

Sands School

Student Survey Results

December 2012 / January 2013

Introduction

This survey was carried out before and after the 2012 Christmas break and responses were received from fifty-three out of the seventy on role, giving a response rate of seventy-six per cent.

Separate surveys were also made of Staff 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.

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 students 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 students. 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

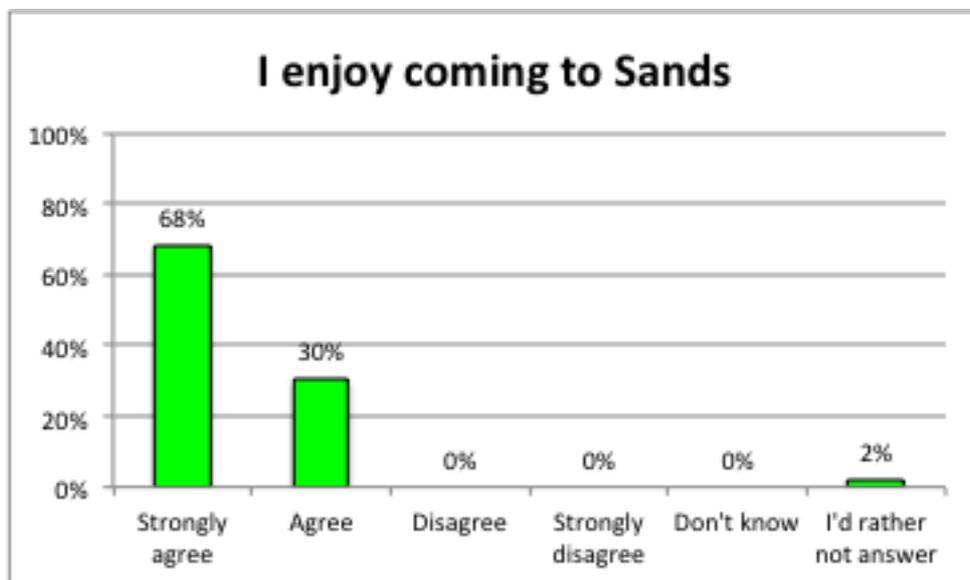
Disagree

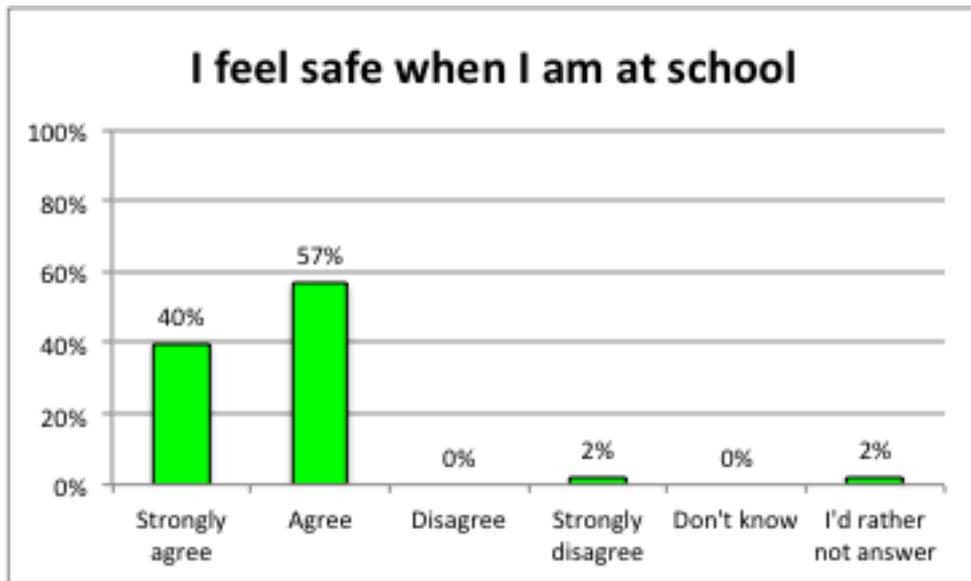
Strongly

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 students have not agreed with the statement we have looked to see if the responses relate differ by gender, by year group or by the length time at Sands. Where there are only one or two students disagreeing this has not been done because it may allow individuals to be identified.

