

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School

Queen's Road, Brentwood, CM14 4EX

Inspection dates 7–8 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From well above average starting points in Year 7, the pupils make good progress and attain high standards in GCSE examinations across a range of subjects.
- The pupils' reading, writing and skills in speaking English are of a very high standard; their progress in the subject is outstanding. Standards in mathematics are also high, and the progress made by pupils is good.
- Teaching is consistently good and is based on thorough planning, accurate understanding of the pupils' needs and clear direction about what pupils need to know and understand next.
- The teachers create a calm, purposeful atmosphere for learning in their classrooms and the girls respond very well.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding. The girls are polite, courteous and show respect for each other, their teachers and all members of staff.
- Leadership and management are outstanding because, since opening as an academy, the headteacher and the senior team have accurately identified the key areas for improvement and taken decisive action to tackle them. Governance has been equally strong; governors have successfully challenged and supported the school to improve.
- Sixth form students achieve well as a result of good teaching and hard work. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Progress in some key subjects, like mathematics, science and modern foreign languages is not consistently well above average.
- While teaching is effective over time, it is not leading to outstanding progress for enough girls.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 38 lessons. Six of these were observed jointly with a member of the school’s senior leadership team.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, inspectors took account of the 131 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire (Parent View), and responses to an inspection questionnaire from 49 members of staff.
- Inspectors analysed examination results for the school since it opened as an academy. They scrutinised the school’s current assessment data, pupils’ work, minutes of meetings and policies, safeguarding documentation, and the school’s self-evaluation summary.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, teachers, pupils from all year groups and three members of the governing body.

