



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School
Local Authority: Essex
Inspection Date: June 11 2019
Reporting Inspector: Damian Fox (Lead Inspector)
Judy Strong (Associate Inspector)

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

Type of School:	Academy	School Address:	Queens Road
School Category:	Secondary		Brentwood
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18		Essex
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		CM14 4EX
Number on roll:	1072	Tel. No.	01277 227156
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	Headteacher:	Dr. R. Wilkin
Date of previous inspection:	30 June 2014	Chair of Governors:	Mr. T. Kemp

Information about the school

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School (BUCHS) is a Catholic Academy. The school is in Essex Local Authority. The school mainly serves the parishes of Brentwood – Cathedral Church of St. Mary & St. Helen with Holy Cross and All Saints; Hutton – St. Joseph the Worker; Ingatestone – St. John the Evangelist & St. Erconwold; Warley – Holy Cross and All Saints; Ongar – St. Helen; Gidea Park – Christ the Eternal High Priest; Harold Hill 1 - Most Holy Redeemer; Harold Hill 2 – St. Dominic’s; Billericay – Most Holy Redeemer, in the Brentwood Deanery. There are currently 1072 students on roll, including 210 in the mixed sixth form. 71% of students are Catholics with most of the remainder coming from other Christian denominations and some coming from other faiths or none. Students come from at least 60 primary schools.

Levels of attainment on entry are above the national average. The majority of students are from minority ethnic background. Currently, 4% of students are on the SEND register, which is below the national average. This includes 0.2% of students with a statement or EHC plan. There are 94 students for whom English is not the first language. 83 students are eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

51% of the teachers are Catholics and eight have the CCRS or similar qualification.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

Brentwood Ursuline Catholic High School is an inclusive Catholic community in which every member of the school is valued. The school is successful in establishing a strong Catholic education for all pupils who affirmed they are treated with dignity and respect in a culture of mutual trust. Governors and School Leaders have a single-minded focus on realising the Ursuline calling to serve young people. They have a strong awareness of their mission based on the charism of St. Angela Merici. The impact of their commitment to shaping the minds, hearts and souls of its pupils is abundantly manifest. The Headteacher and his leadership team constitute an empowering presence in the promotion of the Catholic and Ursuline identity of the school. Pupils identify strongly with their school and its Catholic values. Pastoral care is significantly effective in providing a secure, spiritual learning environment. The school is totally inclusive of pupils with different strengths and challenges. The care pupils receive is a consistent thread running through and a powerful witness to pupils. Relationships across the school demonstrate the impact of the mission of the school, to build a community ‘on the vision of Christ’, in which pupils learn, grow and serve in the knowledge, love and experience of God. Religious Education (R.E.) is regarded as central to the life of the school, is particularly well resourced and is regarded as a core subject by Governors, the leadership team and indeed the entirety of the school community. Outcomes in R.E. are outstanding for all pupils, irrespective of faith or ability, as a result of strong leadership and carefully planned and delivered teaching.

Parents overwhelmingly agree that the school supports their children in developing values and attitudes that serve the ‘Common Good’. One parent said that the school ‘has embedded a fantastic Christian ethos’ that has helped her child feel valued. Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and constitutes the heart of every school celebration. Collective Worship is integrated into the rhythm of school life.

What the school should do to improve further:

Secure an increase in curriculum time for RE at Key Stage 3 in order to fully meet the requirements of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference to reflect the fact that it is a core subject in a Catholic school.

Extend the leadership of Chaplaincy to enhance the prayer and spirituality further through the school.