With a total response of just over fifty the number of responses can easily estimated by dividing the percentages by two, for example 30% equates to roughly 15 students.



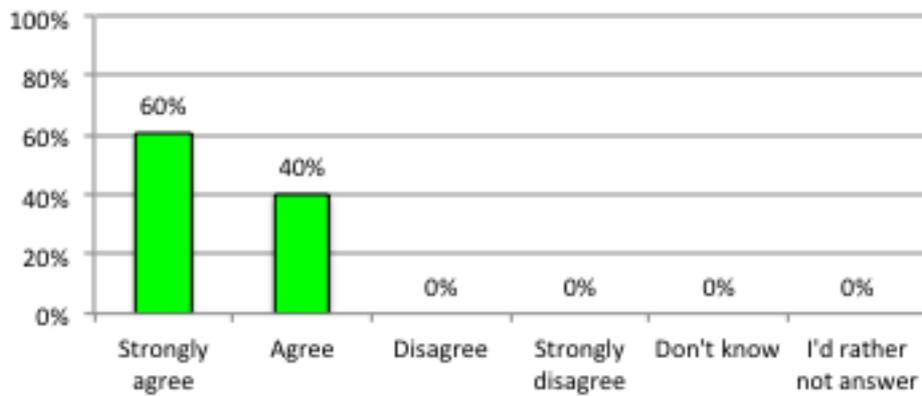


One student strongly disagreed that they felt safe at Sands.

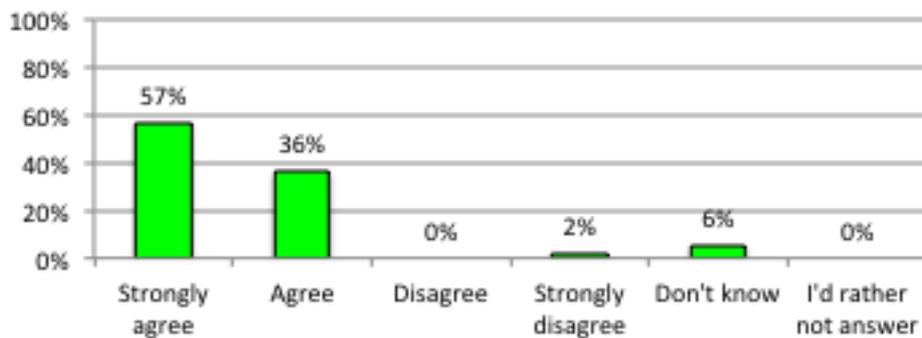


Two students disagreed that could talk to someone and a further four did not know. These students were spread across the middle years of the school, had mostly been at Sands for less than two years and the majority were male.

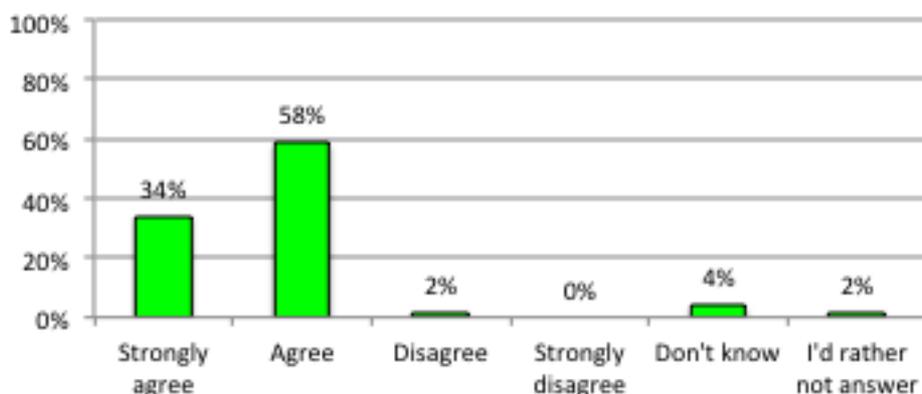
Being at Sands allows me to grow into person I want to be

