

Sands School

Staff Survey Results
December 2012 / January 2013

Introduction

This survey was carried out over the 2012 Christmas break and responses were received from twenty-one members of staff out of the twenty-five invited to take part, giving a response rate of eighty-four per cent. Those invited included peripatetic teachers and other support staff. The deciding criterion used was whether they should be expected to understand their safeguarding role.

Separate surveys were also made of Students and of Parents. The purpose of these surveys was to help assess where we are as a school and to providing some footings for how the school might be improved. Obviously it would be great if all staff thought the school was as good as it could possibly be, but there will always things that we could do better. So as a form of self-appraisal this survey was about identifying any weaknesses, so that they can be addressed, as well as recognising all the things we do well. Staff were asked to answer from their own personal perspective, rather than give a collective view.

The survey was designed in two parts, the first being a set of positive statements with tick box options to agree or disagree and the second being open questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

These two approaches are complementary. The first produces a clear quantitative measure allowing the assessments of the different aspects of the school to be directly compared. However, using set questions and tick-box responses has the very great drawback of only allowing the respondent to answer the questions asked and only in the prescribed way. The open questions do the opposite and allow the respondent to assess any aspect of the school in any way they choose. This approach ensures that staff were not constrained by the questionnaire.

The survey results are presented in two corresponding parts. The first is a set of charts showing the responses to the set questions. The second encapsulates the thoughts offered in the open questions.

A final question asked for 'any other comments'.

This report presents and describes the responses given by the staff. It does not seek to go beyond this by attempting to interpret what has been said, to draw any conclusions or to make any recommendations for responding to the information gathered. That is the role of the School Meeting.

Responses to set questions

For each statement there were four choice:

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

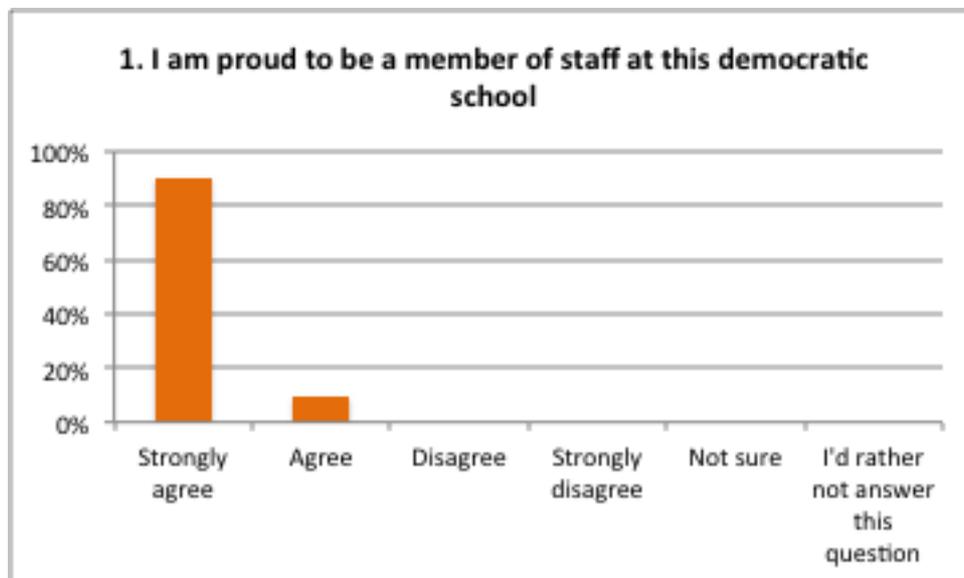
Strongly

But respondents also had the option to say they did not know or would rather not answer. An answer was required for each statement so there was no issue of interpreting non-responses.

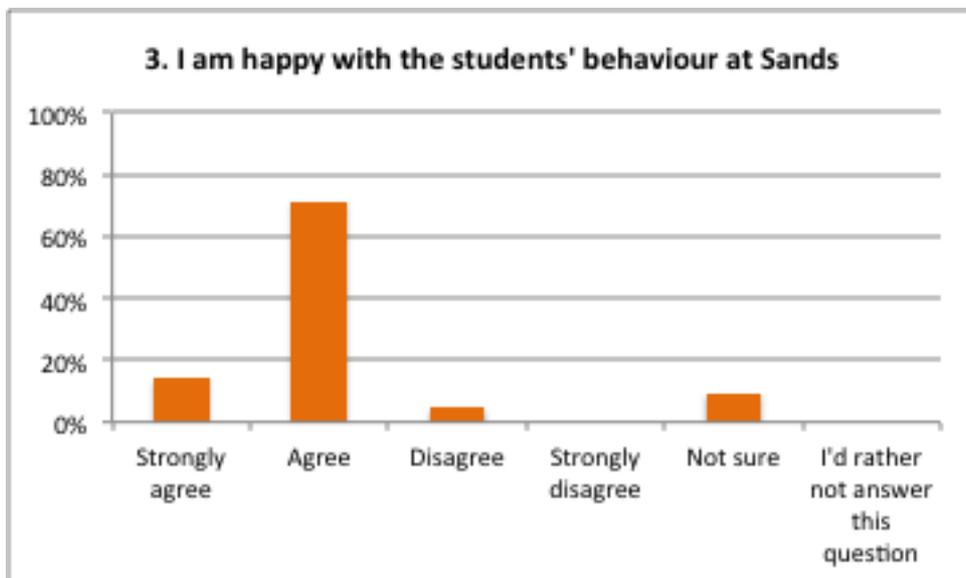
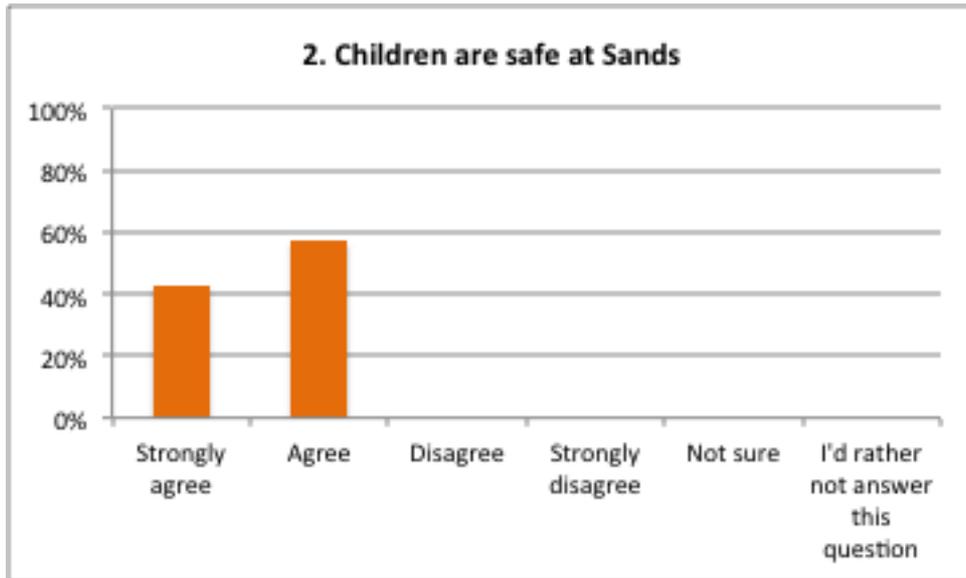
Where a significant number of staff have not agreed with the statement we have looked to see if the responses relate differ between teachers, classroom support and non-teaching members of staff.

