



Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School

URN: 138834

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Brentwood

29–30 January 2026

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

1

Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

1

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

1

Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

1

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- The school has responded fully to the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

What the school does well

- The Ursuline ideal of 'insieme' (togetherness) is exemplified through the loving, caring and inclusive relationships which recognise the uniqueness and dignity of every student and member of staff.
- Students enjoy religious education and truly appreciate the efforts of their teachers to make the lessons engaging and intellectually challenging.
- Leaders are inspirational role models, creating a genuine, authentic vision of Catholic education for all.
- Staff and students regularly use their gifts and talents to promote prayer and liturgy through music, art, dance and drama in a way which reflects the riches of the Church.
- The high standard of displays in classrooms, corridors and communal areas is an effective witness to the school's Catholic identity, mission and charisma.

What the school needs to improve

- Students need to be able to articulate the theology underpinning all of the principles of Catholic social teaching.
- The prayer and liturgy leaders should become more involved in evaluating the quality of their presentations.
- Develop a consistent approach to feedback in religious education so that students can articulate with confidence the steps needed to improve further.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

1

The school motto of 'Duty' is fulfilled by students through their duty to show Ursuline behaviour, their duty to help each other and their duty to support charitable causes. A student who came to the sixth form said, 'It is like night and day compared to my old school. The teachers are nicer and it feels like a community'. The Ursuline ideal of 'insieme' or 'togetherness' is not only apparent in the relationships between students but also among staff. This was confirmed by a teacher who commented, 'I feel we are united in harmony. It is a privilege to work in a school where the Catholic ethos underpins everything we do. I'm so proud of the young people we send out into the world'. The school recently celebrated its 125th anniversary and the links to the past are palpable along corridors, in chapels, communal areas and the library with impressive displays of students' artwork promoting the rich tapestry of Ursuline virtues, house saints and Catholic social teaching. The words of St Angela Merici, 'Do something, get moving, risk new things, stick to it' encourage the students to fulfil their God-given potential. They gladly embraced their personal responsibility to serve through the Ursuline virtue of 'serviam' (I will serve) by supporting local, national and global charities including Cafod's appeal for Ukraine, the Salvation Army toy appeal, the St Vincent De Paul foodbank, the Rainbow Trust and Little Havens children's hospice.

Loving attention has been given to the school's Catholic character which is proudly displayed in the physical environment. Traditional statues and images are carefully placed to promote the rich history of the school. For many, the Blessed Sacrament Chapel is considered a spiritual haven and students fully appreciate the welcome to all who enter — every child matters at Brentwood Ursuline. Staff have positively embraced the Ursuline virtues and the principles of Catholic social teaching by linking them to their teaching. However, more work is required to

ensure students are familiar with all the principles and the theology underpinning them. A member of staff commented, 'It felt to me on my very first day at the school walking the corridors, like I was indeed meant to be here, at this very school. I continued to feel that way and that being here teaching a subject I love and walking with young people on their faith journey is a true honour'. Staff are excellent role models, sharing their passion and enthusiasm with students. Form tutors deliver the 'insieme' programme to help students grow in virtue. House leaders bear witness by encouraging students to become actively involved in the numerous charitable activities. The relationships, sex and health education programme is a bespoke spiral curriculum that embeds all the Church and statutory requirements. It regularly undergoes quality assurance procedures and staff receive appropriate school-based training.

Senior leaders and governors ensure that policies promote the Catholic identity and Ursuline charism. They demonstrate a deep understanding of the school's unique character and can clearly articulate its mission. This was reinforced by a member of staff who said, 'The school leadership take our ethos extremely seriously and this makes it easy as a member of staff to support the implementation of their vision'. The Catholic curriculum is a real strength of the school and departments are expected to highlight Catholic social teaching and Ursuline virtues in their teaching. The staff survey revealed that 100% of staff responses agreed or strongly agreed that the Catholic identity of the school has an impact on the curriculum, while 96% felt that the whole curriculum reflects Church teaching on the goodness of creation and the role of stewardship. At Brentwood Ursuline there is an explicit commitment to both the physical and mental wellbeing of students and staff. Interviews with staff and the survey portray a place where people feel a genuine sense of togetherness.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

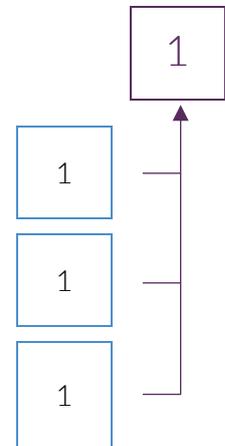
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education



Outcomes in religious education at Brentwood Ursuline are outstanding. Students consistently achieve significantly above national averages in both GCSE and A level. The A level results reflect high levels of subject mastery and deep understanding of Catholic theology and moral teaching. Students are developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect the learning required for the *Religious Education Directory*. However, a consistent approach to feedback across the department is required so that students understand what they need to do to improve their responses. Fully focused in lessons, students repeatedly speak about how much they enjoy religious education. Key vocabulary booklets complement the introduction of new terms in every lesson and regular discussion of vocabulary ensures students are religiously literate and engaged. Recall is embedded at the start of every lesson and reinforces students understanding of key concepts. They are, therefore, able to answer and ask questions confidently about their learning. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is carefully designed to build strong foundations for success at GCSE, enabling students to be fully prepared both academically and spiritually. Consequently, they are able to demonstrate a profound understanding of faith in action, scripture and Church teaching.