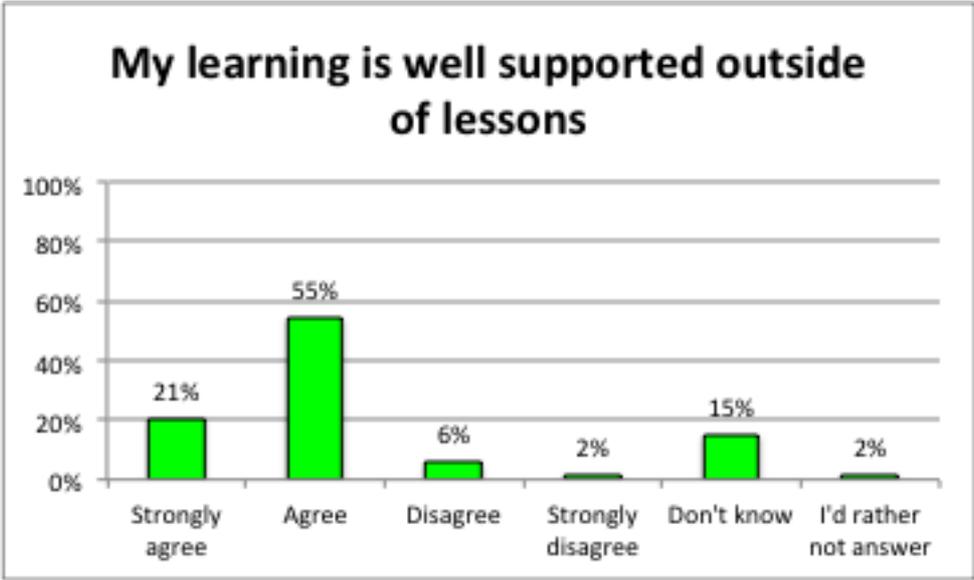


Sands helps me to understand and respect people from other backgrounds

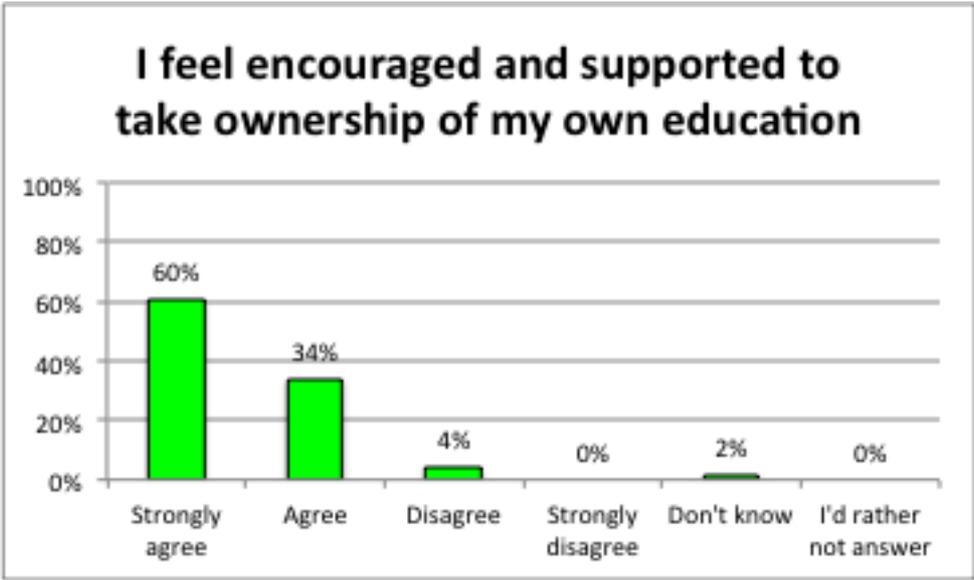