Staff also had the opportunity to comment on their answers to the set questions.

"Although I have answered 'agree' to most questions , I would have preferred to put 'mostly' for some as I don't totally agree with some of the statements but there is no other option that fits.

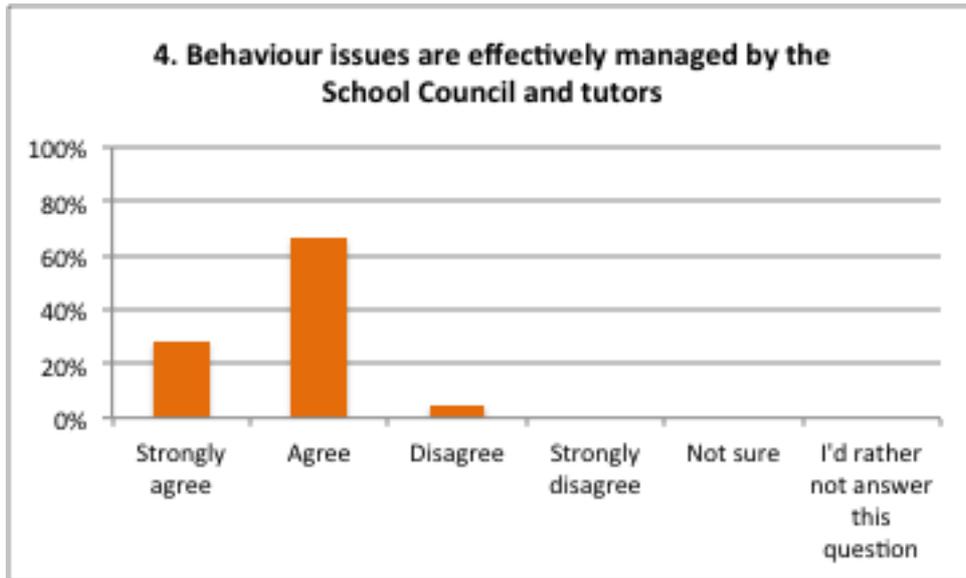


"I still consider it a privilege after more than 20 years to be working here."

