax” to improve our provision in this regard.

We measure the over-all culture of the College with two questions regarding how inspiring and stretching an environment we have established. As with all our indicators we do appear to have slipped this year. Nevertheless nearly 20% of parents put us in the very top category as “inspiring”, and almost the same for “stretching and challenging”. We also maintain the exceptional scores for being “Safe and Welcoming” that we have secured over recent years, with over 90% in the top half, and nearly 40% giving us the very top score.

Our commitment to fairness and diversity has been enhanced this year through our involvement in the “Investors in Diversity” scheme run by the National Centre for Diversity. They have hundreds of organisations across a wide range of both the public and private sectors involved in the scheme, and in our very first year of participation we entered their “Top 100” at number 51. The fact that 67% of respondents put us in the top third of responses for this question reflects this, with only 9 parents putting us in the lower half.

In the final part of the survey we ask if you would see us as your preferred option for another son or daughter starting post 16 education. Again we have slipped, this time from our highest ever score

last year of 87% saying yes, to 74% this year. We are determined to address any of the uncertainties and challenges which may have contributed to the erosion of perceptions this year, and we will make sure that the experience we offer young people gets better and better. These are challenging times for all organisations in the public sector, and I remain convinced that the option of academisation and merger that we are proposing is the best possible option for us in very difficult times. Thank you for your on-going support.

Where respondents did raise individual issues in the questionnaire, and did leave contact details, senior members of staff will be contacting you to follow up on these points. We also really appreciate the many positive and “thank you” comments included even if we do not reply to these individually! If you raised a specific point but did not leave contact details we are unable to identify who completed the questionnaire, and cannot, therefore, address it with you. Please do feel free to contact your son or daughter’s Academic Coach or Lead Manager if you are worried about anything. These can be found on Tyber or identified by our reception staff if you give us a ring.