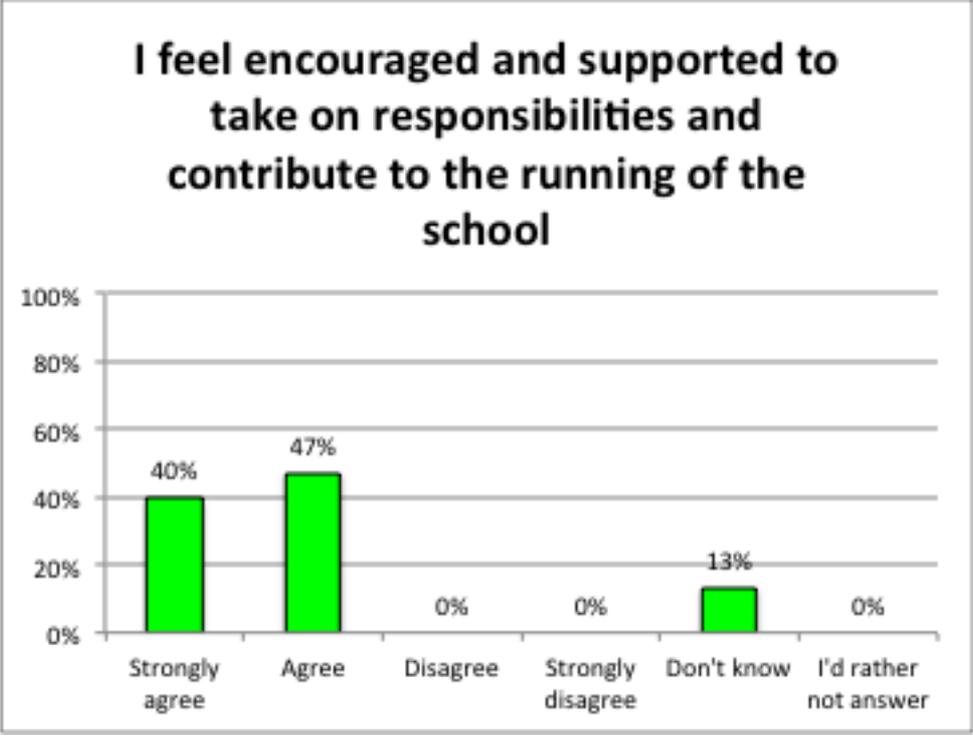
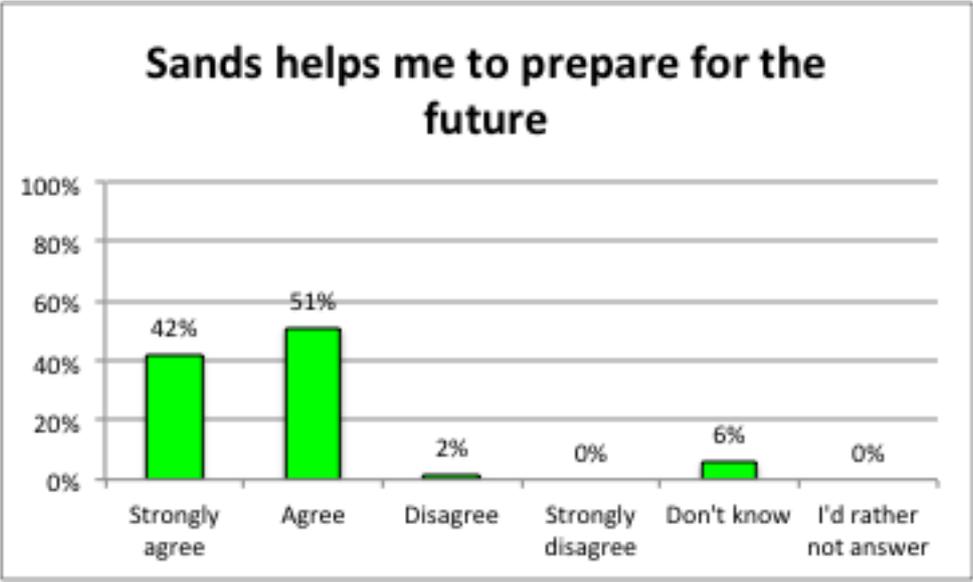
Overall I like the teaching I get in class