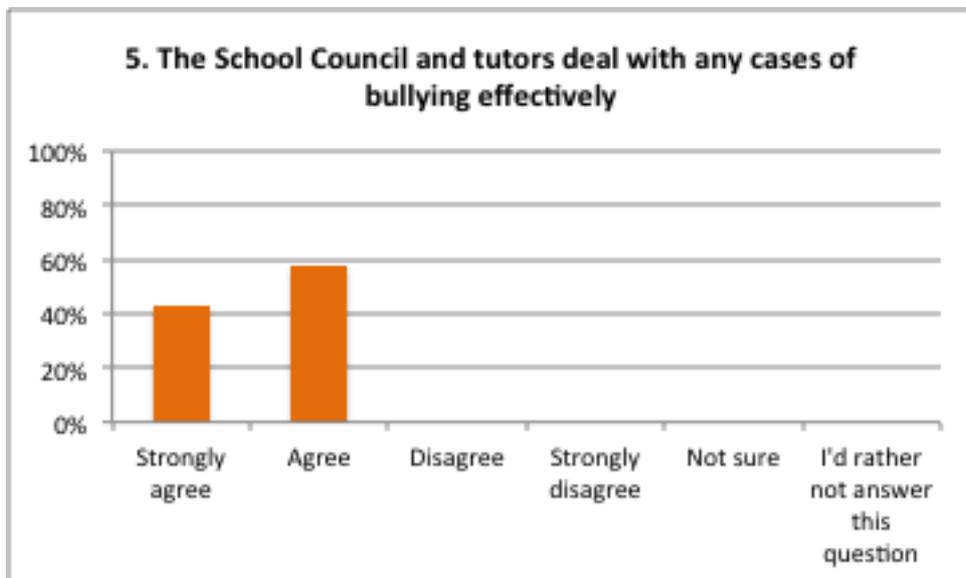


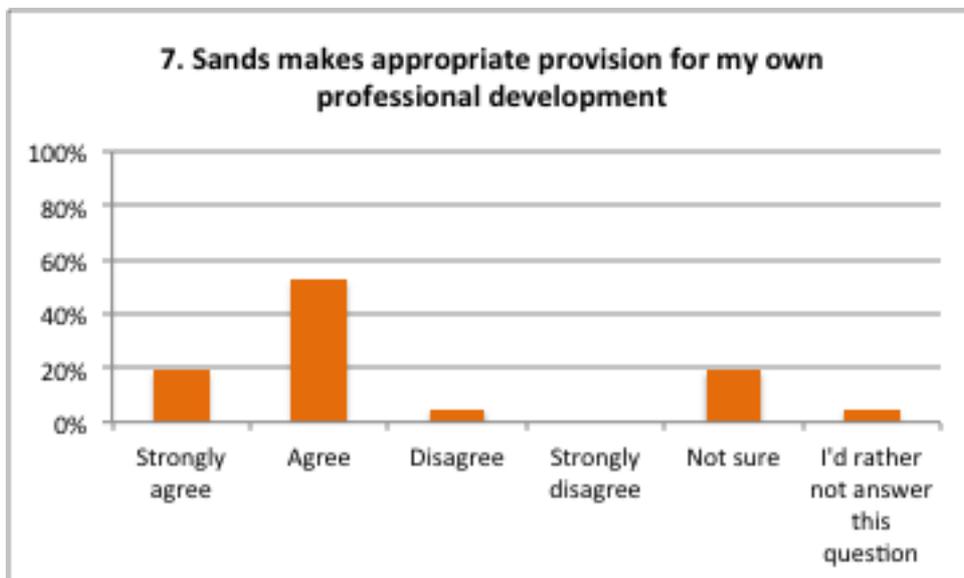
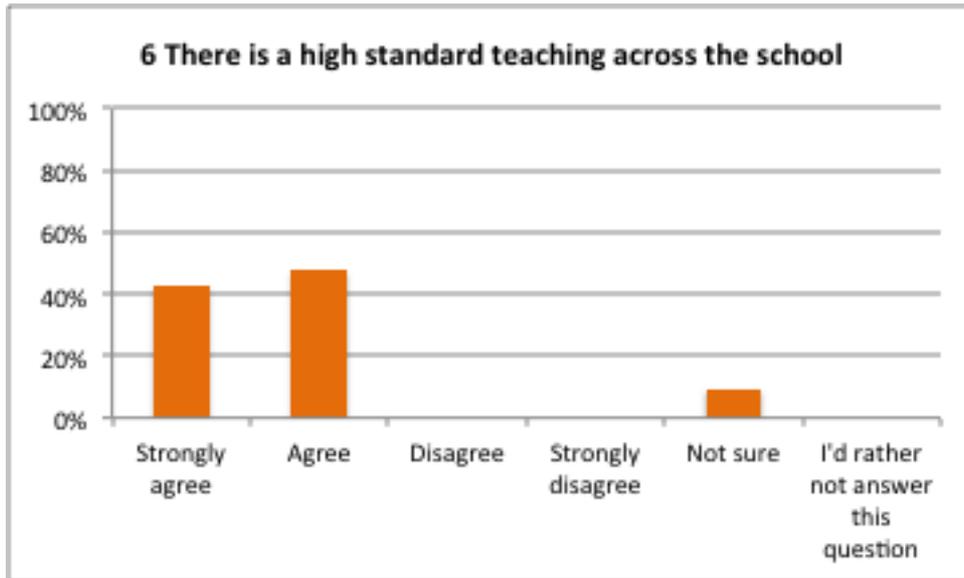
“As a very part time member of staff and not in a teaching role it is sometimes difficult to understand some student behaviour without background knowledge of the student.”

“I do have concerns about the language which students often use and whilst I accept that we do not have petty rules, I am not sure the students understand that sometimes their language is inappropriate and disgusting. Whilst they have freedom within Sands, society as a whole may not be so understanding and maybe we should be giving them some parameters?”



“As a very part time member of staff and not in a teaching role..... I also feel very out of touch with how tutors/school council/meeting deal with difficult issues in the school.”