Inspection team

Sean Harford, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Paul Lawrence

Seconded Inspector

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Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School is an average-sized secondary school. It converted to become an academy on 1 October 2012; the predecessor school had the same name. When that school was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good (Grade 2).
- Just over 25% of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the balancing majority of pupils being White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for certain groups of students, is very low.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is also well below average.
- The school makes use of Essex Alternative Education Scheme to make alternative provision for one pupil.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher joined the school when it became an academy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement by ensuring that:
 - all teaching consistently matches the best in the school
 - opportunities to stretch the most-able students are always provided
 - feedback to pupils on their work provides subject-specific advice on how to improve it
 - in the sixth form, more is demanded of students when using subject-specific vocabulary and when developing rigorous academic arguments.
- Improve leadership and management by continuing to support and challenge the mathematics, science and modern foreign languages departments to raise achievement still further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join the school with knowledge, understanding and skills that are above those expected for their age. By the end of Year 11 they make good progress and their attainment in GCSE examinations is significantly above the national average in a wide range of subjects. At 80%, the proportion of pupils that attained five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics last year was 20 percentage points higher than the national level.
- Progress in English is outstanding and, on the whole, each pupil attains a full GCSE grade higher than the national average. This is because the teachers provide good opportunities for the pupils to build on their strong skills from the very beginning, and the pupils exploit these to the full. For example, in Year 7 the pupils demonstrated their solid knowledge of grammar to write creatively and with flair in describing different locations. The pupils also use and develop their knowledge and skills in writing very well across different subjects. The level of accurate, extended writing in subjects such as science is unusually and refreshingly high.
- Pupils attain high standards in mathematics and their progress has improved; it is now good. Their basic mathematical knowledge provides a firm foundation for learning. However, more able pupils are not always challenged to attain even higher standards. For example, too many reach for a calculator when they could use the opportunity to practise mental arithmetic or written methods of multiplication and division. The school is now targeting carefully those who are entered early for GCSE mathematics, focusing on those who are most likely to get the top grades. Current performance data show that this has been more successful.
- Progress in science, geography and history is also good. Pupils in Year 8 this year, for example, have acquired a good level of knowledge across all three sciences and are applying this in planning quite complex experiments that control variables accurately. Previously, pupils were not achieving as well as they should in modern foreign languages. However, they are now making rapid progress with a much higher proportion set to achieve good GCSE passes, including at the highest grades. Pupils produce high quality writing in French and Spanish. In these subjects they persevere with tasks they initially find difficult, but eventually succeed in, such as writing complex sentences. These attitudes, seen in many subjects, allow pupils to make good progress.
- The girls for whom the school receives pupil premium funding make similar progress to other girls, and attain standards in line with the national average for all pupils. Those in Year 7, including those supported through Year 7 'catch-up' funding, are part of a group targeted for additional support in mathematics. Through one-to-one teaching, the vast majority of these pupils are now meeting or exceeding their targets. On the back of this success, the school plans to extend this initiative to English. The few pupils who have special educational needs also make good progress and attain standards significantly above national averages.
- Sixth-form students make good progress, although this varies between subjects. In drama, media, French and photography, the students' progress is amongst the top 25% in the country. However, in subjects such as government and politics, mathematics, physics and chemistry, students did not achieve their full potential last year. Senior leaders recognised this underachievement and have successfully taken action to improve standards in these subjects this year. Success in the arts is clearly evident in the school, but senior leaders have now rightly placed a strong emphasis in promoting science for girls. As a result, the take up this year has increased significantly.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils experience consistently good teaching throughout the school. The teachers create a calm and purposeful atmosphere for learning. This is founded upon positive, trusting relationships between teachers and pupils. From the outset of each lesson there is a shared expectation that effective learning will take place. Pupils are confident to engage actively in lessons. They listen attentively to the teacher's explanations and feel safe to venture answers to questions and make mistakes.
- Teachers plan their lessons rigorously, based upon sound subject knowledge, a good understanding of their pupils' needs and what they want them to achieve. They incorporate a wide variety of teaching approaches which use lesson time effectively and ensure that pupils make good progress.
- Over time the key features of good teaching are the teachers' ability to ascertain the pupils' knowledge, teach the pupils what they need to know next and provide opportunities for them to apply that new knowledge and develop their skills. In Spanish, for example, pupils practised their existing knowledge of various forms of the future tense through song, speak more complex phrases and then applied the new knowledge and skill to writing interesting sentences. In classics, the importance of knowing the sources, understanding their relevance and applying these to develop a robust academic argument is consistently reinforced. Elsewhere good progress is achieved through a succession of activities in lessons which successfully reinforce pupils' learning. However, sometimes the rapid succession of activities becomes an obstacle to effective learning because pupils do not have opportunity to deal with errors and misconceptions, or to reflect on material in sufficient depth.
- The most-able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. Sometimes opportunities are missed to plan tasks which allow them to demonstrate their full capability. For example, in Key Stage 3 all pupils are provided with 'quick fixes' to manipulate variables in physics equations rather than expecting some to use their knowledge of algebra to solve problems.
- Most teachers' questioning is skilful and diagnostic, and used effectively to check pupils' understanding. Assessment is generally strong and teachers have a sound knowledge of their pupils' needs. Pupils are informed of the progress they are making towards meeting targets in lessons. Teachers help pupils understand clearly the criteria against which they are assessed, for example, by using examination mark schemes. Consequently, pupils are able to play an active role in improving their work, guided with skill by the teacher.
- Most marking in books and folders is diligent and provides encouraging feedback to pupils. However, some does not provide sufficient subject-specific advice that clearly tells pupils how to improve and so build their knowledge and skills more effectively.
- There have been frequent changes of science teachers for some pupils, including in a few groups about to take GCSE examinations. While this situation has been managed well by the school and classes have not been without specialist teachers, it has led to slower progress, especially for those in some lower and middle sets.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers systematically incorporate clear, manageable steps into their lessons to help students meet the greater demands of A-level study. In some subjects the quality of teaching is outstanding. In photography, for example, skilled teaching enables students to produce photographs and videos of very high quality, and to analyse their work with maturity and insight. However, in some subjects teachers do not demand enough of the

students in using subject-specific vocabulary in their work or in developing rigorous arguments.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The pupils' behaviour is outstanding. The girls move around the school efficiently and courteously. Even in the older parts of the building where corridors are narrow, the flow is steady and purposeful, which ensures that lessons start promptly. When they reach their class, the girls make sure they have the equipment they need to hand and are ready to learn.
- The atmosphere in lessons is studious and calm; class discussions are lively and engaging. Throughout the school, the girls are happy to share their thoughts, read their writing out loud and offer opinions, safe in the knowledge that their ideas will be valued by teachers and other pupils alike. There is an all-pervading sense of respect for all members of the school community. The girls demonstrate persistence, cooperation and mature attitudes to learning. These characteristics have a strong impact on their progress.
- Sixth-form students use their free lessons productively. Individual students use the library effectively and tables in common areas around the school regularly accommodate small study groups of students discussing their work enthusiastically.
- Lunchtimes are used well by the girls to practise sport, catch up on homework, or just socialise with friends. The atmosphere at these times mirrors that in lessons: calm and purposeful. The catering staff comment on the girls' polite and civilised behaviour at mealtimes, which helps to ensure that large numbers are catered for efficiently.
- Attendance is in line with the national average; the persistent absence of a very small number of pupils, with good reasons, has a big effect on overall figures. The school is focused on improving this through a tracking and rewards system, although the impact is yet to be seen in higher attendance figures.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Rare incidents of bullying are well documented. The school has developed an ethos in which pupils are keen to share with a tutor or other adult, or with each other, if another pupil is being mean or acting the bully. This ensures quite often that issues are dealt with by the pupils themselves and that differences are resolved quickly. However, when things are more serious, the girls feel well-supported by the adults in the school.
- The pupils demonstrate good understanding of how to keep themselves and each other safe in different situations. Nearly all parents and carers who responded to Parent View agreed that their child feels safe at the school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher leads with great skill, passion and sensitivity. Since the school became an academy in October 2012, he has built upon its strong sense of community and created a renewed purpose for the future. He has identified clearly the best things about the school and ensured that changes have enhanced these, while maintaining high staff morale, motivation and tradition.
- The clear rules and boundaries set from the top and implemented throughout the school result in the pupils' outstanding behaviour and attitudes. The school's calm atmosphere enables

teachers to teach and pupils to learn well here.