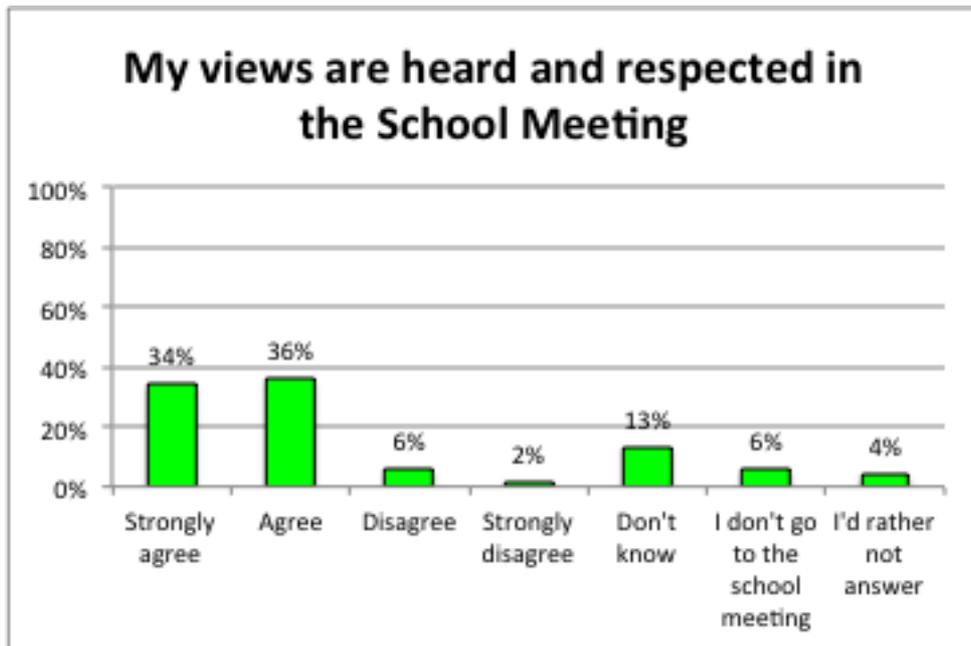


Those not agreeing that their learning was well supported outside of class were a very mixed group apart nine of the twelve being female.

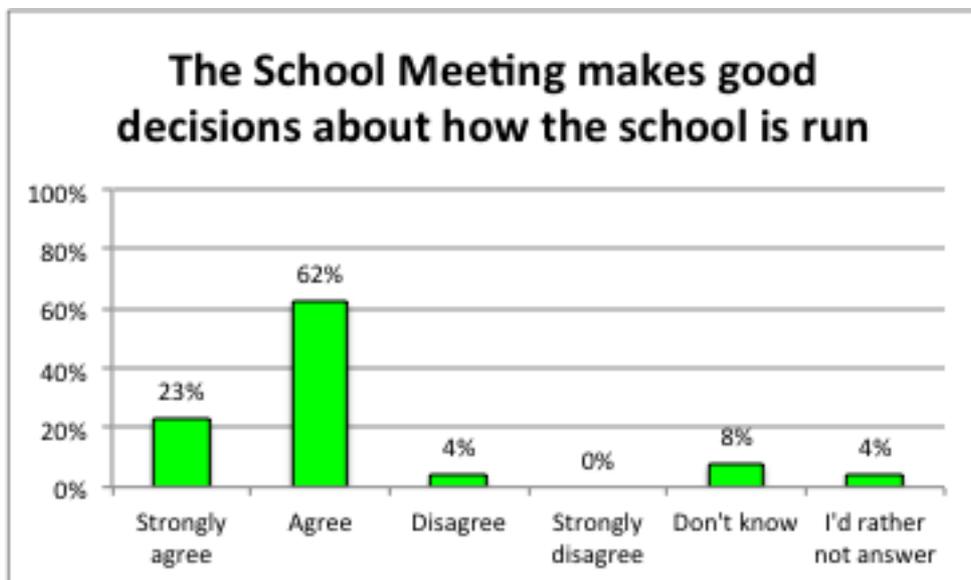




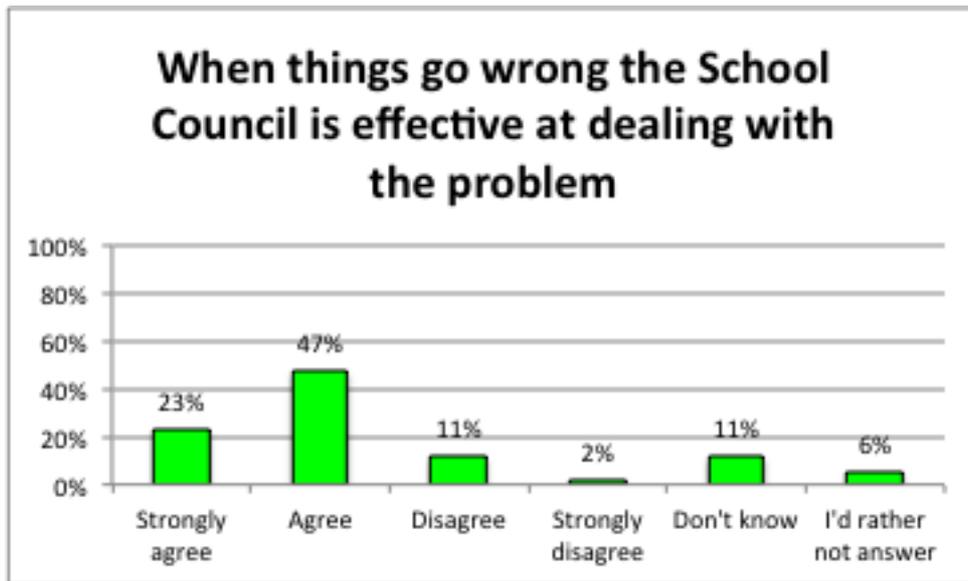
Of the seven who didn't know five were male.



