



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report



Name of School: The Ursuline Preparatory School, Brentwood

LEA: Essex

Inspection Date: 5th November 2015

Reporting Inspector: Pamela Brannigan

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

Type of School: Primary
School Category: Independent
Age range of pupils: 3 - 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 160
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: 18th May 2000

School Address:
Old Great Ropers
Great Ropers Lane
Warley
Brentwood
Essex
CM13 3HR

Tel. No. 01277 227152
Headteacher: Mrs P Wilson
Chair of Governors: Mrs F Deery

Information about the school

The Ursuline Preparatory Catholic School is an independent Catholic day school situated in Warley near Brentwood Essex and part of the diocese of Brentwood. There are 160 pupils on roll, 40% of whom are Catholic, coming from several local parishes. The pupils are aged from 3 to 11, organised into 9 classes of 20 pupils each. The school has a stable staff; 69% of teachers are Catholic. The school prepares pupils for scholarship examinations including Common Entrance and a range of entry papers for secondary schools. An exceptionally large range of extra-curricular activities are on offer and the school has recently opened a Breakfast club.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Satisfactory 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

The Ursuline Preparatory School is outstanding in its effectiveness in providing Catholic education. The head teacher together with the governors and members of the senior leadership team are very effective in promoting the Catholic dimension of the school. Staff are excellent role models for the pupils. Prayer is an integral part of the school's daily life and is central to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Behaviour is very good and pupils work hard and thrive within a strong Christian community where they feel loved, well supported and safe. Teaching is very good and often outstanding. During the course of their time in the school, pupils make excellent good progress.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. School leadership together with governors have put in place a number of initiatives linked to teaching and learning in recent years including the 'Come and See' religious education programme for Early Years. There is a strong commitment to frequent self-evaluation and improvement. The Catholic dimension of the school is strengthened through the very good pastoral care, good parish links and the continuing support of the founding order. The head teacher, ably supported by all members of staff, ensures the Catholic mission of the school is explicit and understood by the entire school community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to implement the areas currently identified in the school development plan.
- Review peer assessment initiatives and evaluate the impact on teaching and learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

The quality of pupils' learning and progress in religious education is outstanding. Pupils' behaviour for learning is excellent. They are interested in their lessons and co-operate and work well individually and in pairs. Pupils understand and strive to achieve their learning objectives. Overall they make excellent progress and achieve and sometimes exceed diocesan expectations by the end of Key Stage 2.

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is also outstanding. Pupils are eager to participate in all aspects of school life. They are friendly and ready to help each other; they feel valued, safe and well supported. Pupils enjoy the friendly

atmosphere; they have a common sense of belonging, everyone is important and everyone belongs. They value the many opportunities offered to develop a sense of service and to show leadership as prefects and members of the school council. 'Charity representatives' suggest ways to support many of the local and national charities linked to the school and understand that gospel values underpin these activities. Older pupils are aware of the needs within their own community and the wider world. An annual retreat day for Year 6 supports the spiritual life of pupils.

The prayer life of the school is central to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. They know formal prayers appropriate for their age group and are given opportunities for reflection and spontaneous prayer. During collective worship they are attentive and responsive. Assemblies begin with prayers and include scripture references. All classrooms have a prayer table with a bible, statue and other religious artefacts which provides a focal point for reflection. Pupils are encouraged to compose their own prayers in class and at home. The Church's liturgical year is celebrated through assemblies and masses as well as Reconciliation, Harvest and Christingle. Lunchtime Rosary groups in May and October are well attended.

Chaplaincy is currently regarded as the shared responsibility of all staff as the previous chaplain has moved out of the area. Pupils know where to go for help if they have a concern about themselves or other pupils. They feel safe, well cared for and believe their views are valued and taken into account. They talk enthusiastically about their involvement in preparing and participating in liturgical celebrations.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The leadership of the school's Catholic life is outstanding. The experienced head teacher has a clear vision for the school which is shared by all members of the school community. All the staff clearly promote the Catholic life of the school and are excellent role models for pupils. The Catholic ethos of the school is stated through its mission statement and evidenced in its daily life and within the wider community. There is a range of lovely religious education related displays in classes and around the school which are linked to topic themes, the liturgical year, particular events or specific prayers.

The subject leader for religious education is experienced, enthusiastic and highly motivated to keep abreast in current developments in the subject particularly in regard to assessment and moderation of levels of attainment of pupils' work. She attends diocesan conferences and has meetings with other Catholic schools. She has recently introduced a new scheme of work for Early Years which is currently being evaluated. Together with the headteacher she ensures religious education is regarded as a core subject throughout the school. She acts as mentor for new teachers and is also able to support or work alongside colleagues when necessary. In-service sessions are used effectively to support and develop staff skills and subject knowledge. Effective monitoring of planning and assessments enables school leaders to have a good knowledge of where extra support is required.

Trustees and members of the governing body are experienced, aware of their responsibilities and understand the strengths of the school. They are extremely knowledgeable about the school and they have a good understanding its day-to-day activities. They are actively involved in the current initiative to provide a new school hall of sufficient size to accommodate all members of the school community. There are regular monitoring visits from individual governors and reports prepared for the full governing body. They are kept well informed about new initiatives in religious education and how these are being monitored. Governors are invited to end of term collective worship and there are plans to further involve them in the Catholic life of the school.

The school is highly regarded by its parent body. Regular questionnaires invite comments about aspects of the school although these do not specifically include Catholic Life. The headteacher also interviews parents when their children leave the school and invites them to reflect on their whole experience at The Ursuline Preparatory School. Responses are overwhelmingly positive with appreciation shown for the high standard of education, the care shown to pupils and the wide range of extra-curricular activities available. Parents are invited to school celebrations particularly when their own children are involved in class assemblies.

Provision

Grade 1

Good planning, lively pace, open and challenging questioning and effective use of talking partners result in teaching being very good or outstanding. In a Year 2 lesson on 'The Trinity' the teacher gave particularly good explanations to aid understanding of this mystery. Excellent resources are available to support children in their study of scripture and biblical knowledge. Differentiation of tasks enable all pupils to engage with the learning objective. In Key Stage 2 pupils are encouraged to identify sources of revelation and quote from them in their written work. Key words and religious terminology are on display in classrooms which enables pupils to use correct vocabulary. Occasionally, some opportunities are missed to challenge pupils but, overall, they make very good progress. Workbooks are well presented and reflect pupils' pride in their work. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and provide good support enabling all groups to make excellent progress.

The school devotes 10% of teaching time to religious education and uses the scheme, "The Way, The truth and The Life" in Key Stages 1 and 2 and 'Come and See' in Early Years. The curriculum is enhanced through effective links with local clergy and visits to Brentwood cathedral. Pupils are given an excellent foundation in Early Years. During the inspection the different parts and symbolism of the baptismal ceremony were being explored through role play with small groups of pupils. Drama is also incorporated into the curriculum in other year groups. Other faiths are well taught and a visit to a synagogue enhances the study of Judaism. The curriculum is further enriched through the school's charity work, its musical flair and its links with other Ursuline schools.

School leadership ensures collective worship is well planned and there is a variety of formal and informal opportunities for daily prayer. Masses are celebrated in school, special assemblies are held and good use is made of a reflective prayer garden which provides a tranquil space for groups of pupils. The school offers a very wide variety of clubs and enrichment activities which provide opportunities for the development of skills and interests. Achievement in school and outside of school is celebrated. Assemblies are often led by Year 6 pupils and members of staff lead lunchtime Rosary groups daily throughout May and October.

The inspector would like to thank all members of the school community for the warm welcome and the hospitality extended during her visit.