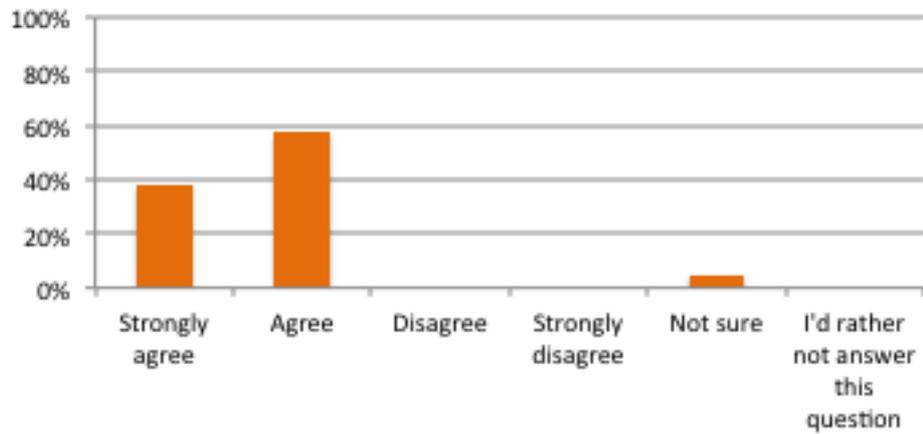


Professional development

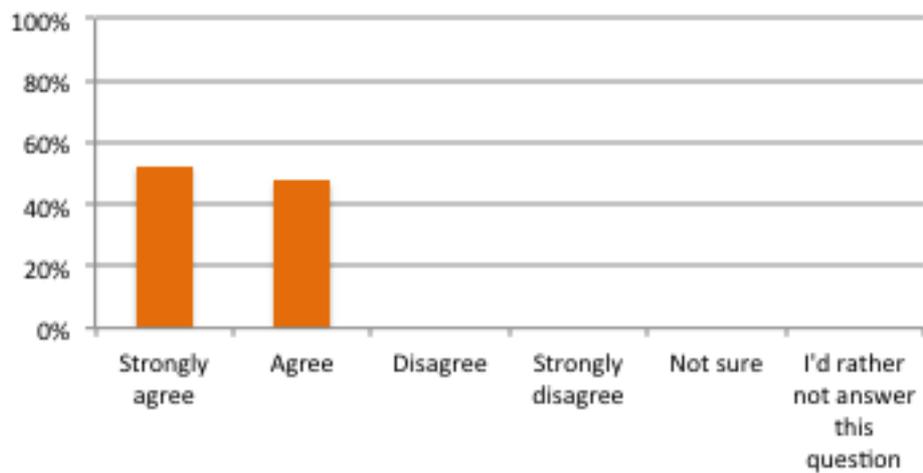
	Disagree	Not sure	Rather not answer
Teachers		2	1
Classroom support		2	
Non-teachers	1		

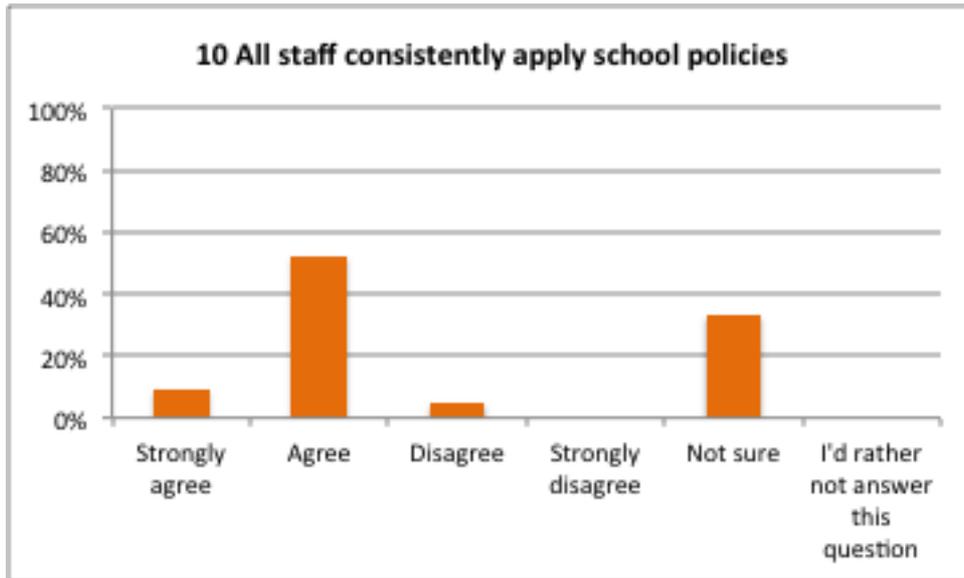
Regarding the professional development the onus is on each of us to know what we need but I think it could have a higher profile in staff discussions.

8. The school successfully meets the differing needs of individual pupils



9. I know what we are trying to achieve as a school



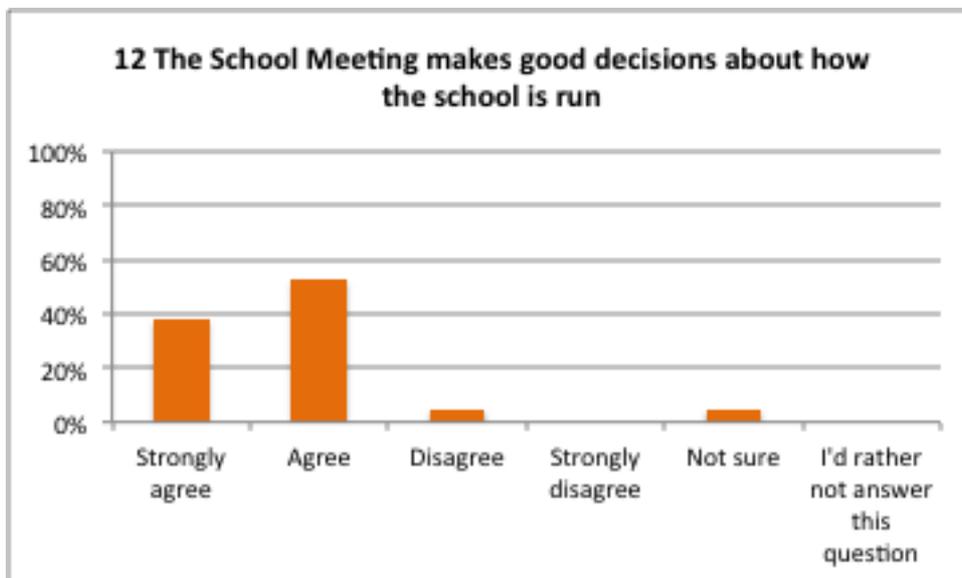
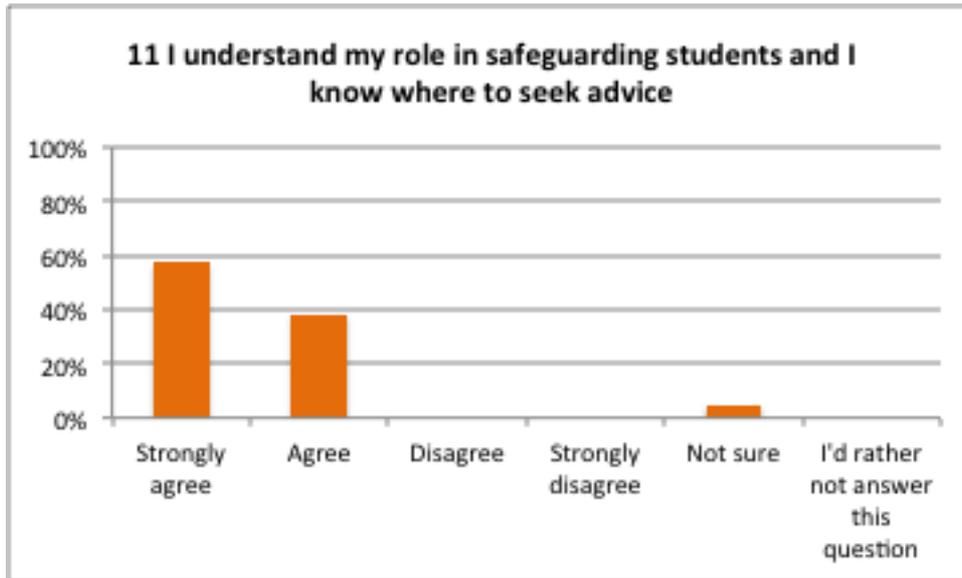