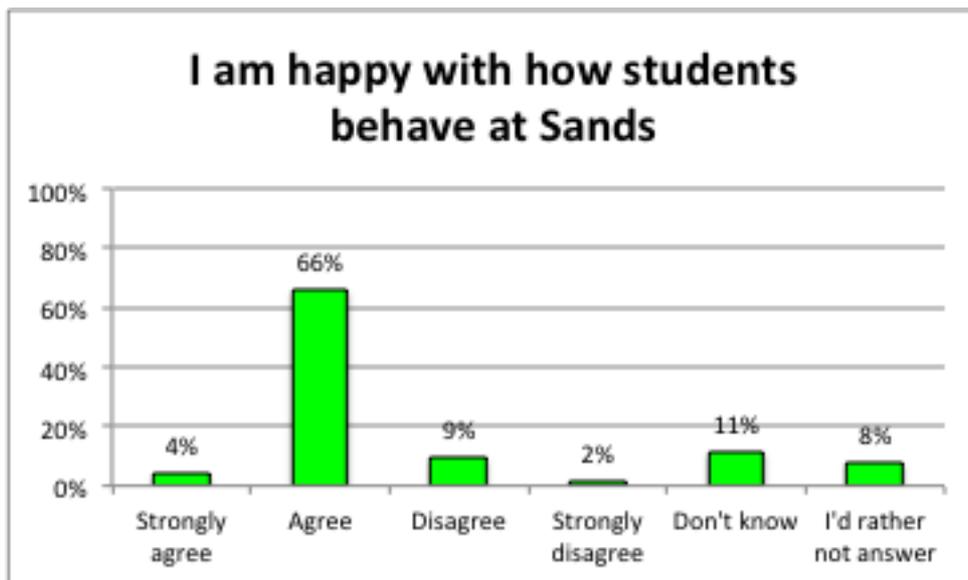
Seventy per cent agreed that their views were heard and respected in the School Meeting. Half of those not agreeing had been at Sands for less than two years but otherwise there was not strong pattern. There was a follow-up question for those not attending the School meeting but the numbers responding mean it was too small to be meaningful.



