

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Piddle Valley Church of England First School

Piddletrenthide, Dorchester, Dorset. DT2 7QL

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Salisbury
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Dorset
Name of multi-academy trust	Greenwood Tree Academy Trust (GTAT)
Date of inspection	14 March 2017
Date of last inspection	20 April 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	First school 141804
Executive Principal	Paul Chadwick
Headteacher	Jayne Brown
Inspector's name and number	Lorraine Pugh 819

School context

Piddle Valley is a smaller than average first school with 104 children. It is situated in the centre of Piddletrenthide village. Children come from the local village and surrounding areas and are predominantly from White British backgrounds. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals and the pupil premium grant is below the national average. The number of children receiving extra support for special educational needs is also below the national average. The school is one of the five schools forming the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust (GTAT) which was established in 2015. Each school has its own headteacher. The current Piddle Valley headteacher was appointed in 2015. In 2016 the GTAT appointed a new executive principal to work across all five schools.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Piddle Valley First School as a Church of England school are good.

- The Christian ethos of the school, in which all children are highly valued, promotes excellent standards of personal development, academic achievement and well-being.
- A core set of Christian values are clearly articulated by all members of the school community and reflected in the quality of relationships throughout the school.
- The commitment of the headteacher and her staff, supported by the governors, ensures that the school continues to develop as a distinctively Christian school although this is not always effectively evaluated by school leaders and by members of the GTAT.

Areas to improve

- Allow the children to be more involved in the leadership, planning and evaluation of worship so they increase their ownership of this special time in the school day.
- Develop a system to collect evidence of religious education (RE) learning that may not be captured within the children's RE books.
- Develop the skills of school's leaders, including governors, to more effectively monitor and evaluate the school's Christian ethos so that more accurate evidence is used to identify further improvements.
- At Trust level, ensure that support and understanding of the school's Christian status and what this means, is developed with the leaders of the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust (GTAT) and evident within the GTAT's future vision. This includes identifying opportunities for its schools to work together to strengthen Christian development.

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

Piddle Valley First School is a good church school because its core values are becoming increasingly explicit, and embedded through Christian teaching that is understood by all members of the school community. Recently developed displays are strengthening their visual presence within the school's environment. Values are woven through religious education (RE), collective worship and general school life. Individualised care ensures all children are nurtured and supported with their academic and emotional development resulting in happy, confident children who are excited to come to school. Members of the school's community can explain why Christian values are important and adults describe the positive effect they have on children's learning and behaviour. Each child is viewed as unique and special and very well supported when difficult situations arise. This loving and safe Christian environment allows all children to succeed contributing to being the best they can be. Academic standards are above the national age expectations and children make good progress from their individual starting points. Children link their behaviour and experiences to the school's values with good levels of understanding of what they mean. For example, they know that not giving up in lessons makes them a better learner with one child stating, 'I want to use my initiative to work more individually more of the time because I think I ask for help a bit too much.' Children's behaviour, inside and outside of the classrooms, is of the highest standard. They have positive attitudes towards their learning and engage well in lessons. They are confident, polite and respectful to each other and to the adults looking after them. When behaviour needs support this is done firmly but gently, giving children time to learn from their mistakes. Reward systems are regularly reviewed, ensuring that good behaviour creates a model for others to follow. Children and adults say that the school is a place where they are listened to and where worries are dealt with quickly. Parents say they feel comfortable when approaching teachers regarding concerns. Adults within the school describe the support they have when facing difficult situations, whether at work or home. Children love their school and are able to describe how adults look after them and the importance of friendships. Adults in the school have a shared understanding of spirituality and this successfully supports children's personal spiritual development. Spiritual experiences are planned with time to stop, listen and reflect. This develops children's awareness of themselves and the world around them. Class areas are used by the children for prayer and reflection. Children have a growing knowledge of other faiths and they clearly explain why everybody should be treated with respect, regardless of differences in faith or culture. Children support a range of local and national charities. Child initiated activities allow them to experience the impact of their charitable work, for example, the money raised when they did a sponsored walk for the Moorfields Eye Hospital.

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

Collective worship is enjoyed by the children. They describe it as a time to gather together to learn about Bible stories, the work of Jesus and how to behave kinder and better. Anglican practice is demonstrated by the lighting of a candle and a Christian greeting. Children are able to explain how the light from the candle shows that Jesus is the light of the world, guiding them in kind thoughts and behaviour. They have a growing knowledge of Bible stories and can refer to known stories to move their learning forward. For example, the youngest children were able to talk knowledgeably about Palm Sunday events as they embarked on their making of an Easter garden. This allowed them to clearly understand why Jesus was so special to his followers and why they were so sad when He died. The school's Christian values form an integral part of collective worship and each one is focused on for a month. This allows the children to gain a deeper understanding of their meaning and how each value relates to their lives. Biblical quotes make each value's Christian foundation explicit. Children are active participants in worship and there is obvious enjoyment as they join in the songs and volunteer their thoughts. They understand the themes because leaders deliver worship in an accessible way for young children. There are many places within the school environment for quiet personal prayer and reflection. A recently established prayer tree has many personal prayers written by children. Older children use reflection diaries to capture their individual thoughts and feelings. Children know that prayer is open to everyone and that they can pray anywhere as God is always listening. Worship is well planned through the Christian year, so as well as the school's values, children also celebrate Christian festivals. A range of leaders gives children a range of experiences of different worship styles. A local church member has re-established 'Open The Book' including the active involvement of the children. Children say they really enjoy learning about the Bible from dramatized storytelling. Children's views on worship are collected and many of their ideas are included within the provision. A role for children in planning, leading and evaluating worship has not been fully developed to increase their ownership of this important part of the school day. Spiritual development is nurtured through exploring the world and quiet reflection time, which is embedded within daily worship. The new vicar is already a very active supporter of the school and regular worship leader. The church is close to the school and children are regular visitors. They say church worship services feel special. However, church members ensure that the church's presence is as much within the school building as it is within the church. A developing understanding of the Trinity is supported through the 'Understanding Christianity' materials including artwork and discussion.

