



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School

Inspection Date: 30th June 2014

Reporting Inspector: Rev Dr W. John Dickson SDB

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

Type of School: Academy
School Category: Secondary
Age range of pupils: 11-18
Gender of pupils: Female
Number on roll: 1014
Appropriate Authority: Brentwood
Date of previous inspection: 15th October 2009

School Address: : Queen's Road,
Brentwood CM14 4EX ·
Phone: 441277227156

Headteacher: Dr Richard Wilkin

Information about the school

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School is a Catholic Academy in the county of Essex in the diocese of Brentwood. Its students come from 40 primary schools. Practicing Catholic students in the parishes of Brentwood, Hutton, Ingatestone, Warley, Ongar, Harold Hill Most Holy Redeemer and St Dominic's and Most Holy Redeemer, Billericay form our priority area but students are also drawn from parishes across South Essex and London boroughs. There are currently 1014 pupils aged 11-18 on roll and the school is over subscribed. The majority of pupils are of White British with 25% of students from a range of ethnic minorities. The student population represents the full range of social, economic and educational backgrounds of whom 80% are Catholics. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below the national average and the proportion receiving pupil premium or disabled receiving support for special educational needs or school action plus is below the national average. There are 66.12 fte. teachers of whom 43% are Catholic and 9 hold the CCRS.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School is an outstanding Ursuline school with a Catholic ethos which permeates all areas. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school and opportunities for pupils' spiritual and moral development are excellent. The head appointed in 2012 and senior leadership team have taken a number of new initiatives to develop the Catholic life of the school as well as focusing on teaching, learning, assessment and monitoring. Pastoral care is very good and shared by all members of the school community. Relationships within the school are very good and pupils feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents welcome the Catholicity of the school, appreciate the good communication with staff and the way the school keeps them informed. Pupils' attainment in RE is outstanding.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. Over the last 2 years the SLT has put in place systems which ensure that student progress is accurately tracked and that this has critically informed the style of teaching and learning taking place. The appointment of the Head of religious education to the SLT and the appointment of a new second in department ensures capacity to improve even further. The last inspection identified two areas for development linked to greater use of assessment to inform lesson planning and the development of Chaplaincy. These have been addressed very well. The introduction of a new system for student tracking in RE has shaped teaching styles focusing on students actively learning and taking responsibility for their learning. Currently in Chaplaincy retreats additional opportunities are being provided for pupils to demonstrate their understanding and commitment to the Catholic Life of the school. The school gives a high profile to religious education and has very good strategies to share good practice and support new teachers.

The senior leadership team and governors have a clear vision for the Catholicity of the school and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. Senior staff are very good role models and all staff are given opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding of the Ursuline ethos through attendance at a staff training day and all new staff receive appropriate induction to working in a Catholic school. .

What the school should do to improve further

Enhance the Catholic life of the school by further developing the student engagement in assemblies and evaluating liturgical experiences.

Support attainment by: further developing consistency in assessment and sharing good practice in teaching and learning,

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

Students at BUCHS are very conscious of being part of the Ursuline family of schools and understand in outline something of the educational tradition of St Angela Merici and her pioneering way of educating girls. 'Doing our duty (the school motto), being good Christian role models, being supportive of one another, being part of the global Ursuline community and taking responsibility to encourage women to succeed' offers their summary of the outcome of their education. The students make an outstanding contribution to leading the Catholic life of their school. They take responsibility in vertical tutor groups for leading morning prayers in classrooms, mentoring younger students, and helping with paired reading. They enjoy serving at Mass and as Yr 12-13 take an active part in leading retreats for younger students and building a strong sense of community. They respond very well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. Up to 50 of the students take part in the Annual Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes and others volunteer through the Ursuline network both at home and abroad. Members of the Student Voice and prefects play a major part in school life and older pupils help and support younger ones. Several local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year and pupils support a Legacy Fund for students in Kenya. Last year the school raised £10,446.04 for charity. Pupils show respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is excellent and pupils value the sense of community created within the school.

Prayer and worship are central to school life. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to develop their faith journey in the extensive retreat programme involving all students at KS3, and voluntarily residential retreats for KS4 and the VI Form. They are involved in preparation for assemblies, liturgies and masses and participate well. Whole School Liturgies in the Cathedral and celebrations of the Ursuline Feasts highlight the school's Catholic and Ursuline identity. Supporting families suffering bereavement of fellow students marks the quality of the students' engagement with one another and is deeply appreciated by the families involved. The Lourdes Group try to continue the aspect of service developed in the pilgrimage when they return and students are significant contributors to the Diocesan Youth Service events, e.g. Youth Gather. Curriculum Extension Days are valued by students as ways of developing a deeper awareness of wider social issues, such as mental health issues, drugs awareness, world peace and world development issues. Assemblies could be improved by use of music, and more student response.

Pastoral care is very good and given a high priority by staff and governors who work closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils and the Catholic life of the community. Pupils feel safe, well cared-for and know where to go when they need support. They value being

in a friendly environment where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents value the care given to their children, the quality of education and the approachability of staff.

Achievement in Religious Education is outstanding. At Key Stages 3, 4 and at AS and A2 students show high levels of achievement. Though many students enter Year 7 with higher than average ability, at the end of KS 3 in RE they have made more progress than they have in English. At KS 4 students achieve consistently outstanding results with 89% of students A*-C with 58% A*-A in 2013. Raise Online shows that the RE results are the highest performing in the school and well above the national average. At A-level the numbers of students opting for AS and A2 are growing and the results are consistently high. At A2 in 2013, students achieved 76% A-C. Progress in religious education is good. Pupils work with application and interest and when challenged display high levels of understanding and enjoy debate and exploring difficult questions. They enjoy their religious education lessons and work very well together. They are eager to see the relevance of Catholic faith to the complex questions that today's world poses. They understand religious language and accurately use important theological terms.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The headteacher demonstrates excellent leadership of the school through the way he promotes the provision for the Catholic life of the school. His appointment of the Head of RE as an assistant Head and the appointment of a Second in Department mark his commitment to improving the impact of RE in the school's life. He communicates a clear Catholic vision to the whole community, emphasizing its Ursuline roots and this is affirmed by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. Encouraging the Governors to develop and support the Catholic Life of the school through the new Chaplaincy Committee has stimulated a deeper understanding and commitment to its continued development.

Senior leaders monitor religious education by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning which is followed by feedback to individual teachers. The school has identified the need to put in place additional assessment strategies at KS3 to ensure pupils are able to demonstrate higher levels of attainment and continuing progress.

A staff working party have undertaken a review of the RE Department and Chaplaincy and have set up a Governors' Chaplaincy Committee to support the Catholic Life of the school. As a result, they are in the process of rewriting the School's Sex and Relationships Education Policy, which is still at an early stage of development. One governor represents the Ursuline Sisters who founded the school and through Ursuline Links, the Sisters are able to communicate their vision to current staff and students. The role of the RE link Governor and the Chaplaincy Committee recognize the need to ensure that there is an effective monitoring system in place to evaluate all aspects of the religious life of the school and to enable the governing body to challenge and support effectively.

Provision

Grade 1

Provision for prayer and worship at BUCHS is outstanding. The Chaplain plays a central role in the Catholic Life of the school. Liturgies are well planned and other departments cooperate to highlight the Catholic identity of the school. They include visual bible readings drama, singing and music. Pupils are involved in liturgies which are very well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. Students are clearly involved in preparation and performance through reading, music, drama and in serving. Students lead the collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for personal reflection. The beautiful Blessed Sacrament Chapel is at the heart of the school and is available for classes and groups. Full school masses that celebrate the Ursuline Feasts are held in the Cathedral three times a year. Voluntary lunch-time Mass as well as other liturgies are celebrated in school throughout the year. The priest from the Cathedral parish supports the school through masses, liturgies and is also a governor. Students are also offered the opportunity to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation in either Advent or Lent. Key moments in the liturgical year are marked by attendance at the parish mass in the Cathedral for KS3 and by assemblies for other years.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is excellent. During the inspection, lessons observed were good or outstanding. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. Pupils work very well and make very good progress. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments and take every opportunity to extend knowledge and develop understanding. However, teachers' marking needs to be more consistent across the key stages. While there is some excellent practice in offering formative comments, more work is still needed to ensure consistency.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is outstanding. Generally 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education at KS3 and 4. The revised schemes of work at KS3 will offer even more opportunities to adapt lessons to the needs of students at different levels of achievement. The headteacher gives religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the investment in staff. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. The hidden curriculum of strong relationships between staff and students contributes very well to their spiritual and moral development. The excellent range of extra-curricular activities, particularly of voluntary work in and out of the school, enables students to develop real confidence in their gifts and talents which they can use to make a difference in the world.

The inspectors would like to express their thanks and appreciation to all members of the school community for their welcome and openness during the inspection.