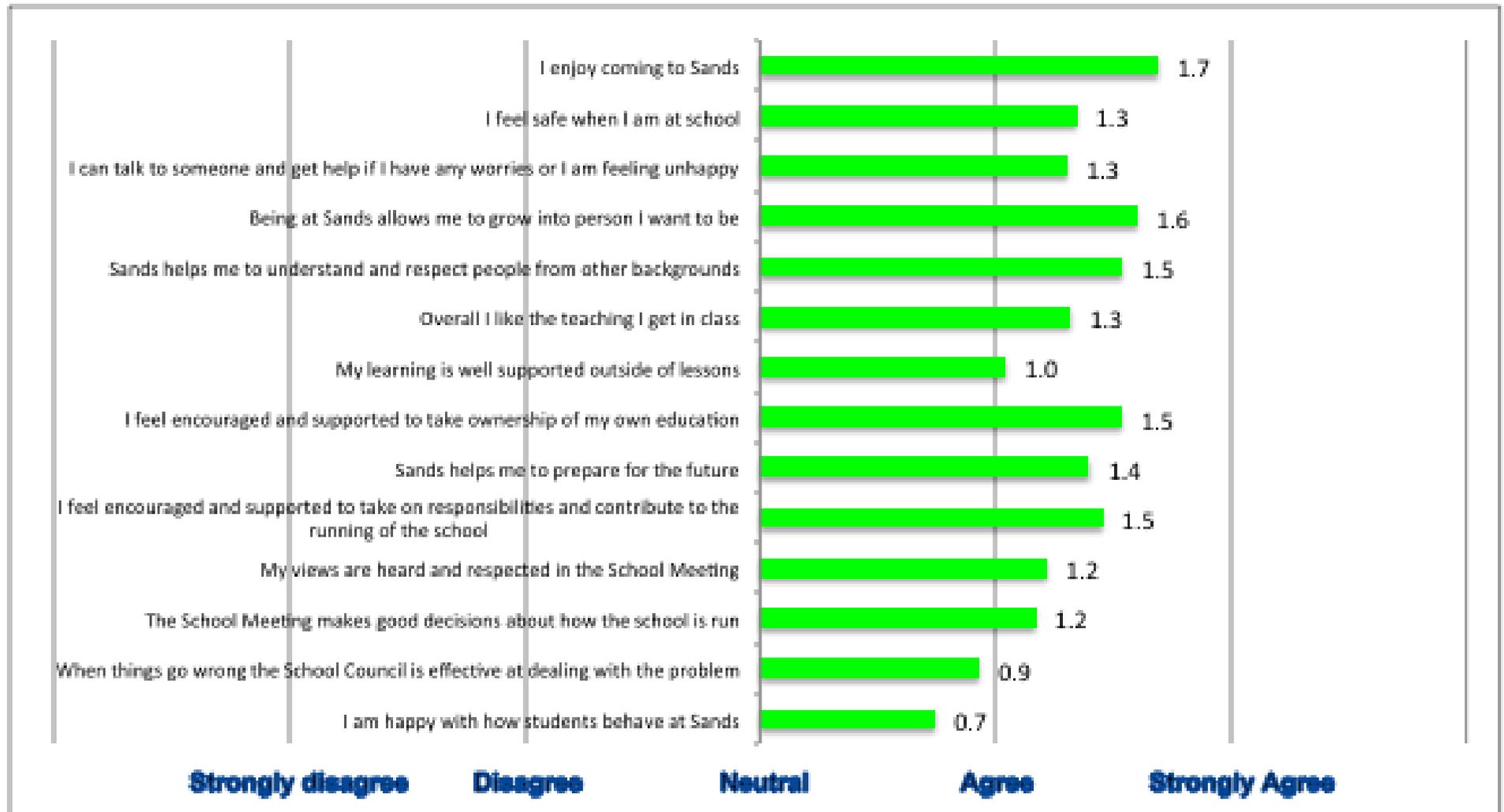
There was not discernable pattern to those not agreeing that the School Meeting made good decisions.



Seventy per cent agreed that the School Council was effective at dealing with the problem when things went wrong. There was not discernable pattern to those not agreeing.



Very few students *strongly* agreed that they were happy student behaviour but seventy per cent were in agreement. Again, here was not discernable pattern to those not agreeing.



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 students enjoyed coming to 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 students from agreeing to strongly agreeing?'. With some questions, like feeling safe and having someone to talk to, anything less than everyone strongly agreeing

Four areas scoring at or below 1.0, so barely 'agree' on average, that is, few students strongly agreeing and / or a significant minority disagreeing. These were:

- **My learning is well supported outside of lessons.**
- **When things go wrong the School Council is effective at dealing with them.**
- **I am happy with how students behave at Sands**

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

The open questions

What works well and where Sands can improve

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

What are the three most important things that make Sands the right school for you?

For you, what are the three things about being at Sands that you'd most like to improve?

In each case they were invited to offer up to three suggestions. These questions resulted in 131 comments on what makes Sands the right school for them and 57 suggestions for improvements. Although differently expressed it was possible to clearly identify the recurrent themes and which views were the most commonly held.

With a few exceptions the grouped comments represent the views of very small numbers of students and so should not be seen as being representative of all students. 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**
- **Other**

Ethos, approach, atmosphere

What makes Sands the right school?

The people / social	10
Able to be myself	9
Atmosphere in school, family	9
Freedom / independence	9
Able to grow into the person I want to be	5
Respect and equality between teachers and students	5
Small school	5
Not like other schools	4
Understanding staff	2

What could be improved

Behaviour / discipline	8
More respect, respect for property	7

"Sands has provided me with a family environment where I have felt supported, liked and cared for."