All staff consistently apply school policies

	Disagree	Not sure	Rather not answer
Teachers	1	2	
Classroom support		3	
Non-teachers		2	

"With regard to question 10, because of the nature of the relationships we develop with students, it is sometimes tempting to try and manipulate opinion, and use our influence as adults to affect decisions that should really be completely open to the will of the School Meeting. I don't think this is necessarily a problem, in most cases, as we are very good at picking each other up when we see another member of staff 'circumnavigating' school procedure."

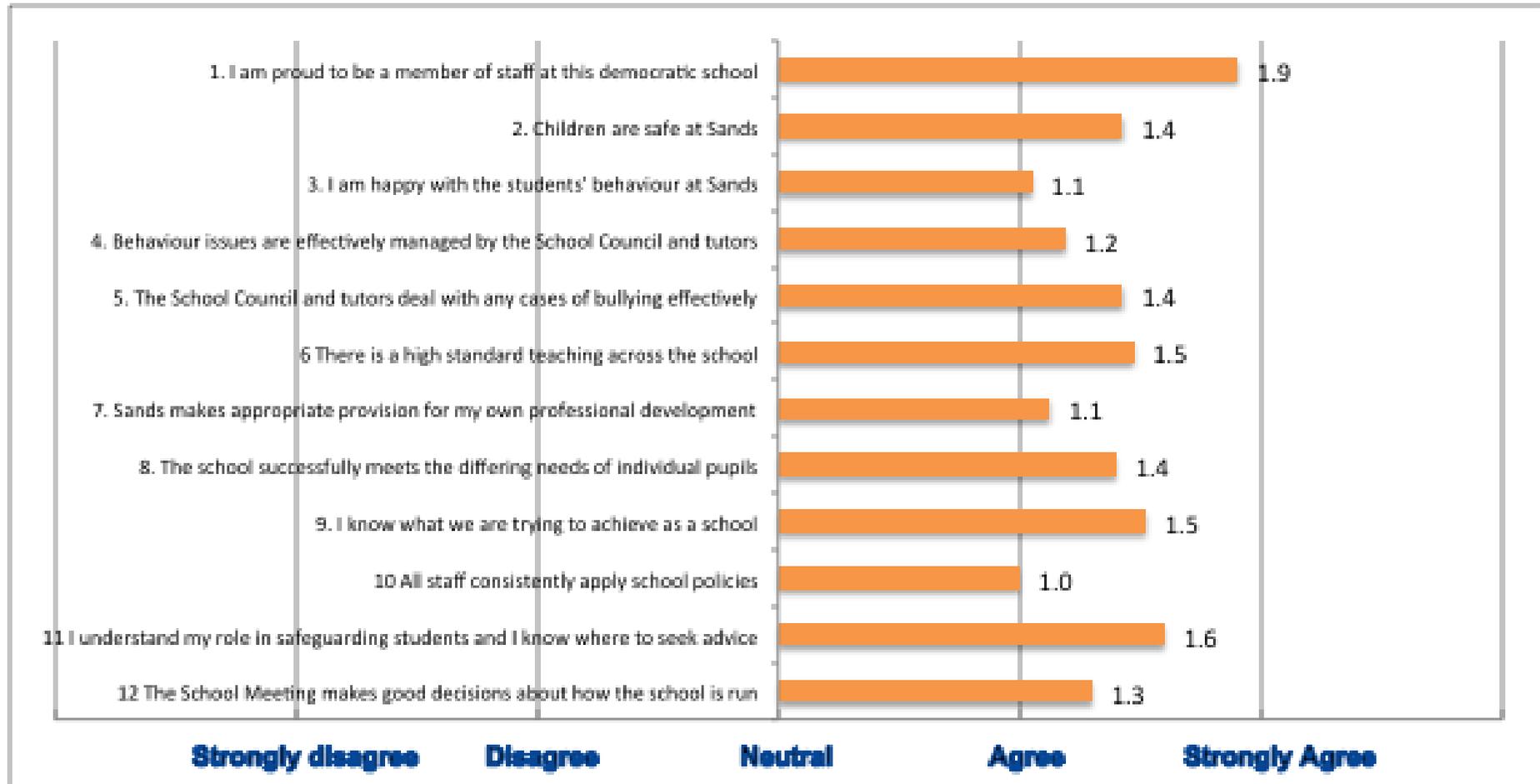
"where I have put "don't know" it's because I feel there is not enough collaboration and exchange between staff about the way everyone teaches and what our visions for developing and evolving are."