The effectiveness of religious education is good.

Religious education (RE) is an important part of the school curriculum and considered a core subject alongside literacy and maths. The RE leader works closely with the collective worship leader ensuring the two areas work together to integrate the school's Christian values within RE and worship provision. Since the previous inspection the school has developed a clearer overview of RE coverage. Detailed planning is supported by the 'Discovery' RE scheme, the Dorset agreed RE syllabus and 'Understanding Christianity' resources. These materials, and associated professional development, have increased staff knowledge and confidence when teaching RE. Effective assessment systems help teachers identify children's levels of understanding. Further activities or discussions address any misunderstandings and careful questioning is used to extend learning. In lessons children listen to each other and show confidence when sharing their thoughts. They understand that sometimes there can be more than one answer to a question and that we should respect those holding a different opinion to our own. They are excited when learning about other religious faiths because the lessons capture their interest. Their learning about Judaism illustrates this, where children shared, in detail, their learning about the Shabbat meal and what happened in the Passover story. They explain that each faith is very important to those who follow it and this is why respect should be shown. Involvement with local groups such as the Dorset Trees Project, the Dorset Garden's Trust and the RSPB give the children a connection to the outdoor environment. Their learning about other cultures through African workshops, involvement in Black History month and celebration of the Chinese New Year is giving children an appreciation of other cultures that exist both in Britain and the wider world. The RE leader regularly observes lessons and this includes the monitoring of RE work in books. At the moment there isn't an organised whole school system for capturing evidence of RE learning that may not be included in the RE books and the school is investigating the introduction of class portfolios to address this. Lessons are delivered at a good pace with children actively involved and working cooperatively together. Religious education makes a good contribution to children's moral and social development through reinforcement of the school's Christian values.

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

The school has made progress since the previous inspection and the development points identified in that report have been addressed. However, the establishment of the GTAT multi academy trust in 2015 has introduced some challenges as well as benefits for Piddle Valley school and its church school ethos. Whilst documentation from the GTAT communicates to the community the undoubted educational advantages of the five schools working together, no mention is made in its communications, including the GTAT vision, of the importance of maintaining and developing the Christian work of the schools in its care. This is despite four of the five schools in GTAT being church schools. The importance of Christian development within the whole organisation is therefore unclear. The executive principal was not present at this inspection. Opportunities for the trust's schools to work together to enhance their Christian distinctiveness are not being developed. Piddle Valley school's leadership looks for opportunities to further its Christian distinctiveness and the headteacher works closely with the governing body to ensure that all developments keep children as their major focus and central to all decisions. They seek to provide the best learning opportunities for their children and this is evident in the high standards achieved and the children's love of learning. Regular questionnaires involve parents in the school's development. The vast majority of parents reported their awareness of the school's status as a church school recognising the importance its Christian values. Communication to parents regarding RE and collective worship has increased in response to parental feedback. Parents greatly appreciate the school's work and its welcoming atmosphere. An example was, 'The school gives individualised, nurturing support and they are passionate about our children and their learning'. The governing body is knowledgeable and focused, having a good understanding of what it means to be a church school. However, they are also aware that they need to firmly establish the importance of Piddle Valley's Christian identity within the GTAT leadership structure. The Trust's level of support and understanding of developing Christian distinctiveness within Piddle Valley is not currently apparent. Governor visits have a sense of purpose, allowing governors to identify future improvement needs. Strong links exist with the local church as well as within the local community and the school regularly seeks ways to strengthen these relationships further. Liaison and support for the onsite Feathers Pre-school are strong and this gives children a smooth transition into the main school. Piddle Valley is an active member of the Dorset Area Schools' Partnership and it benefits from school improvement collaboration with the other member schools. The RE leader attends local RE leadership meetings which allows participants to share ideas. Teacher training is supported and the school shows this commitment by regularly offering placements to trainee teachers from Winchester University. Teachers value the advice given by the local vicar and support from the diocese. Parents praise the school and feel that its distinctive Christian ethos encourages children to explore matters of faith and belief openly, in an environment that is safe and respectful. Parents agree that the children show empathy for each other with an acceptance of difference. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.