"sands helps people to become the best they can when you come to sands you are "healed" almost by the environment and helped through your problems. This helps create the big family feel making sands for loads of people more home than home."

"I feel as if I am a large part of the school and can feel happy talking to anyone in the community."

"...I feel less stressed than at the other schools I've been to"

"I love the size because it means that I can form a really strong relationship with both pupils and students which makes it feel like more than just a school."

"Our students are the most important thing in Sands but not forgetting the teachers who I feel I can talk to as freely as I can to the students."

But....

"I feel as though sometimes we do not uphold rules and are a bit too soft on people at times."

"some of the students don't respect the school and don't listen to the rules, so I would like that to improve but apart from that nothing really"

"Students to feel passionate and empowered by decision-making"

"Be more willing to enact consequences"

Curriculum, Teaching & learning

By some margin the most commented on aspect of being at Sands was the sense of choice and flexibility in the learning offered and the teaching, support and environment making learning possible.

What makes Sands the right school?

The freedom to find your own way - having choice / flexibility able to learn	13	22
The encouraging / supporting / inspiring teaching	6	
Atmosphere / environment in class	6	
Art	4	
Woodwork	2	
Curriculum	1	

What could be improved

Teaching	3	
More sport	3	
More encouragement, support to achieve more academically	3	
More guidance for making choices	2	
More students / bigger classes	1	
More trips	1	
More encouragement to engage with learning	1	
Attendance and attitude in lessons	1	
More subjects on curriculum	1	
Timetable	1	

"Passion for subjects and life and learning!"

"I feel as though it is my chose how I educate myself and I am free to discover new ways of learning."

"I like the support sands gives me (the teachers are understanding) I am able to go at my pace in classes"

"I can actually learn, at my old schools I couldn't learn the way they wanted me to but at sands you can learn the way which is easiest for the student"

"I love that I am in charge of my education"

"I can draw whenever I need to without waiting till I'm allowed and then the idea's gone"

"Setting yourself goals in your education and being able to achieve them by yourself if you wish without teachers spoon-feeding it to you."

"Teachers are patient and helpful... and understanding :) They don't get unnecessary angry."

"The teachers are helpful and inspiring, but in the end, your education is up to you."

But...

"More guidance for people who don't know what to do or can't be bothered"

"may be more of a push in lessons"

"a nice quiet work space/library for people to go and do extra work or homework or something like that!"

"there should be more lessons in the morning on Fridays for the Y groups"

The Democracy at Sands

What makes Sands the right school?

Being democratic / School Meeting 10

Having a voice, being trusted, being a part of the school, having responsibility 6

What could be improved

Upholding rules, too soft 5

Improve meetings 4

Passion, commitment to democracy, equality 3

School Council 1

"When I can voice my concerns to peers or teachers and instead of taking it out of my hands they encourage me to push for it"

"No head teacher"

"The Meeting is one of the things that makes Sands, Sands. Without it I feel my point might not be heard."

"Everything is fair (Or attempted to be made fair)"

"My part in making the school"

But....

"everyone at sands is supposed o be equal but I don't actually think this is the case, people don't act like it, in my opinion...so I'd like everyone at sands to actually be completely equal, as is supposed to be."

"School meeting is too long and boring"

Other

What makes Sands the right school?

Lunches 3

What could be improved

Cleaness, tidiness 3

lower fees 3

Better facilities 2

Useful work 1

Stop being veggie 1

More pegs 1

Quiet place to work 1

"The food is so good, you can smell what's cooking while in lessons, and it makes the school feel cosy and homely."

And finally... some last comments

"I love this school I wish that he Government would fund schools without adding their wishes for education as this damages individuals."

"I love sands and feel as though it is a second home. It is a place where I feel safe, can be myself and not be judged."

"Just that I think every school should be like Sands"

"Sands is amazing, it's has helped me in so many ways and I'm a new person since I have been here and a lot happier! I love it here :)"

"Coming to Sands has helped me more than anything before."

"I love Sands School, and have really enjoyed the past three years."

"Sands is sooo great, I feel I'm a real individual person here, and the teachers are all so encouraging and lovely, I think at least half my friends a teachers!"

"Sands is the best"