Pupils derive great benefit from and make a significant contribution to the 'Catholic Life of the School'. They are excellent ambassadors for Catholic education. In discussions and in lessons, pupils articulate their understanding of what it means to belong to an Ursuline Convent School. All pupils take full advantage of the wide-ranging opportunities the school provides for their personal support and development. As a result, they are happy, confident and secure in their own spiritual journey. Pupils behave in a respectful and courteous manner in their encounters with each other and with staff, reflecting the commitment of school leaders to the promotion of high standards of personal behaviour. The inclusion of all members of the community is a significant strength of the school. Pupils were particularly complimentary about the way in which all felt included. Pastoral staff said, 'we do not leave anyone behind.' Pupils have a well-developed understanding of Catholic social teaching. They demonstrate an understanding of their responsibility to serve others and to respect each person as unique and a child of God, through the evident high level of respect for others. Pupils on the Student Council described their role as a 'duty to uphold the school's reputation for kindness and caring'. As a result, pupils respond generously to a range of opportunities to serve others modelled on the example of Christ. Fundraising for people in need is an established part of school life. Pupils are aware of the needs of others in the local and wider community and willingly take up the many opportunities to raise awareness of their challenges and to raise funds. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the House charities such as CAFOD and the Stroke Foundation. Pupil leadership is a significant strength. Pupils respond willingly to the many opportunities to take on responsibility to help and serve others. Prefects play an important role in promoting the ethos of the school and serve as outstanding role models. There is evident effective support for younger pupils who know they can turn to others when they have concerns. This contributes to an environment in which pupils know they are secure and cared for. The profound impact of outstanding pastoral care is evidenced in the calm harmony that characterises pupils' daily lives. Pupils' understanding of their personal responsibility for others is evident in their exemplary behaviour towards each other. The manifest sense of community is evident in the quality of relationships that prevail amongst staff and pupils. No pupil is left out. Older pupils demonstrate their immense pride in serving and in contributing to making the school evermore effective and spiritual. The behaviour of pupils is exemplary whether in lessons or around the school. The mature and respectful behaviour of pupils makes a significant contribution to the learning environment and the strong Ursuline ethos that permeates the school. The view of the vast majority of parents is that the school is highly successful in everything it does for them and their children. One parent commented on the positive impact the strong, Catholic ethos was having on her child.

The Ursuline Convent School empowers students to realise in their lives the central theme of its mission. The School Mission Statement is a clear and inspiring expression of the educational mission of the Church. 'To base the life of the school on the vision of Christ' captures the ethos of this outstanding Catholic school, particularly in terms of the way in which the ministry of Christ is modelled by all staff. The way in which students relate to each other and offer mutual support reflects the deep sense of care for each other.

The school is distinctly Catholic. The Catholic ethos and identity of the school community is visible through the centrality of religious icons and images displayed and treated with respect throughout the school. The chapel is visually inspiring. The original altar from the Ursuline Convent era serves as a physical and spiritual link with the charism of the Ursuline order, in whose footsteps the school proudly walks. The chapel serves as the spiritual centre of the school and is an inspiration for teachers and pupils. They are blessed to have the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel. The chapel is open all day and is used effectively for prayer and reflection by staff and pupils. The 'Catholic Life of the School' forms a regular feature of the professional development of all staff. Catholic distinctiveness also features prominently in staff induction programmes. The way in which the Headteacher and his leadership team model 'Catholic Life', constitutes a significant formative instrument.

Pastoral care is a significant strength of the school, evidenced in interviews with Governors, students and parents. Several parents cited examples of the impact of the strong supportive ethos on their children. Students unanimously voiced their affirmation of the inspiring, encouraging and caring nature of pastoral support, particularly at crucial times in their lives. A secure Relationships and Sex Education programme is evident.

Behaviour policies are rooted in Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church. These policies embody throughout the importance of personal responsibility and the need for justice and forgiveness. Pupils spoke warmly of the support, praise and encouragement they receive. Students highlighted the supportive nature of relationships between staff and students and their impact on the academic, spiritual, social and cultural development of students.

