

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Frome Valley Church of England First School

School Drive, Crossways, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 8WR

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Salisbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 April 2015
Name of multi-academy trust	Greenwood Tree Academy Trust
Date of inspection	9 November 2017
Date of last inspection	15 November 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	First (VA converter) - 141777
Headteacher	Julie Thorp
Inspector's name and number	Richard Wharton - 835

School context

Frome Valley First School is a smaller than average school for children from YR-Y4. The school became an academy in April 2015 as a founder member of the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust (GTAT), which currently comprises of four first schools and a middle school. Four out of the five schools within the trust are church schools and the trust has adopted a voluntary aided governance model. The school serves an area of mixed private and social housing and levels of pupil turbulence are higher than those seen nationally. Pupils are predominantly White British and the proportion with additional needs is broadly similar to those found nationally. St Aldhelm's church was built on the school site in May 2015, which enables direct links between the school and church community. A governor run pre-school also operates on the school's site.

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

- The Christian vision for the school has been deeply embedded from the time that the school was first established on its present site and is integral to the provision which it makes for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Partnership with the local church is outstanding and is central to the distinctively Christian ethos which brings purpose and meaning to the lives of children and adults within the school community.
- The leadership of religious education (RE), is given a particularly very high priority and this makes a foundational contribution to the Christian character of the school.

Areas to improve

- To embed a more systematic process for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's distinctive Christian ethos in order to generate a cycle of continued improvement.
- To develop a shared understanding of the Christian basis of the school's core values to serve as a reference point for the whole community to articulate them in the daily life of the school.

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

Frome Valley First School is a caring Christian community where everyone is valued and welcomed. The Christian vision for the school was established from its foundation on its present site and has been strengthened over time. The accepting and respectful attitudes of the children are fostered through the staff leading by example. Parents feel that their children are known and understood by the school. Several parents commented that their children are eager to come to school every day and attributed this to the ethos of the school. The school is highly inclusive, committed to meeting the needs of the whole child and providing extra support where needed in order to meet its mission statement of ensuring that all are enabled to 'learn as much as they can about all that they can'. As a result of this attention to individual needs, overall pupil progress and achievement is generally above average for all groups of learners and rates of pupil absence are below national average. Following its previous church school inspection, the school revisited its core values and introduced the three values of 'compassion, respect and perseverance'. These are clearly embedded in the life of the school and children are clearly able to articulate what they mean and how they draw upon them to guide their decisions. Children are able to explain that the values come from the Christian tradition and to cite examples of stories, for example The Good Samaritan, that illustrate them. One child said, 'We have these special values because we follow in the path of Jesus and he taught them to us.' An area for improvement, however, is to develop a shared theological understanding of the Christian basis of the school's three core values, which is shared across the whole community and can serve as a reference point for articulating them in the daily life of the school. The school has a highly developed interpretation of spirituality and has worked with the diocese to create progression grids which clearly identify activities through which the children's spirituality is being developed. The children are able to capture their developing thoughts and feelings in Diaries of Reflection, which are clearly highly valued. Provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is excellent and children talk with great enthusiasm about the wide range of activities which they take part in, all of which are documented in beautifully presented whole-class SMSC journals. The children's knowledge and understanding of diverse global communities is developed through a wide range of engaging activities, including a link with a school with a Christian foundation in Kenya. This school link has included teacher exchanges and the children at Frome Valley were able to compare the worship at the Kenyan school through videos captured by teachers while visiting the school. Religious education (RE) is treated as a core subject and makes a very significant contribution to the school's Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