"Occasionally decisions are made in the school meeting that are then not stuck to . Sometimes things are a little vague !"

"With regard to question 12; the School Meeting makes decisions about how the school is run, but whether or not they are good ones, depends on your subjective viewpoint."

'I feel that the whole picture is mostly positive as outcomes are met after going through natural processes which can range through the comfort zones. In essence things are run in a human way which embraces all angles and is not mechanical, systematic or repressive so there are some organic highs and lows.'



The set questions compared

Finally, the responses to these twelve statements can be compared by assigning each statement an overall score. This is based on adding up the individual responses by scoring minus 2 for each 'strongly disagree', minus 1 for each 'disagree', plus 1 for each 'agree' and plus 2 for each 'strongly agree'. The importance of any disagrees is not in any way negated because they are outweighed by the agrees but this overall scoring allows an at-a-glance picture of the relative strengths across the areas assessed, see chart on facing page.

The simple four options is of course a blunt instrument for gauging what are complex things, for example children being 'safe'. They don't allow any shading to the answer or any caveats. However when taken together the balance between the 'agrees' and the 'strongly agrees' does seem to offer some indication of how much room there is for improvement.

The most positive response by a clear margin was that staff were proud to be employed at Sands. Most of the other statements scored around 1.5 so between 'agree' and 'strongly agree' on average. In each of the areas we can ask 'what could be done to take staff from agreeing to strongly agreeing?'

Four areas scoring closer to 1.0, so only just agree on average, that is, few staff strongly agreeing. These were:

- **I am happy with students behaviour at Sands.**
- **Behaviour issues are effectively managed by the School Council and tutors.**
- **Sands make appropriate provision for my own professional development.**
- **All staff consistently apply school policies.**

It is important to emphasize that in these areas the staff's response was still positive, but just not as positive as in others. However these are the areas where staff are furthest from being completely happy

The open questions

What works well and where Sands can improve

After responding to the statements staff were asked two open questions:

Looking at Sands in the round what would you say are the three most important things that we do well and we should make sure we keep doing well?

Looking at Sands in the round what would you say are the three most important things that we should be trying to improve?

In each case they were invited to offer up to three suggestions. The views, positive and critical, have been grouped together into broad subject areas to give a balanced picture:

- **Ethos, approach, atmosphere**
- **Curriculum**
- **Teaching & learning**
- **The Democracy at Sands**
- **Communication**
- **Other**

There is nothing that I can think of that would be right to put down here. I personally think that the school evolves with the students and staff working together. This is always changing because of the personalities in the school at any given time. This is all good.

**** Are any of these improvements actually a reality? Not without more staff/money. Is that a reality? No. So, we have to find some other solution.*

Staff, particularly the full time teachers, do a huge amount and our efforts to 'improve' must make their loads easier to bear and not add to them.

Ethos, approach, atmosphere

We are good at:

Nurturing students and staff

Treating each other with **respect**

We are very good at **treating each child as an individual**, making it possible for them to thrive, where perhaps in other settings they would not.

taking time together to solve problems (of both a personal and more general nature) - in the meetings and tutorials and one to one

looking at each **individual students needs** and trying to do our best for them

There is a really **wonderful atmosphere** at the school , **friendly and fun** , which makes a great deal of difference to the way everyone feels about working and learning.

I witness a very **healthy degree of respect...** Between staff for each other and between pupils and staff...which is so important in the bigger picture.

Understanding each **individual students needs and capabilities**

Supporting role

safe place

Adult/Teacher and student **relationships.**

Giving students **a sense of their own value** both in themselves and as part of the community of Sands

Sands provides **profoundly different model** of how people can work together based on **trust and respect** rather than rules and power.

Students like coming to Sands which means we are getting something right that so many other schools get wrong. The years from 11 to 16 are not just a preparation for life they are part of life and **should be enjoyed.**

We are **caring**

We **acknowledge and appreciate people for who they are**

Supporting the students.

Giving children the **space to be individuals**

A **safe environment for children to learn** and make mistakes.

A **beautiful environment** to grow up in.

Sands **allows each child a voice** often in a society that can leave children feeling voiceless and disempowered.

The **staff dedication and passion** for each student is second to none. There is shared ethos of care, consideration and enabling students to become **unique individuals**.

The **one-to-one level of care** for a student and the reflective time spent considering the child's needs is excellent. It really is a school where **every child matters**.

Knowing the students well and looking after them as **individuals**

providing the **space for students to express their opinion** and experience that **their voice counts**

Instilling a **sense of community** based around **rights and responsibilities**.

Enabling **students to be themselves** - and therefore they develop a maturity not often seen in other young people their age.

Give children the **time to talk about whatever they need to**

Allow/almost encourage students to **make mistakes and support them in learning from those mistakes**, no matter how long it takes

Get the best out of those students that would have been unsuccessful and unhappy at other schools

Knowing who the **students really are**.

Allowing the students to **be themselves**.

Allowing the **students to develop their particular strength**.

We seem to be able to **provide a happy environment** for children and this is a prerequisite for success in almost everything else we do. The **students love their school**, a rare thing in such a high proportion. For the Exhibition I have been organising we have had almost 100% of the students contacted lending their work. This goes right back to year one, a very remarkable degree of loyalty and must be based on a very happy memories of their schooldays. It is related to the **sense of equality between staff and students**. They **feel safe** too and there is a **high degree of trust**.

