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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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12 October 2017

Dr Richard Wilkin
Headteacher
Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School
Queen's Road
Brentwood
Essex
CM14 4EX

Dear Dr Wilkin

Short inspection of Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2017 with Duncan Cooper Ofsted inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has ensured that the exemplary behaviour of pupils towards learning and each other, identified at the previous inspection, is nurtured and developed. Parents are positive about their children's experiences of learning at the school. This is evident in the many positive statements made in Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Parents commented on the responsive and caring staff and said, for example, that children 'have always felt safe and well looked after'.

Leadership, including that of governors, is focused on ensuring that all pupils receive a high-quality education. Despite staffing changes, you and your leadership team have endeavoured to provide pupils with highly effective teaching and learning. As a result, pupils achieve well across the curriculum. Your plans for further improvements to the quality of provision at the school are clearly laid out in the school's improvement plan and are already taking place.

Governance at Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School is strong. The governing body is led with expertise and understanding. As a consequence, governors are able to challenge and commend in equal measure. Together with your leadership team and staff, they are highly ambitious for the social and academic success of each pupil. Governors visit the school regularly and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. They are kind, polite and respectful towards each other at all times. As a result, there is a harmonious learning environment throughout the school. In lessons, pupils listen to each other and respond with empathy and maturity. For example, I observed a Year 13 English literature lesson in which students discussed the characters in Shakespeare's play, 'Othello', with insight and regard for the perceptions of others. You have ensured that pupils are able to access a rich and varied curriculum, including opportunities to learn about the faiths and cultures of others. Consequently, many pupils are developing into highly engaged, thoughtful citizens.

You correctly judge English and mathematics to be a strength of the school. Highly effective leadership has ensured that pupils make very good progress and achieve above the national average at the end of key stage 4. Leaders' high expectations of pupils combined with an uncompromising focus on effective teaching and learning have resulted in strong outcomes.

You and your leaders take effective action where required to ensure that pupils receive high-quality teaching. For example, as a result of your developments in the teaching of modern foreign languages, outcomes at the end of key stage 4 increased in 2016. You acknowledge that there are still areas for improvement. For example, you have plans in place to further develop subject leadership. You recognise the importance of continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning in science. You also know that sixth-form teaching requires more consistent challenge so that students make increased progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils told me how safe they feel at the school. They explained the ways in which staff are on hand to resolve issues as they arise and that they feel confident that they are listened to. You have ensured that pupils gain a clear understanding of how to behave safely when online. Pupils also learn about how to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations through well-structured tutor lessons.

Pupils can define bullying and told me that it is not an issue at the school. School records confirm this to be the case. Pupils were confident that any issues such as bullying would be dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that all safeguarding systems are robust. Records of staff employed at the school are carefully documented and maintained securely. Safeguarding leads are alert to the needs of pupils and act quickly and appropriately to ensure their safety. Pupils' attendance is above the national average and is testament to the close tracking of pupils. In addition, you provide a breadth of incentives alongside emphasising the link between achievement and attendance at school.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school has remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about pupils' progress in mathematics, including that of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Although most pupils made progress in line with other pupils nationally from 2013 until 2015, many did not make accelerated progress. However, you and your mathematics lead focused on improving the quality of teaching and tailoring support to the needs of pupils. As a result, many more pupils made progress that was significantly above the national average in 2016. You have introduced a 'little and often' approach to the teaching of mathematics, which pupils value. Many pupils told me that mathematics is their favourite subject. You have also introduced regular assessments, which are analysed carefully to ensure that pupils receive the most appropriate support.
- As my colleague and I visited classrooms, looked in pupils' books and talked to your leadership team and pupils, the high expectations of staff became evident. For example, in pupils' mathematics books, I noted the ways in which staff provide pupils with additional challenges to extend their skills and understanding. In addition, disadvantaged pupils make good progress as a result of focused support. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also receive tailored support through additional work and from teaching assistants. Consequently, these pupils make progress in line with other pupils nationally.
- You provide your leadership team with time and support to monitor the quality of teaching. You ensure that areas that require improvement are supported through carefully tailored training. As a result, the quality of teaching in mathematics has improved since the last inspection.
- My second line of enquiry was about how leaders are ensuring improvements in pupils' achievements in modern foreign languages and science. You and your leadership team continually review the quality of the curriculum at all key stages. As a result, you have introduced a rich languages curriculum, in which all pupils study three languages, French, German and Spanish, at key stage 3. To develop culturally enriched twenty-first century citizens, you ensure that all pupils take at least one foreign language at key stage 4.
- Despite staffing changes, you have monitored carefully the quality of teaching and provided support where necessary. As a consequence, the quality of teaching has improved and pupils' achievements have gradually increased at the end of key stage 4. Pupils told me that they appreciate the privilege of studying a foreign language.
- Pupils have not consistently made progress above the national average in all areas of science at the end of key stage 4. However, you and your leadership team have reviewed the curriculum offer to ensure that all pupils study physics, chemistry and biology at key stage 3 and 4. You have provided time and support to the new subject leader to continue to improve the quality of teaching. Pupils are still not consistently challenged across the key stages in science. Some pupils find the work too easy while some are not challenged to extend their thinking. However, you recognise that the leadership of subjects such as science and

languages requires additional support to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential.

- I also sought to establish how well students progress across the curriculum in the sixth form. The previous inspection report stated that students needed support to articulate academic arguments. You and your leadership team have ensured that students in some subjects, such as English, mathematics, psychology and history, develop critical skills of evaluation and analysis. As a result, students achieve well. For example, I observed an English literature lesson in which the teacher helped students to structure their ideas about a Tennessee Williams play. However, this is not consistent across the curriculum.
- My final line of enquiry was about how well pupils are prepared to keep themselves safe. Pupils' conduct in class and around the school is exemplary. Pupils are kind, helpful and courteous. The curriculum helps pupils to keep safe in the world beyond school. For example, they learn about the dangers of extremist ideologies through guest speakers and discussion.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide more challenging work for students in the sixth form to accelerate their progress and attainment
- teachers in science provide additional challenge to promote pupil progress with the same precision and rigour as they do in mathematics and English
- subject leadership continues to improve.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Brentwood, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the course of this inspection, we held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders and a group of five governors.
- We spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. We also met formally with a group of 14 pupils and the student council.
- We visited a range of classes across key stages 3, 4 and 5.
- We undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; minutes of governors' meetings and curriculum plans.
- I considered the views of 174 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 92 parent views expressed via freetext. Additionally, I considered the views of 29 members of staff and 243 pupils.