

**Frome Valley Voluntary Aided First School**

School Drive,  
Crossways,  
Dorchester  
DT2 8WR

**Diocese: Salisbury**

Local authority: Dorset

Date of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> November 2012

Date of last inspection: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2008

School's unique reference number: 113763

Headteacher: Julie Thorp

Inspector's name and number: Carole McCormack (224)

**School context**

The school relocated in 2006 from the nearby village of Owermoigne. Children come mainly from Crossways which has a mixture of private and social housing. There are a significant number of single-parent families and high mobility as families frequently join the community but subsequently have to move out in order to accommodate further children. There is currently no church building in the village, so church members meet locally in a secular building. This challenge has meant that the school and church community have been brought particularly close together as they establish and continue to develop the local Christian community in partnership. The expectation is that a new church/community hub will be constructed next to the school in the near future. The current headteacher has been in post since April 2012.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Frome Valley as a Church of England school are outstanding**

The school has many strengths, but the central driver is the coherence, continuity and progression of provision which stems from detailed team planning and reflective and insightful evaluation leading in turn to confident progress as a distinctive and highly effective church school.

**Established strengths**

- Exceptional team work leading to an ethos of trust and openness
- A calm and reflective environment
- Vibrant relationship between the school and the church; and the valued and central place which the school holds in the community
- The impact that collective worship has upon the security, emotional well-being and spiritual development of the children

**Focus for development**

- To create the opportunity for all stakeholders to re-visit the core values of the school and to re-examine their explicitly Christian character
- To introduce a structured way of supporting and deepening the children's spiritual development

**The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners**

Christian values – especially the core values of 'Love, Respect and Perseverance' – are threaded through all aspects of provision. The children are remarkably articulate about how these Christian values nurture and equip them to be compassionate, thoughtful and effective human beings. One Y4 child commented profoundly: 'If you can find peace inside yourself, you can find peace anywhere.' Another gave a practical outcome of finding peace: 'If you've

been upset, you need to calm down – you need to get another feeling.’ Through discussion the children linked a SEAL display to the core value of Respect and mentioned the perseverance necessary to complete a striking stained glass window panel in the entrance of the school. Excellent team work ensures that there is striking continuity and progression throughout the school; and the headteacher’s precise attention to detail heightens even further the impact of the curriculum. Thus the spiritual, social, moral and cultural (SMSC) development of the children is supported by a number of strategies e.g. the provision of a reflective area and encouraging diaries of reflection to be written by Y3 and Y4 children in class with a background of contemplative music and a lighted candle. Another striking example is the practice of ensuring that the school development plan is written in a child-friendly version so that all children can identify with, and contribute to, the progress of the school and its place in the community. Undoubtedly there is excellent provision and promotion of SMSC within the school but, as a distinctive church school, this needs to be addressed in a structured way to support and deepen the spiritual development of each individual learner. A well-established ‘buddying’ system ensures that the older children take on appropriate responsibility within the school community. The school has achieved Rights Respecting Schools level 1 and, powerfully aligning responsible citizenship with the habit of reflection, a relevant Unicef ‘article’ is linked with each worship theme in the diaries of reflection. Relationships are exemplary and, because of the outstanding team work, issues relating to provision are addressed corporately – for example, common needs within continuing professional development are covered in staff meetings. One parent commented that she: ‘would be happy to recommend this school to anyone’; and the incumbent explained how she values the headteacher’s active support of the church. Above all, the children feel absolutely secure: ‘Nothing is going to hurt me here. It’s a safe place inside the school.’ The thoughtful, reflective and spiritual provision is very well-supported by the school environment. The whole school is calm, quiet, orderly and reflective. The headteacher explained how one of her central intentions has been to ‘make the environment reflect who we are.’ Currently the core values of the school are implicit. The process of all stakeholders revisiting these values would highlight their explicitly Christian character.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