Develop **good relationships with students**

Work together as staff, and with students, to adhere to the **school's core principles**.

We allow children to **develop genuine confidence** and faith in the inherent kindness and creativity of the people around them and in themselves.

We have created an **atmosphere and culture in which trying to achieve excellence in any pursuit or skill is applauded, respected and encouraged** by children and staff alike. It is **cool to try at Sands'**.

Children are given a **real voice in the direction that their own school careers take** and are deeply involved in evaluating that process, learning from their mistakes and successes without reference to comparison and value judgements and as such are confident and active in their school lives in a positive and self-critical manner.

Allowing students the **freedom to be themselves** be it in and out of lesson time.

Very good level of **genuine pastoral care**

We should be trying to improve:

Specifically we need to **recognise the importance of staff being around and amongst students outside their time-tabled roles** and make sure that they have the time and space to maintain the social cohesion of the school.

We **encourage everyone to be more responsible** to themselves, their companions and their environment

Knowing when to **say no to more pupils with learning difficulties** as we don't have the man-power to cover too many such students properly.

I would like to see more occasions when we as Staff **really look at alternatives**. How else might we do it? There seems to be so little time available to really look to the future and be self critical, maybe visit other schools and genuinely research new ways of doing things. I think we could even learn form conventional schools at times. There are some great art teachers out there but I hardly ever meet them. I still think most of what we do is truly wonderful but maybe we are **a bit complacent at times**.

Children more involved in the practical daily life of the school such as cooking more, learning to decorate, repair and maintain the property.

Develop **better contacts with partner schools** and international contacts so that we have a better sense of the school in a more global context.

Curriculum

We are good at:

Giving students **the opportunity to explore** whatever it is that they need to explore. This could be anything from a love of science/art/music/skateboarding to sorting out their emotional lives/ relating to others / discovering something very important about themselves

Taking each student as an individual and offering them the **personal development and education that meets their particular needs.**

encouraging students to **follow their interests** and supporting them as much as possible in their learning

Cater to **individual students' needs**

We should be trying to improve:

more **sport** provision

We should be providing more **sport.**

outdoor activities and **trips**

providing new/different opportunities for students to engage in **meaningful activities if they don't like academic subjects.**

More **sport/organised physical activities**

better **facilities for sport**

more "**interdisciplinary enquiry**" - would be great to have learning happening that was occasionally a bit more reflective or symbolic of the way that things in the real world are connected and use what we've got to expand horizons out of subject teaching/learning boxes frequently

thinking honestly about **what we think students may need when they leave**, more outreach into the "world of work" - work experience? are we providing enough learning opportunities for people who are not heading for A-level college and university?

Resources - **better equipment**, especially in science and music departments

cross curricular collaboration.

Teaching & learning

We are good at:

Because each member of staff knows the students well we are able to **tailor their learning and emotional support to suit their needs.**

We have a **creative approach to learning**

Allowing the students to learn at their own pace and giving them the opportunity to study what actually interests them.

Make learning fun! The learning journey is more important than the end results so there is much greater scope to be able to teach in a way which engages all.

The teaching is generally good though we all have bad days and are stretched in so many ways that other things can detract from the teaching, but I think it is very important to have **high standards of expectation**; not for everyone all the time, but the experience of high endeavour and hard work at some time for everyone is important.

Encouraging students to take **responsibility for their own learning.**

We should be trying to improve:

Younger students should make more of a commitment to attend lessons

'Going back to when I was a parent: **staff cover when teachers where off sick**, so that the pupils are not just left to there own devices. I think this is really hard for a small private school to fund and am not quite sure what the answer is. I am aware of the cover for teachers taking long sickness leave. It is more the short term cover for example if a member of staff is off on a course and maybe another member is ill, in the past and I'm not sure that its changed this would lead to a lot of kids wandering around aimlessly or not bothering to come in to school and congregating at each others' houses.

Ensuring **all lessons are covered when teachers are absent.**

Encourage the students away from spoon-fed teaching. They should be more able and willing to learn for themselves when they need to. This would make them better students, and take the pressure off teachers so that they can give more time to individuals and improve the quality of what they already provide

Catering adequately for those with **particular learning difficulties.**

I think there is still room for improvement in **consistency over lesson attendance** . There is some misunderstanding amongst the students and some of it is I think deliberate. I don't mean all lessons should be 100% compulsory but my own lessons are frequently made more difficult by latecomers or students not attending at all. I know not

everyone will agree with this but not all subjects are equally affected by problem and I do quite a lot of repeat teaching when I have already too much to do.

Encourage **students to develop a more independent work ethic**

Creating more time to **learn from each other's best practice** as teachers. We are all very good and skilled practitioners with a range of approaches to teaching that encompass a huge range of experience that allows us to be successful with a broad ability and personality range, but the demands of a small school make it hard to prioritise the opportunities to learn from each other as much as we would like.

Perhaps some **improvements around levels and achievement**. Closer tracking with clearer and more focused targets. Maybe some integrated attendance records across subjects to more closely scrutinise student attendance and potentially raise standards.

The Democracy at Sands

We are good at:

The school meeting provides a safe place for students to have a voice within their peer group, to be listened to with respect and to listen with respect. This means every student can express what they really think without fear of reprisals and learn how to deal with differing opinions.

The **School meeting** although sometimes frustrating and poorly attended is the core of the school and closely related to the above. It **is probably the most important thing in the school**, certainly for some students who become so eloquent and confident. Even the silent ones learn a great deal. I think it is pretty good as it is but we should not be fearful of experimenting with it. There may still be room for improvement but it is a very special feature of the school and sometimes very impressive.