The school's leadership is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. The Governing Body describe an understanding of their role as preparing young girls to be 'complete people'. Leaders are committed to maintaining a balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctiveness. They have a strong sense of vocation to provide a school that responds to the needs and strengths of staff and pupils. The development of the 'Catholic Life of the School' is seen as a core leadership responsibility. The obvious commitment of the school to the welfare of the pupils is reflected in the programme of continuing professional development. The Governing Body meets regularly with the Headteacher and provide appropriate support and challenge. They are dedicated to the development of the 'Catholic Life of the School'. They visit regularly for Mass and special events. The self-evaluation prior to the inspection was fully endorsed by inspectors in all areas. The impact of the Headteacher and his senior staff is a significant factor in strengthening spiritual development across the school. The school has highly successful strategies for engaging with almost all parents and carers to the very obvious benefit of pupils, including those who might traditionally find working with the school difficult. The way in which there is constant communication between the school and parents was affirmed unanimously during parental interviews. The dedication of leaders and managers to their pupils has resulted in a highly effective transition process for pupils from primary school who need further opportunities to learn. Staff training ensures that pupils joining the school feel secure and welcome.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 1

Pupils are passionate about Religious Education. They generally enjoy Religious Education lessons and there was unanimous affirmation during interviews and within the classroom, that they appreciate the encouragement and praise they receive. Pupils particularly appreciate the range of teaching strategies used by teachers to engage and enthuse them. One pupil spoke of the 'genuine passion' teachers had for the subject. They value their teachers highly. They develop excellent relationships based on trust and respect. As a result, pupils respond with commitment and concentrate well. Behaviour for learning is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils to which nearly all pupils rise. As a result, almost all pupils are making rapid and sustained progress. There are no perceivable differences between different groups of pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. Pupils acquire knowledge. Their ability to interpret sources, including scripture, demonstrates their developed understanding of key learning concepts. For example, in a lesson studying Sikhism, interpreting key words and symbols helped pupils develop an understanding of several similarities between Sikhism and Christianity. Students join the school from over fifty primary schools, so pupils display a wide range of understanding of Catholic Christianity on entry. Notwithstanding this wide range, school data shows that students make at least good progress and often outstanding progress at Key Stage 4 in Religious Education. Students display good, and in most cases, outstanding age-appropriate standards of religious literacy. Most pupils were on task throughout the lesson. Outcomes in Religious Education are broadly in line with the school average in other subjects. This is in the context of a very high achieving school. By the end of their time at the school, pupils have developed excellent subject knowledge of their faith and that of other faiths. Observations and a review of written work showed the pride pupils have in their learning.

Almost all pupils make sustained progress as a result of teaching that is at least good and often outstanding. Teachers use excellent subject knowledge and inspiring pedagogy to present complex topics in ways both engaging and accessible to all pupils. A GCSE class, for example, exemplified the range of activities typical of Religious Education lessons observed during the inspection. Pupils worked collaboratively and independently as a result of effective planning and guidance from the teacher. A consistent approach to learning by all Religious Education teachers is exemplary and reflects a collaborative approach among staff whose sharing of expertise contributes significantly to an effective learning environment. Students are making greater than national average progress because teachers have a high level of confidence and expertise both in terms of their specialist knowledge and their understanding of effective learning in Religious Education. As a result, they use a very wide range of innovative and imaginative resources and teaching strategies to stimulate pupils'

active participation in their learning and so secure outstanding progress. Lessons are planned and taught in accordance with the scheme of work, taking account of pupils' prior learning and achievement. Assessment at key stage 3 is undertaken in line with school policy. It effectively uses criteria focused on skill development which will promote the skills needed for GCSE Religious Studies. The moderation of work at all key stages is regarded as a key strategy for enhancing student progress. These were characterised by knowledgeable teachers who were passionate about the subject and inspired pupils to commit to learning. The pace and structure of lessons ensured that pupils were happy to engage and achieve. Questioning is used skilfully to promote understanding and further reflection.

