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Ms Julie Thorp  
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Dear Ms Thorp

### **Short inspection of Frome Valley CofE VA First School**

Following my visit to the school on 11 January 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2013.

**This school continues to be good.** The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your team work diligently and effectively to ensure that pupils are well taught. You are not complacent and continually seek improvement. For example, following disappointing results in 2016 key stage 1 assessments, you completed a detailed analysis of what needed to be improved. This has brought about rapidly improving outcomes for pupils. Together with other leaders, including governors, you regularly check pupils' achievement and take effective action in holding teachers to account. You do this skilfully so that teaching staff feel valued and understand the principles and rationale for improvement. Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their support of the school. A typical view expressed through the online survey included, 'We've been delighted with the school since our daughter started... she has made fantastic progress and loves going to school. She is nurtured and challenged.'

You ensure that the quality of education is good through maintaining high expectations of the pupils. You are keen to find ways to motivate pupils and include them in their learning. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them and work well together. For example, all pupils help each other with their daily phonics work, including children in the Reception Year. Teachers know the pupils well and use assessment information effectively to plan work which accurately meets pupils' needs.

This is the first inspection since the school joined the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust (GTAT) in April 2015. School leaders and the governing body have worked closely and effectively with the Board of GTAT since then to ensure that the school

continues to improve. Most significantly, they completed an overhaul of their approach to the teaching of reading and phonics with impressive results. Leaders' belief that all pupils can read, and must do so quickly, continues to ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their learning, including when they leave at the end of Year 4.

During the inspection, we worked together to evaluate what is working well but also identified some priorities for improvement. We agreed that pupils do not always use and apply their writing and mathematical skills to the highest standards across the curriculum. Weaknesses in how teachers present tasks in other subjects, such as science, reduce the quality and depth with which pupils practise and hone essential writing and mathematical skills. Furthermore, despite a recent initiative to improve pupils' handwriting, a few pupils' handwriting is still not improving quickly enough.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust and fit for purpose. Checks and vetting procedures you carry out before employing new staff are rigorous and well documented. Regular updates and ongoing training ensures that staff are confident and knowledgeable about how to respond to and record any concerns about pupils. Staff are also vigilant and aware to ensure that safeguarding is the highest priority. You work well with other agencies and authorities to look after pupils and protect them. This includes ensuring that the most vulnerable pupils receive intensive multi-agency support. It also involves working with others to ensure that pupils are not missing from education. Your strong awareness and determination enable you to take timely action on behalf of pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe. They know what bullying is and are confident that this does not happen at Frome Valley. They know how to stay safe in different situations, such as when working online. They are clear about how to evacuate the school in the event of an emergency. Pupils feel secure and like coming to school. The good bond of trust between pupils and staff contributes well to pupils' physical, mental and emotional well-being.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first key line of enquiry evaluated how well particular pupils of average ability are progressing in writing and mathematics in key stage 1. This is because some of these pupils did not do quite as well as their counterparts nationally in the 2017 assessments. However, you have ensured that a rigorous assessment system is in place which enables you to check the progress of every pupil. You know which pupils are making strong progress from entry to the school and those who require additional support. As a result, teaching is well focused and ensures that those who are behind receive effective help to catch up.
- Effective professional development and training mean that teachers know the national standards for primary education well. As a result, they are confident supporting and challenging pupils to learn what is expected at their age in writing and mathematics. A mathematics scheme is also providing a useful framework to

ensure that pupils gain the confidence, knowledge and fluency in number to tackle appropriately challenging tasks and problems. Pupils have a good understanding of number and place-value which serves them well as a foundation for further mathematical learning and development. However, mathematics in other workbooks and learning across the curriculum is too limited. As a result, pupils are not consistently making strong links or connections to apply their knowledge in other subjects.

- Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are continuing to make strong progress in writing. For example, in one typical year group the proportion of pupils working below the level expected at their age has reduced from 48% to 16% in the past 12 months. Pupils draft, edit and publish writing with increasing skill and complexity by the time they leave the school. However, pupils do not consistently show the same skill, depth or quality of writing in other subjects across the curriculum. Teachers' lower expectations in other subjects, for example in science and creative curriculum subjects, mean that pupils do not consistently receive enough support and challenge to develop their writing purposefully in a range of contexts.
- You have introduced a handwriting policy which is having positive impact for the majority of pupils. However, there are still a few pupils who are taking too long to learn to write fluently and legibly in a cursive style.
- My second key line of enquiry considered how well disadvantaged pupils are catching up by the end of Year 4, especially in writing and mathematics. This is because disadvantaged pupils did not do as well as they should over consecutive years. You have a clear strategy to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Governors are pivotal in checking on their achievement and have been proactive in asking questions about this group. As a result, a wide range of activities now support disadvantaged and other vulnerable pupils. These include specialist help, and provision such as the 'learn to move' programme and allocated time with the emotional literacy support adviser.
- You know every pupil well and check their progress meticulously. Your rigorous monitoring enables you to intervene and provide focused provision and teaching when needed. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress. You have also introduced a relatively new approach for working with the pupils and their families ('achievement for all') to ensure strong home-school partnership working, although the impact of this is still being evaluated.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress that is comparable to that of other pupils in the school. This is diminishing differences between pupils. As a result, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is starting to rise notably across the school, especially in reading and mathematics.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils in writing is slightly less than that seen in reading and mathematics. This is something that you have identified through your own monitoring and evaluation and remains a challenge for you. Furthermore, too few disadvantaged pupils are reaching the highest standards by the end of key stage 1. As we discussed, these are areas that you and your leadership team are concentrating on improving.

- The third key line of enquiry explored the reasons for pupils' consistently strong reading and phonics results in national tests. Following weaknesses in previous years, your governors challenged you to improve pupils' reading to ensure that they get a good start. You took this as a moral imperative and the actions you took as a result have led to impressive and sustained improvement for your pupils. The implementation of a rigorous daily systematic and synthetic phonics programme ensures that pupils are quickly taught the letters and sounds they need to start decoding and reading. Your high expectations are evident in all of the guided phonics sessions where pupils, even in the Reception Year, are active in supporting and helping each other. This strategy is continuing to have a strong impact from the beginning with the children in the early years foundation stage.
- You ensure that staff are highly trained and use assessment information effectively to check the letters and sounds that pupils know. Teachers and teaching assistants follow a rigorous programme skilfully and quickly so that pupils gain speed and confidence in segmenting to spell words and blending to read. They also ensure that pupils' reading books are matched to the letters and sounds that the pupils are learning so they to reinforce their knowledge. As a result, pupils are quick to recognise and use what they have learned and so make rapid progress; for example, a child in Reception who had started school with no previous knowledge of sounds but can now read a range of words with a consonant-vowel-consonant sequence such as 'dog' and 'leg'.
- You and other leaders inspire pupils to delight in reading. Pupils spontaneously told me, 'I love reading!' Staff lead phonics sessions and talk about reading with great enthusiasm and passion. You promote reading as the cornerstone of learning and communicate this to pupils across the school day and in a variety of ways. Consequently, pupils do not simply learn to decode and read. Once they have mastered the intricacies of phonics, pupils are keen to pick up a book and enjoy being independent readers.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils draft, edit and compose high-quality writing across the curriculum
- pupils apply their skills, knowledge and understanding of mathematics widely in other subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the executive headteacher of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

We agreed the timetable and activities for the inspection. I worked extensively with you, including sampling pupils' books and examining information on pupils' progress held by the school's assessment and tracking system. I scrutinised safeguarding records and we discussed a wide range of related matters, including staff recruitment, training and vetting arrangements. I spoke to pupils, staff and parents about their views of safeguarding. I evaluated evidence that shows how you work with other agencies to keep children safe. Together, we visited classes across the school. I met with representatives of the governing body and reviewed school documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary and records of governors' visits. I also held discussions with GTAT's executive headteacher and the chief accounting officer on the board of trustees. I took full account of the 20 responses on Parent View as well as other surveys, including 17 free-texts received through the inspection, and spoke separately with parents. I also spoke with pupils throughout inspection activities. I took account of the 19 staff survey responses to evaluate further aspects of the school's effectiveness.