All religious education lessons are mixed ability taught, with high quality resources that are challenging, engaging and suited to students' abilities. Relationships between staff and students are excellent, creating a respectful and engaging learning environment where every learner feels valued and supported. A consistent approach to curriculum delivery ensures that all pupils receive the same rich and challenging diet of learning. The quality of questioning by teachers is consistently high, prompting deep reflection, which leads to critical thinking and a sophisticated command of religious literacy. Different types of questioning are used in lessons to assess students' understanding; some are specifically targeted through cold calling, while others are

asked to nominate another student to extend and elaborate on ideas and responses, thus increasing engagement. In an excellent A level revision lesson on death and the afterlife, the teacher shared his knowledge of the topic, examination specifications and requirements with the students. They, in turn, were able to ask pertinent questions and provide detailed responses. Students were willing to take risks and learn from their misconceptions when working in groups on different religions' approaches to life after death. They make good use of the impressive course booklets, which are bespoke and designed by the department to help all students. In a Year 10 lesson on euthanasia, the teacher's calm and purposeful approach enabled effective learning to take place. Students were engaged and on task, enjoying their learning and interested in the content. Teachers' strong subject knowledge gives the students reassurance and confidence. The vibrant displays of student work in classrooms highlight their achievements and enhance the learning environment.

Leaders and governors ensure that there is regular training on the new *Religious Education Directory*. Consequently, the new curriculum is fully embedded and resources are used imaginatively and creatively. Religious education is viewed as the core of the core with parity between the subject and the rest of the core subjects in relation to resourcing, timetabling and accommodation. The expertise and commitment of the religious education team is a real strength. Three members hold a CCRS and two are AQA examiners. Four staff are also learning champions for special educational needs and / or disabilities, leading training and sharing good practice across the school. The head of religious education provides a clear vision of the subject as both academically rigorous and spiritually formative. Leaders and governors, along with the chaplain, work closely with the team to embed religious education into the daily life of the school. The curriculum is appropriately sequenced and demands more of the learners as lessons progress. Students spoke about how beneficial it is to have separate teachers of Christianity and Judaism at GCSE, ensuring content is introduced systematically to support understanding and recall. Enrichment activities include a wide range of guest speakers and a comprehensive retreat programme which provides students with opportunities to promote their learning and engagement of religious education and their faith.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

1

1

The experience of prayer and liturgy engages students deeply and leads to wholehearted participation. Students are reverent and attentive when prayers are said during morning registration by the form tutor or students. They willingly volunteer for a variety of roles including altar servers, readers and composing prayers of the faithful. The inclusive nature of the school is further enhanced when students recite prayers in their home languages. Their God-given talents are celebrated through liturgical dance and the choirs as well as dramatic and artistic contributions to prayer and liturgy. Students, with the support of the chaplain, are involved in the planning and leading of prayer and liturgy. They receive liturgical formation to help them undertake their ministries and older students act as mentors and guide them through the process. However, prayer and liturgy leaders should now be encouraged to formally evaluate the quality of their presentations so that they can become even better. Year 10 students spoke about praying for Year 11 students sitting their mock examinations and cherish this as part of the community they are proud to belong to. The programme of retreats for older students, and days of prayer and reflection in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel for younger students, are impactful and something the students truly value. They are clear that worship leads to action and were keen to cite examples of this including the regular contributions to food banks.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school, shaping its rhythm and reflecting a deep and authentic Catholic identity. Form time prayer makes links to the school prayer, Ursuline values and Catholic social teaching. Staff spoke with enthusiasm about the importance of prayer and worship. 98% of staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Christ is at the heart of the school. This is reinforced by the weekly activities which they complete in their 'insieme' workbooks which they consider to be part of the expectation of being a member of the Ursuline community. The students value the contribution made by the school chaplain. She is highly

skilled in helping students to confidently plan and lead prayer and liturgy. The creative and artistic skills of staff and students are another significant strength of the school. A wide range of subjects promote prayer and liturgy including music, art, drama and dance. The expertise of the staff and the students is integrated into prayer and liturgy and enhances the experience for all. A parent commented, 'I really enjoy the chaplaincy provision and appreciate the weekly updates. Also, the parent prayer portal is a great way for us, as parents, to be connected to the school and to share our collective faith'. Parents are invited to school regularly to support the developing prayer life of the school.

Leaders, including governors, have a developed understanding of the different levels and skills of participation that reflect the age and capacity of students. The effectiveness of the plan is evident in the way older students, as part of the Kairos leadership group, support younger students in the planning and preparation of their assemblies and Masses. The annual plan of provision provides an outline of the liturgical events for the year. Holy days of obligation and feast days are carefully planned so that all can celebrate Mass. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is made available during the seasons of Lent and Advent. Leaders place the highest priority on inspirational professional development of all staff. Staff training regularly focuses on prayer and liturgy with lots of high-quality support materials available for staff on students. A member of staff commented, 'I have been helped to grow spiritually during my time at the Ursuline'. All staff are invited to attend an afternoon retreat every summer term at Abbotswick. Leaders ensure provision for prayer and liturgy is prioritised and as a consequence relevant staff are supported in developing high quality materials and experiences of prayer and liturgy.

Information about the school

Full name of school	Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School
School unique reference number (URN)	138834
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8815461
Full postal address of the school	Queen's Road, Brentwood, Essex, CM14 4EX
School phone number	01277227156
Headteacher	Richard Wilkin
Chair of governors	Trevor Kemp
School Website	http://www.brentwoodursuline.co.uk
Trusteeship	Ursulines of Brentwood
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Dermot O'Neill	Lead
Claire O'Neill	Team
Sinead McGinty	Team

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement