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Mr Michael Frost  
Headteacher  
Grappenhall Hall School  
Church Lane  
Grappenhall  
Warrington  
Cheshire  
WA4 3EU

Dear Mr Frost

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grappenhall Hall School, Warrington**

Following my visit to your school on 7 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Make use of the identified external support from outstanding schools and the local authority to provide all teachers with the opportunity to see good and outstanding practice in a range of settings
- Ensure that all teachers and support staff attend training on how to develop boy's writing as a means of promoting consistency of approach across the school
- Make use of feedback from students to both identify areas of concern to them, for example about bullying, and to check on the impact of actions the school has taken to address the students' concerns.
- Produce and action a plan to ensure: unused sections of the building are first and foremost safe for all students; all used sections provide a learning

environment which is clean, well appointed, bright, warm and welcoming for students at the school now.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, teachers, the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and the local authority support plan were evaluated. You provided me with documentation which gave a summary of your evaluation of progress so far and the impact of the school's actions particularly on behaviour and attendance. I was also able to take part in a learning walk with you and the deputy headteacher to observe form time and I observed a part of a science lesson.

## **Context**

There have been no significant changes to the staffing since the last inspection. The governing body has been strengthened by the recruitment of three additional governors.

Plans have been made to relocate the school to an alternative site. At the time of this monitoring visit you were not aware of a set date for the move. Quite clearly this lack of direction is causing uncertainty in how you manage the school. There is an obvious deterioration in the fabric of the school buildings. This needs to be addressed to ensure the positive attitudes held by the majority of students remain so.

## **Main findings**

By focusing on the learning environment and the behaviour of students you have been able to take some quick action in order to ensure outcomes for students at Grappenhall Hall School improve. There is an obvious determination to achieve consistency both within the classrooms and around the school. Teachers say that students are more settled in lessons. The students feel behaviour is improving and as a result they are making better progress. This is because there is more time for adults to help the students with their learning.

The introduction of weekly teachers meetings which focus on what needs to be improved has had a positive impact on learning and behaviour and has provided a collective sense of urgency. For example, by establishing some non-negotiables within the marking policy, leaders have set a clear expectation that teacher comments in the students' books will help them improve their work. Students feel that marking is 'really helpful', 'we have more information in our books' and that 'we know what to do better next time'.

The introduction of the 'Pod' system in which students from different year groups are taught together in one class has now been embraced by staff and students. As a result the introduction of the day, where there is time to talk, share information and

even have some breakfast, is now calmer and most students look forward to coming to school. Leaders need to monitor how teachers address the challenge of a mixture of ability in one class and ensure that work is presented by teachers in a variety of ways.

The insistence by leaders that teachers look to develop a wider range of subject skills in all lessons is improving the learning environment and adding interest for the students. Some classrooms are noticeably brighter and welcoming because they have a selection of work displayed. Teachers make use of space to ensure key subject words are prominent so that they support learning. Students are enthusiastic about project work, they find it more interesting and exciting because they no longer concentrate on just one subject and because 'we have to find things out for ourselves'.

Changes to the way the school is managed, including use of the 'Pod' system and a more visible senior staff presence have impacted directly on improvements in behaviour and attendance. The result of a slight increase in group size is an increase in the number of staff per class. This means that staff are better placed to support students quickly when they need help with either their learning or their behaviour. The school's data show that levels of aggressive behaviour and the numbers of students not attending class have reduced significantly. Both staff and students were clear that classrooms and corridors are much calmer now and there is far less disruption of learning.

There have been noticeable changes to some classrooms, resulting in a better environment for students to learn in. However many areas of the school look neglected and unsightly. Some parts of the school, such as the former residential facility, are used sparingly or not at all and are deteriorating rapidly. Some students talked about their fear of bullying in some areas of the school, such as behind unused classrooms and on the tennis courts. Others said they preferred to stay indoors at playtime because of this. It is important that leaders do not allow the uncertainty around a planned move to another site distract them from meeting the needs of the students on roll at the school now.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

You are making good use of external support as a means of supporting the school to improve.

The level of support offered by the local authority has increased and links are strong. A representative of the local authority is helping the governors to provide challenge to the leaders of the school on a regular basis. Support offered by a local authority attendance officer has been increased and this is contributing to the improved attendance of some students. The headteacher of the Virtual School is promoting better links with the carers of looked after children but the impact of this is yet to be assessed.

You have established well thought out links with two outstanding schools. By being in contact with a local secondary school and a school similar in nature to Grappenhall Hall you are in position gain support from a variety of settings. Already this has contributed to strengthening of the Governing Body through the appointment of a new member with expertise in data analysis. You have plans to ensure the support of the headteacher of the other similar school will help you develop the school environment and improve behaviour.

You have taken steps to initiate an external review of governance which will take place in the next few weeks.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Warrington.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

**Her Majesty's Inspector**