

Katherine Warington School – Setting A Surveying Pace For Success

“Rather than sticking with a big annual survey or jumping to weekly pulses, we’ve focused on finding a half-termly rhythm that suits us. The flexibility of School Surveys has allowed us to do just that.”

Zoe Coomber, Assistant Headteacher, Katherine Warington School

About Katherine Warington School

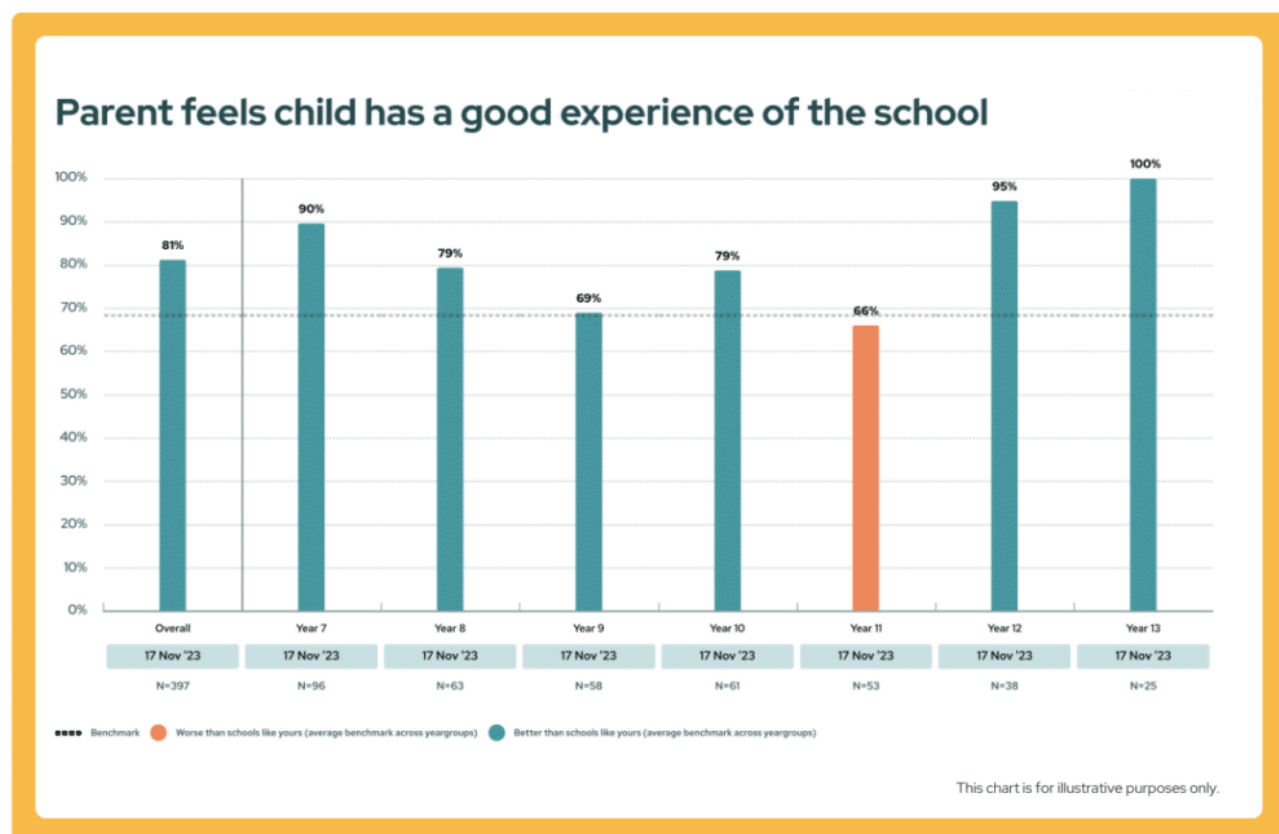
Katherine Warington School, a co-educational, non-denominational secondary school in Harpenden, Hertfordshire, opened its doors in September 2019. Now in its seventh year as a single academy trust, the school has developed a distinctive approach to staff voice and continuous improvement – one that reflects its ambitious and adaptive ethos.

From an annual survey to responsive feedback

In the early years, Katherine Warington ran an annual staff survey. The results were generally strong, but the leadership team, including Assistant Headteacher Zoe Coomber, soon recognised the limitations of relying on a single, retrospective snapshot. To gain a richer and more timely understanding of staff experience, the school adopted School Surveys – a flexible platform powered by Teacher Tapp’s national benchmarking data – and shifted to surveying staff half-termly.

This more regular cadence has allowed leaders to take the temperature of the school community throughout the year. Unlike the static nature of an annual survey, this responsive model allows the school to evaluate ongoing initiatives and sense-check progress on the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Benchmarking against schools with similar characteristics (such as phase and FSM profile) has also introduced a new level of challenge and insight.

“It can be hard to see things in context because we’ve only experienced things from our school’s point of view. School Surveys allows us to see the real picture, the bigger picture, with accurate benchmarking.”



Strategic planning – with space for flexibility

Survey planning begins in August, when Zoe maps out two focus areas per half term – such as behaviour, workload, or teaching and learning – for the year ahead. The first three survey cycles tend to follow a structured plan, while the latter half of the year allows for greater flexibility to respond to emerging needs or unexpected developments.

Importantly, survey findings are shared with staff during briefings, accompanied by clear graphical outputs and actionable insights. These presentations provide not only transparency but also a springboard for constructive discussion and school-wide improvements.

“We stand up in staff briefings regularly to share results and explain next steps.”

Owning bumps in the road

Zoe reflects candidly on what they’ve learned. Not every survey result lands as expected. On one occasion, a question about time spent marking generated some tough feedback – but it was asked right in the middle of KS3 exams when the whole school was marking; not perhaps the best timing. “You have to be humble,” Zoe explains. “Sometimes, you get it wrong.”

And setbacks can prove motivating. The school has found the link with the Steplab coaching programme very helpful. But when the coaching lead discovered that staff didn’t rate their experiences of coaching above the national benchmark, he didn’t retreat – he doubled down on improving the programme. Similarly, leaders are held to account by the very transparency they’ve created. Zoe recalls a recent moment when an SLT colleague considered asking staff

for a quick turnaround on a major task. She reminded them, "It'll show up on the next survey!" – and the deadline was adjusted.

Driving governance and workload action

Beyond SLT, the survey insights have supported the school's Workload Committee, triggering follow-up investigations into topics like subject TLR distribution. And the school's Trustees receive concise updates, with direct access to the data that shapes decisions around funding and accountability.

Katherine Warrington School's journey demonstrates how a flexible, well-planned survey approach can underpin real cultural change. With regular feedback loops, honest reflection, and a commitment to staff voice, the school has embedded surveying not as an add-on, but as a vital part of its improvement engine.