- The leadership and management of teaching and learning are outstanding. From day one of becoming an academy, the headteacher and his senior team relentlessly focused on improving the quality of teaching. They accurately identified that weaknesses existed in modern foreign languages, mathematics and science, and in aspects of the sixth form. The actions taken to improve teaching in these key areas were swift and decisive. The inevitable staffing turbulence that this caused was well managed and successful in ensuring that the pupils' progress did not suffer and that teaching improved, dramatically so in some areas.
- The senior team has challenged staff and made them responsible and accountable for the pupils' achievement, personal development and well-being. This has been achieved by greatly improving performance management and firmly anchoring this with effective professional development through the 'Teacher Learning Communities' that all must participate in. This has been successful in improving learning across the school.
- The highly effective induction of newly qualified teachers builds upon the areas of strength and development from their training year. They are provided with a wide range of after-school induction sessions throughout their first year in the profession. They are also given appropriate amounts of non-teaching and mentoring time, and good opportunities to meet others in the local area new to teaching. This provides these young teachers with a strong foundation for embarking on their teaching careers. One commented that 'it is a pleasure to be part of such a fantastic school which is very supportive'.
- Heads of year hold subject departments firmly to account for the pupils' achievement. They check that actions to tackle issues identified by termly performance data are completed successfully and are having impact. This system has supported significant improvements in the weaker performing subjects. The senior leaders have demonstrated great skill in bringing about these changes in management while keeping the staff fully on board.
- Where heads of department are new in post, members of the senior team provide strong guidance and support. This gives these less-experienced middle leaders sufficient direction, but with the autonomy to drive the improvements required in their areas. However, there is still more to do here to consolidate the gains made to date, particularly in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and the sixth form.
- The school's curriculum is proudly traditional and entirely appropriate for its pupils. It provides a broad and balanced range of academic subjects, and some opportunities for vocational experiences, for example, when girls can spend regular time working in local primary schools. The school has also introduced a challenging mathematics course for those entered for the GCSE examinations early; this is helping to ensure that more able pupils are stretched in the subject.
- The vast majority of parents and carers are very positive about the school, although responses to Parent View suggest that it could do more to provide better information about the pupils' progress.
- The opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good and used very effectively. The school community comes together harmoniously when girls of all ages prepare for and then participate with enthusiasm, for example in the Christmas Fair. The pupils take part in the spring concert with great pride. Trips, such as when Year 8 visited a local farm, are appreciated and enjoyed by the girls. Lessons and assemblies develop spiritual, moral and cultural aspects well, for example, through discussions about the links between spiritual beliefs and world events. Sometimes opportunities in lessons are missed to explore moral issues in

depth, for example in English, when villainy in literature is studied. Regular lunchtime and after-school clubs are provided for girls who excel in sport, for example, the track and field athletes who compete at district level. This is complemented well by physical education lessons which cater for all abilities in a truly supportive and inclusive way.

■ The governance of the school:

- In common with the school as a whole, the governing body has used the last 19 months to identify its strengths and build upon them very effectively by making improvements in some key areas. It has significantly increased and improved its corporate knowledge of the quality of teaching by overseeing rigorous reviews of subject departments. It has also improved the thoroughness with which it analyses performance data and challenges the school to raise standards.
- Governors ask searching questions of the school's leadership to check whether targets are being met and are very clear on the link between teacher performance and outcomes for pupils. They have played a key role in ensuring that the performance management of teachers has improved in its rigour and pay rises are awarded only when performance is good or better. This is now a strong driver for improvement across the school.
- The Chair and Deputy Chair of Governors work extremely hard for the school and take charge of areas such as child protection and safety. The governors ensure that the school meets all statutory safeguarding requirements.
- Governors brought onto the governing body more recently have provided fresh impetus and new skills in, for example, performance management and business processes. There are some particularly strong parent governors who demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in ensuring that the school's trajectory of improvement is maintained.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138834
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	428918

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1063
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	189
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Turner
Headteacher	Richard Wilkin
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01277 227156
Fax number	01277 229454
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