Leaders and Governors ensure the curriculum fulfils the content requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. Governors understand that the curriculum allocation at KS3 does not yet meet these requirements. The School's Self Evaluation is honest and accurate and reflects the pride the school has in the success of Religious Education, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders and Governors are ambitious for improving outcomes in Religious Education further. Governors are effective in their role in both supporting and challenging the Senior Leaders. They are kept fully informed through the Governors' Chaplaincy Committee that is active in monitoring standards of teaching and learning. Headteacher reports and regular participation in departmental reviews by Governors ensure an understanding of the strengths of teaching and learning and areas for further development. The Headteacher is committed passionately to promoting the pivotal role of the Religious Education department in this outstanding Catholic school. This was evidenced during the inspection in discussions with him and Governors. His tangible support constitutes confirmation that his promotion of the Religious Education department goes beyond public rhetoric. Leadership of Religious Education inspires confidence and whole-hearted commitment from pupils and colleagues. As a result of the Head of Department's experience and expertise, Religious Education has a very high profile in the life of the school and has a profound impact on the moral and spiritual development of pupils. Leadership of Religious Education focuses relentlessly on improving teaching and learning in Religious Education, resulting in teaching that is likely to be outstanding and at least consistently good. Attainment and progress are monitored following assessments. There is detailed evidence of rigorous tracking of pupils' learning. The Head of Department meets with senior leaders to analyse data and plan for appropriate challenge and support for targeted pupils.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

Acts of worship engage all pupils' interest and inspire in them deep thought and heartfelt response. There is a palpable enthusiasm for Collective Worship, reflected in the quality of prayerful silence and the depth of participation in community prayers. Students respond reverently and respectfully to daily opportunities to experience and participate in prayer and worship. Visiting clergy confirmed the Inspectors' findings that pupils respond with reverence and respect in acts of worship. During the inspection, an assembly was marked by an atmosphere of reverence, respect and active engagement on the part of students. Pupils understand the importance of prayer and express the centrality of it in their lives. They are involved in preparing liturgies and are keen to be involved in reading, serving and singing. As they move through the school, pupils are increasingly taking responsibility for choosing and preparing resources, planning and the delivery of prayerful worship experiences. Pupils are keen to lead prayers and to write their own prayers. They respond with sincerity when invited to pray for special intentions. They participate through prayer, reading, serving and singing. Pupils have a very good understanding of the Church's liturgical year, its seasons and feasts. The experience of living and working in a praying community has had a profound and visible effect on the development of all pupils, irrespective of ability or faith background. In the assemblies and services that took place during the inspection, pupils were engaged in preparing and leading. The school acknowledges that developing chaplaincy across the school is an area for development.

Collective Worship is central to the life of the school for staff and pupils, whatever their own particular faith. It forms the heart of every school celebration. It is not something added on to the day. Pupils are confident in celebrating their differences and act with integrity when praying together. Each day starts with prayer and Collective Worship, whether in the form class, or assemblies. The well-appointed school chapel is a feature of the school and is always open to the community for prayer and reflection. During the inspection, a student-led prayer group discussed the impact of God in the lives of pupils and their families. Pupils spoke openly about their faith journey and the importance of recognising their need for God. Mass for the whole school is celebrated each term and on all Holy Days of Obligation. Thus pupils and teachers are able to enjoy the annual

celebration of the Church's year. Pupils also have opportunities for class Masses and year Masses throughout the year. The highlights are Masses for the feast days of St Ursula and St Angela.

Leaders and governors, including the chaplain, have expert knowledge of how to plan and deliver quality experiences for Collective Worship. They are committed to the provision of effective liturgical celebrations. They understand their responsibility to provide opportunities for staff and pupils to experience prayer and worship in a variety of forms. Governors effectively monitor the quality of provision through regular visits to the school and through the governors' chaplaincy committee. They are proud of upholding the charism of the Ursuline order with the deep sense of spirituality that permeates the community. They have ensured that Collective Worship is integral to the growth of a Catholic, spiritual community with a range of opportunities for prayer and worship. Leaders and governors demonstrate a thorough understanding of the Church's liturgical year. The Headteacher is passionately committed to the building of an authentic Catholic community. With senior leaders, he ensures that all staff in the school receive formation of their own spiritual development. There is also a high degree of collaboration between the Religious Education department and the chaplain, resulting in a vibrant Catholic worshipping community. Chaplaincy is a developing strength of the school. The Chaplain provides deep and effective counselling support for pupils and is beginning to work effectively with the Head of Religious Education. The school sees this as an area for further development.