During worship the hall lights are extinguished and striking banners are displayed behind the worship table reflecting the beauty of creation (Psalm 8) and the season of the year. The headteacher at the start of worship paused for a significantly long period of time, modelling the habit of reflection and stillness, whilst listening to the quiet music to which the children had entered the hall. Because of this thoughtful scaffolding of behaviour and creation of a very special atmosphere at worship time, the attitudes of the children are outstandingly reverential and attentive. Assessment for learning is used throughout the school and employed also within collective worship. After being given opportunities to speak to a ‘talking partner’ pupils swiftly came back together as a whole school group due to the continuity of behaviour management strategies employed in other aspects of provision. One of the most striking examples of children deriving spiritual growth and confidence from worship was the spontaneous prayers offered by children across all year groups, when being handed a ‘holding cross’. Another was the deeply moving way in which the children started singing, unaccompanied, as the incumbent sang. As one child put it: ‘children at Frome Valley love singing!’ The incumbent acts as in a quasi-chaplaincy capacity within the school – being present at break and lunchtimes to support and talk to staff and children. She confirms how conversations with staff evidence how much inspiration and affirmation they derive from worship. Christian symbols and the seasons of the church enrich collective worship. Liturgical responses clearly demarcate the act of worship: ‘The Lord be with you’; ‘And also with you!’ The importance of worship in the life of the school is outstanding and the heartfelt profound way in which the children talked of how collective worship has altered their lives is evidence of this. One explained how worship was important because ‘when you are grown up you may not be helpful to someone’ if you did not ‘think about the wonderful gifts that we get’ from God. All staff attend worship and are confident to lead it. Governors attend as part of their monitoring of the Christian character of the school. Staff informally evaluate collective worship, but the diaries of reflection used by the oldest children in the school form a valuable evidence base of the impact that worship has on learners. One child prayed in her diary: ‘Dear God, help me to believe in you. Amen.’

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

Under the leadership of the current headteacher the school has been determined to ensure that Religious Education (RE) is given the appropriate status as a core subject. Consequently APP was introduced from September 2011 for RE. (APP for English and Mathematics were introduced in previous years). Through discussion and moderation, staff have agreed sub-levels in the subject. Since September 2011 a further development has been that every learner is assessed every half term in RE with the outcome that staff now feel that they have got to know the children very well indeed. Teaching was observed in each year group during the inspection. All the lessons observed were good and one was outstanding. The most significant point of impact was the continuity and progression demonstrated in the subject, together with highly effective differentiation which stems from deep knowledge of the children's attainment levels. The new Dorset agreed syllabus has been very effectively introduced by the RE leader who supports the subject knowledge of her colleagues on an individual basis with energy and understanding. The school is highly inclusive. Discussions with the children and observations across provision demonstrate extremely positive attitudes and responses to the subject. RE contributes powerfully to the SMSC of all children. The key to this is the close team-work and coherence of approach and the identification by the staff of opportunities for learning from religion (AT2) to be woven throughout the creative curriculum. Comments from the children illustrate that they are absolutely clear about the Christian character of their school: 'we become Christian by doing these wonderful things' (at school, particularly in worship). Equally they demonstrate an empathy and understanding way beyond expectations concerning beliefs and feelings in other religions. When asked how a Hindu child could be made to feel welcome at their school, one child suggested 'take him to Moreton river just before sunrise and pretend it was the Ganges...' RE has a high priority in terms of continuing professional development. Diocesan courses and bespoke training are accessed as part of the school's partnership service agreement with the diocese. The development of RE and collective worship represents one of four areas for development in the school development plan.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is outstanding**

As one foundation governor phrased his response: 'Everyone is involved, all the time' in finding ways to promote and develop the school vision, which is: 'As a Church of England school our caring, Christian environment gives us the security to nurture the enthusiasm for learning that will enable us to develop into confident, competent and caring human beings.' Because of the remarkable team work at all levels within the school community, vision and implicit Christian values are embraced by all, but an opportunity for all stakeholders to revisit them would sharpen their explicitly Christian character. A recent practice of creating 'Year governors' has deepened the relationship between governors and children as a governor has the opportunity to track a year group through the school, getting to understand the children extremely well and being able to give them high quality support. Leadership of collective worship and religious education is outstanding. A rare mix of enthusiasm, understanding, commitment and care on the part of the subject leader has ensured that each member of staff has developed commensurate qualities in their planning and teaching of the subject and their leadership of worship. The challenge that the local church has faced of not having a physical building has had the consequence of bringing the school and church together in a close knit community of thought and direction. A member of the church community has worked with the children on producing the strikingly beautiful banners in the hall; and the PCC pray for suitable foundation governors to be recruited. At the centre of this outstanding provision lies the highly effective leadership of the headteacher. She cares passionately about children and staff and the community which the school serves. She invests huge thought and energy into the school and is determined that all the children will receive only the best possible educational provision and emotional and pastoral support.