

Inspection of Piddle Valley Church of England First School

Piddletrenthide, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 7QL

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Annetta Minard. This school is part of Wessex Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Mike Foley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Baker.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Piddle Valley Church of England First School as an academy school under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children thrive from the moment they arrive in Nursery. Pupils go on to achieve well. Staff know pupils individually. They link learning to pupils' interests and build on what they already know, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils love learning at this friendly village school.

Staff expect the best for pupils. Pupils respond positively. They know that they are cared for. Occasionally, some pupils need reminding to do their best. Pupils rightly say that everyone looks out for one another. They share break times together well, often sorting out any problems independently. Consequently, pupils enjoy their play and social times.

Pupils feel happy and safe at school. They know how to keep themselves safe and who they can talk to if they are worried about something. Pupils rightly say that bullying is not an issue. Some parts of the community are less confident, because of historical weaknesses in the school's engagement with them. However, new leaders and the trust have already raised expectations and pupils are responding. Piddle Valley is a harmonious place, where pupils' experiences reflect the school's values of 'living, growing, loving and learning'.

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

Piddle Valley Church of England First is a rapidly improving, effective school. New leaders have introduced a more effective curriculum. Expectations have risen. Teachers utilise well-sequenced planning to promote pupils' learning across subjects in meaningful ways. For example, pupils learn key knowledge in science systematically and what it means to be an effective scientist. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, remember relevant knowledge and achieve well.

The school gives reading the highest priority. High-quality texts underpin planning in the early years, English and wider curriculum areas. Leaders have established a robust programme for teaching reading. Pupils learn to read rapidly as a result. When pupils are at risk of falling behind, staff use strong assessment and targeted support to ensure these pupils keep up. Pupils learn to love reading. They say they enjoy the books their teachers share with them. The school has also built on the strength of the reading curriculum to develop an effective approach to teaching writing. Pupils write for a range of purposes and with increasing skill. Many are now writing at greater depth.

Nevertheless, there is more to do. In some subjects, planning lacks refinement, so that pupils can learn more and with greater understanding. For example, in mathematics, pupils learn to reason, but are not secure in their basic knowledge of mathematics. This means that, occasionally, pupils cannot learn the new curriculum as well as they should.

Children flourish from the moment they start in the very effective early years provision. The school has a carefully planned early years curriculum. This draws on national expectations, but also reflects the needs of the children the school serves. Staff realise leaders' ambition consistently and with skill and enthusiasm. Language and communication underpin carefully designed learning areas, particularly in the indoor learning spaces. Staff promote high expectations through the positive relationships they establish with children. Staff ensure children make the most of every learning opportunity provided. Children love the chance to learn and explore through very well-planned activities. They develop independence and are well prepared for key stage 1.

Pupils' wider development is promoted well. Trips and visits are utilised whenever possible to enrich and enhance pupils' learning. The school site benefits from useful and rewarding resources, including a range of outdoor learning spaces. This promotes pupils' physical and mental well-being. Pupils learn strong attitudes to being healthy, because they enjoy physical education, the games they can play and the well-being promoted through outdoor learning. The school has rightly recognised that helping pupils learn more about diversity is a key next step. Nevertheless, pupils understand how fundamental British values link to the school's values and what they learn in lessons.

Together, the trust and the school have resolutely turned around a previous decline in standards. Expectations have risen and plans for improvement are systematic and effective. Everyone works together to make a difference. Staff feel, and are, valued. As a result, the curriculum has improved, pupils are learning more and are better prepared for the next stage of their education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Improvements to the curriculum are settling in. There is some variation in how well these improvements are implemented. Historic weaknesses in the curriculum mean that pupils have some gaps in their learning. The trust and the school should continue to strengthen the implementation of the curriculum, so that pupils achieve well across all subjects.
- New leaders are engaging more effectively with the community. However, some parents still lack faith in the school because of a long period of poor engagement and communication in the past. The school should continue to strengthen how they work with the community to establish effective collaboration for the future.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	141804
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10298034
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Baker
Headteacher	Annetta Minard
Website	www.piddlevalley.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Piddle Valley Church of England First School converted to become an academy school in April 2015. When its predecessor school, which had the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged outstanding.
- When the school converted to an academy it was part of another multi-academy trust called the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust. In September 2022, the school changed hands and became part of Wessex Multi-Academy Trust.
- Since the predecessor school's last inspection, there have been two changes to the headteacher.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with leaders, including the headteacher and the early years lead. They also spoke to a range of staff.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer from the Trust and four representatives from the local governing board, one of whom chairs the committee and is a trustee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum planning and work linked to other subjects across the national curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and free-text responses.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluations, the school improvement plan, reports provided by external consultants, minutes of the board and from the governing body and information about the school's curriculum.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Carl Thornton

Ofsted Inspector

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