We should be trying to improve:

meetings may be better attended if held in the morning and concentration levels may be better then

We tend to be a bit **inward looking**. I think that sometimes we should look at what other schools are offering and how they do it just to see if there is anything we can improve on, or to confirm that we are brilliant.

Communications with the children too... Especially **the ones who do not go to the school meetings**. These meetings are often painfully long and hot and stuffy, so physically it can be hard and uncomfortable to be at them ...But they are such an important part of the school. It is

sad that there are some children who never go and so probably cannot feel part of things. I am pretty sure there are always quite a few children who have absolutely no idea what is going on .

Encourage a greater engagement with the democratic principles of the school.. students often don't seem to feel empowered or fully understand their roll in running the school.

Communication

We are good at:

Students are able to communicate really well with adults, something a lot of traders in the town comment on and enjoy.

We should be trying to improve:

improve communication between staff/students/parents

- finding better ways to **keep everyone informed** both at school and at home

Communication. Somehow to find a way for staff to **all know what is going on** . This can be especially hard for part time people to catch up on events , or decisions ...

communication amongst staff

communication between staff, to get more benefit from working in a great team! with so many of us and so many parent consultations this last term, there was just never enough time...

Communication - for part-timers - things get discussed / mentioned and if you are not there on that specific day you may not find out the information. This is already being addressed with the staff meeting minutes being accessible online.

Staff communication. I work the first half of the week and don't always get the Staff Meeting minutes until my last working week day. I did suggest a Staff Meeting once a month on Thursday lunchtimes.

Better **communication with parents**

More **communication between staff**

Other

We are good at:

I have spent some time writing and rewriting the answers that would

look good but it keeps coming back to the fact that we who are involved in the school **work really well as a team**. A team which has been working together for a long time.

Excellent **lunches**.

And **we eat well** !

We should be trying to improve:

A **quiet study area** for students and **better use of the amazing grounds!**

It would be great to have more **quiet spaces** for study, pastoral and social.

Recycling .. And composting . **Far too much waste**

useful work

More involvement with Ashburton as a community.

The school needs **more management!** Or to be managed more effectively. The just in time approach is the most stressful way of doing the things that need to be done.

We provide **better physical space for learning**

Overall **tidiness of the school**. Its lovely to see the kids with cups of coffee in the morning and perhaps toast but its quite horrible to see all the litter, tipped over cups and old food around the place. Our school has far more litter around than most other schools I've visited!

Get rid of the television for cartoon and non educational watching. Ive always held the opinion that they generally stop more creative work or play. While I was working in the common room recently there where kids watching complete rubbish for long periods of time, groups of up to 25 or so which is a high number of kids not to be at lessons. The school did seem quite peaceful though!

I think **more regular appraisals for staff**. Positive praise from colleagues and staff rather than student feedback being the primary focus. in a sense valuing each others gifts and skills.

A space for staff to go to rest, work or reflect that is separate from the students I think is vital.

The **teachers do too much** during the day. Being 100% on form 100% of the time with no chance to take a break and relax even for 5 minutes is unrealistic and completely at odds with what the school should be doing. We all need a place we can go and know that we will not be pestered by students OR staff. A place to completely get away. In fact, it is a legal requirement that all employees are entitled to

'breaks away from the normal working environment'. There is definitely no such space at Sands!

In general, the **staff need more time** to go about their duties. Work piles up, then more is added, and all with a busy teaching schedule with no breaks so there is no time to catch up without getting stressed! Oh, and breaks should mean 'not working', not 'doing a bad job of all those little jobs you need to catch up on and getting all stressed over it'.

We are not good at **environmental awareness** and this is going to be for everyone on the planet the most important thing in the near future, in fact it is now. There is far too much to say about this. It is difficult with teenagers and a culture hell-bent on ignoring the problems and even causing them but i feel we continually put it off, just as society at large does. This is one area we are not able to claim to be in any way better than "others" . We really must tackle this and do better. We should be ahead of the game and we are not.

Students could do the **washing up** better. And the staff sometimes.

And finally... some last comments

Overall SANDS is a happy, stimulating and caring place to be but can sometimes suffer from communication breakdowns between students, parents, staff which can undermine the more positive aspects of the school. There is a slightly chaotic nature to SANDS which is a natural part of it, but I feel we could strengthen the foundations without losing the special qualities of the school.

Having had two quite academic children who have been through the school - so this comes as a parent rather than a member of staff - they have both said that the students who have issues/difficulties get more input than those that who don't, and that they used to get fed up that their studies were sometimes second place to various student crisis.

Working at Sands is being a part of something that is good in a very deep way. The way we work together as adults and the outcomes for the individual students show that there are viable alternatives.

I absolutely love working at this school. I have been made to feel 100% welcome

I think the committed ethos and philosophy of sands is prevalent in all staff and there is a wonderful sense of teachers "being more human" and individual in there relationship to each other and the children. They model the real process of a relationship with a family type feel which makes it a special place to be part of.

Why am I doing this at 1.00am when I am tired and even ill? Everyone on the staff works so hard. Over the years we have become more and more dominated by conventional systems and expectations, marking everything, recording everything. A policy for everything etc. and we might be in danger of losing some of our unique and highly important qualities. When I look to the real moments of joy and success in teaching these moments seem outside of all that. We have to be careful not to lose sight of the core values which made this school and others like it so special. This is more than just a school thing it is wider problem facing the whole of society.

I feel totally supported and respected by my colleagues and can think of no better place to be a teacher. A school should also allow the adults to grow and develop as professionals as people and SANDS ensures that this can happen in a safe and exciting way. As such we tend to want to stay here and so develop a strong and experienced team that benefits all the children.