Collective worship is of central importance in the life of the school because it makes a significant impact on the Christian ethos by providing an underpinning Christian foundation to the school's values. For example, the worship observed explored the value of compassion through the idea of 'noticing need', using a gospel reading to illustrate this. Acts of worship effectively demonstrate the naturalness with which children engage in prayer and reflection, as well as their enjoyment of singing. Children take an active role in worship and are given opportunities to lead worship each half-term. Parents say how much children look forward to services in St Aldhelm's church, as do the children themselves, and these services clearly give children a sense of Anglican traditions and the cycle of the church year. The Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is incorporated into worship through candle prayers and children talk about this with age-appropriate understanding. One child said that, 'When you see pictures of baby Jesus in the manger, you sometimes see a dove hovering above him and that's a sign that the Holy Spirit is present.' All staff take part in leading worship and spend time reviewing and drawing up comprehensive plans for worship together. Collective worship plans are based on the 'Roots and Fruits' resource but the school has adapted this to its own needs. The vicar also leads worship each week and plays a key role in developing services to mark special events and festivals. Children have a particularly impressive appreciation of the place of prayer within their school; they describe how prayers are said at key times throughout the day and one child proudly declared that, 'Everyone in our school gets to make up prayers.' This was indeed evident when some of the children led spontaneous prayers at the end of the collective worship observed. The children were clear that, 'You can't just pray for selfish things to please yourself, you have to think about the right things to pray for.' When asked how we can know what God would want us to pray for, the children drew upon the school values. The importance of prayer in the life of the school is exemplified by a beautifully presented prayer station in the central area of the building, which is changed regularly to match changing themes. Children are invited to write up their own collective worship evaluations, which they do with a significant degree of thoughtfulness. In one of these, a child had written that they enjoyed the worship because, 'It was a time to reflect, talk to God and be still.' The RE leader and vicar frequently monitor and review collective worship and gather children's views in order to identify areas for improvement.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

Leadership of RE as a curriculum subject is given a very high priority within the school. The RE leader has been in place for two years and is fully committed to developing standards yet further. The RE leader carries out a range of monitoring activities, including lesson observations, pupil interviews and work scrutiny and feeds back areas for development to class teachers. An extensive subject review report is prepared for governors at the end of each year and a development plan produced for the following year on the basis of this. The 'Understanding Christianity' resource was introduced last year and this is now being embedded and refined. All teachers are very positive about the way in which 'Understanding Christianity' has enabled them to deepen children's understanding of core Christian concepts. Excellent teaching and learning was observed on the day of the inspection. All five classes were engaged in learning about the concept of Incarnation. Progression in children's understanding across the year groups was very evident, with some Year 4 children conveying a very sophisticated understanding of Christian symbolism. Detailed tracking and assessment processes are in place for RE and these are thoroughly reviewed by the RE leader. Though standards, in terms of pupils' attainment in RE, appeared to drop a little last year, the RE leader is confident that this was as a result of introducing a new, more demanding assessment system in line with Understanding Christianity. Current progress data indicates that children are on track to achieve outcomes that are broadly in line with national expectations by the end of the year. This is reflected in the standard of work in books and the quality of their responses in lessons. Links with the Christian values of the school and SMSC development are intrinsic to RE and it is evident from many activities recorded in class SMSC that this makes a significant impact on the lives of learners. At the same time, however, children are provided with a range of opportunities to make links between the beliefs and practices of a range of faiths, a notable example being a project where children explored similarities and difference between the Hajj and Christian pilgrimage.

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

The headteacher is very clear that the Christian ethos of the school is at the heart of the school's purpose within its local community and this has been built on and further developed since the previous SIAMS inspection. All leaders articulate this vision and one spoke about how this was a key feature of the interview process when she was recruited to the school. Strong links between the school's vision and the children's learning and wellbeing ensure that the Christian ethos makes a significant contribution to the children's academic success and personal development. The headteacher confidently articulates the vision and has a very clear grasp of how this is lived out in the life of the school. This is shared within the whole school community, which ensures that the vision drives all aspects of school improvement and is continually developing to meet the needs of children. Through the process of academy conversion, governors considered it a priority that the Church ethos should not be compromised and they are still mindful of this in any discussion of expanding the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust. The link between the school and its neighbouring church are exceptional. The vicar is an integral member of the school community and contributes significantly to the life of the school. Many shared activities take place between church and school, including Christingle, flower festival, children running computer classes for older church members and church members coming into school to listen to children read. Children's work is displayed in church and the children refer to the church as 'our church'. All of this has a significant impact on children's understanding of Christianity as a living faith at the centre of the community and parents are highly appreciative of the special contribution which this makes to their children's education. Leadership and management of RE are given a very high priority within the school and the school takes advantage of all professional support that is offered by the diocese. The leadership and management clearly have very strong capacity to continue to develop the school as a church school, though their processes for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's distinctive Christian ethos are not fully developed and embedded so that they generate a cycle of continued improvement. The school meets the requirements for RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report November 2017 Frome Valley Church of England First School Dorchester DT2 8WR