

Inspection of a good school: Frome Valley C of E VA First School

School Drive, Crossways, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8WR

Inspection date:

4 July 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The curriculum has recently undergone considerable change. This means many of the changes introduced by leaders are still new to pupils. Leaders do not check pupils' learning well enough across different subjects. Sometimes, teaching does not expect enough of pupils. This all means that, while pupils enjoy their learning, they do not learn as well in some subjects as they do in others.

Nonetheless, pupils try hard and typically behave well. Low-level disruption is rare. Children in the pre-school and Reception Year respond well to established routines. They play and learn together harmoniously. Older pupils are respectful to each other and adults.

Pupils are adamant that the most important value of the school charter is to 'treat other people as you want to be treated'. They know why this is important and ways they can do it. Pupils know and understand the rules. They feel that staff use these consistently and fairly. They like the 'wow' rewards and proudly describe their achievements.

Pupils enjoy a range of clubs, responsibilities and residential trips. Through these, they develop characteristics such as resilience and courage. They understand these are important life-long qualities.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum for all pupils. However, pupils do not all learn as well as they could across different subjects. Leaders do not evaluate the impact on pupils' learning precisely enough. As a result, some teaching does not ensure that the ambitious curriculum is delivered effectively.

Leaders have identified the knowledge they want pupils to learn and when. However, teachers do not use assessment well enough to ensure that teaching is precisely matched to what pupils need to learn. For example, in mathematics, some pupils are taught about acute and obtuse angles before they have a secure understanding of right angles. Consequently, they struggle to apply knowledge to new concepts.

Subject leadership is not fully developed. Subject leaders do not have a strong enough overview of their subjects. Teachers use leaders' plans to deliver the curriculum. However, leaders do not check effectively that their plans are leading to pupils learning the intended curriculum. This means that the training provided for teachers is too generic. It does not support staff to improve their own practice. As a result, some teaching expects too little from pupils and leaders do not realise this or challenge it consistently when they do.

A love of reading is visible throughout the school. Children in the pre-school enjoy listening to familiar rhymes and stories. They learn and play in a language-rich environment. Adults model reading books for pleasure and information. Older pupils are enthusiastic about the changes to the library. They appreciate the range of books that they can choose. The teaching of reading enables most pupils to learn well. However, it is not precise enough to help pupils who struggle with reading. For example, some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not catch up well enough. This is because teaching does not address misconceptions quickly enough and books do not always match the sounds these pupils know.

Pupils with SEND learn alongside their peers. They are included in all aspects of school life. Leaders are currently developing staff's understanding of how to adapt the curriculum to enable pupils with SEND to learn well across the curriculum. However, this work is too new for any significant impact to have been seen.

Pupils have a good understanding of how people can be different. They demonstrate respect for different cultures, disabilities and religions. They learn through a well-sequenced personal, social and health education curriculum. They have an age-appropriate knowledge of relationships. They are confident about how to build, solve and restore friendships.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise keeping pupils safe. They have established a culture where everyone takes responsibility. Staff vigilance is evident in the detailed records and use of reporting systems. Staff have a good understanding of the signs of abuse. Leaders make good use of records and the analysis of information. As a result, they have improved systems over time. This enables them to act swiftly and have all relevant information available to them.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They have a particularly secure knowledge of how to stay safe online. They trust adults to listen if they have a worry.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teaching does not always make effective use of assessment to shape curriculum planning. As a result, pupils do not always have the prior knowledge they need to build on. Teachers need to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of what pupils know and can do already in order to plan to build secure knowledge over time.
- Teaching is not consistently ambitious for pupils. This means pupils do not learn as well as they could. Leaders need to ensure that teaching reflects the ambition of the intended curriculum by, for example, using appropriate activities that ensure pupils can achieve their potential.
- Subject leadership is underdeveloped. As a result, leaders do not have a secure enough understanding of how well their curriculum areas are implemented. This hinders pupils' learning. Leaders need to plan improvements with precision and then check they are leading to improvements in pupils' learning.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Frome Valley C of E VA First School, to be good in May 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	141777
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10284074
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	125
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Garry Batt
Headteacher	Julie Thorp
Website	www.frome valley.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Wessex Multi-Academy Trust in September 2022.
- The on-site pre-school for two-, three- and four-year-olds became part of the school in September 2022.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, special educational needs coordinator, curriculum leaders, teaching and support staff, two members of the local governing body and the chief executive officer of the trust.

- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader to discuss how pupils are kept safe in school. Inspectors considered the school's recruitment procedures, staff induction and training, records of concerns and their engagement with external agencies. They also spoke with staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to an adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. In addition, they met with pupils informally and formally to hear their views.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. Inspectors also took into consideration responses to the staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation document, improvement plan and documentation relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Angela Folland, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sean Millar

Ofsted Inspector

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