

Inspection of Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School

Queen's Road, Brentwood, Essex CM14 4EX

Inspection dates: 7 March and 17 March 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School (BUCHS) benefit from very high expectations of what they can achieve. They learn a coherent and meticulously planned curriculum. Pupils develop strong levels of self-motivation in their learning. Consequently, they do exceptionally well. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who receive excellent support. This means they build the same deep and detailed knowledge as their peers.

Pupils embody BUCHS's Catholic values. In particular, they learn the importance of duty. This teaches pupils to speak up if they have views or concerns. Pupils praise the sense of community in the school. Pupils take on leadership positions, such as 'form' and 'liturgy' representatives. This builds their confidence. Pupils enjoy, and feel safe in, the school.

Behaviour is very positive. Pupils are excited about, and focused on, learning. They show mature respect for others. Pupils articulate the importance of empathy, such as wearing their rainbow badges with pride. If there is any unkindness or bullying, they are confident to resolve it themselves.

Pupils engage with a wide range of opportunities. For example, many complete The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Pupils praise the way the sporting and creative clubs extend what they learn.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is aspirational. This includes in the sixth form. Leaders aim high in terms of what pupils should learn, and then do whatever they need to do for everyone to access this. Subject leaders plan effectively. This enables pupils, from the start of key stage 3, to study a wide and challenging range of topics that build on their prior learning. Where subjects have been less strong, leaders have addressed this promptly and successfully. As a result, pupils learn a consistently well-considered curriculum. This means pupils from Years 7 to 13 understand new concepts and confidently move forward on to more ambitious content.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge, and use this skilfully. They are well trained and know the exact knowledge pupils need to learn at each point, such as subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers deliver this in well-crafted activities. They check closely that pupils understand and remember it. Consequently, pupils develop rich and detailed knowledge.

Leaders have created a culture that values reading. They make sure any weaker readers get all the help they need to read more fluently. These pupils are consequently able to understand their learning. Pupils across the school talk about what they read with enthusiasm.

The aspirations of pupils with SEND are prioritised. Leaders identify these pupils' needs accurately. Support plans embed parents' and pupils' views effectively. Staff give pupils with SEND consistent and expert help. This means these pupils take considerable pride in their work and achieve at a high level.

Pupils fully understand leaders' high expectations for behaviour. Staff apply these consistently. Leaders identify and address the causes of any misbehaviour. For example, if pupils are anxious, they get close support from their staff 'champion'. As a result, there is almost no disruption to learning. Pupils conduct themselves in an exemplary manner.

The curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. Pupils learn to understand a rapidly changing world, for instance about different communities. Leaders connect this learning thoughtfully to the school's 'Ursuline' values. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for adult life. For example, they develop an informed awareness of areas such as consent. While still effective, this is slightly less well planned in the sixth form.

Pupils receive a range of guidance about life beyond school. For example, they have regular encounters with employers. That said, leaders do not ensure that all pupils get one-to-one advice from a careers professional. In the sixth form, not all students get the help they need to have meaningful experience of the world of work. This means that pupils do not have all the information they could to make informed decisions about their next steps.

Students in the sixth form benefit from well-designed programmes of study. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is closely planned for learning outside of lessons. Students have strong attendance and punctuality. They engage well with the wider life of the school, such as by reading with and mentoring younger pupils.

Governors have the knowledge they need to fulfil their roles effectively. They ask leaders challenging questions, such as about aspects of the curriculum. Governors monitor pupils' well-being, and support improvements in this. Governors check the processes for safeguarding regularly, but this aspect of their work is not as thorough as it could be.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils learn how to be safe through the curriculum. Positive relationships with staff mean they feel safe. Pupils know whom to talk to if they have worries.

When staff log concerns, leaders respond quickly and thoroughly. Leaders are well and regularly trained. They liaise closely with parents and agencies to ensure that the right actions are in place to ensure pupils are safe.

While this is the case, leaders' processes for recording safeguarding information are not as precise as they should be. Consequently, leaders and governors do not always have clarity of the oversight of the actions being taken that they might.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While safeguarding is effective, leaders' processes to ensure all safeguarding information is recorded are not as thorough as they should be. This means that although leaders and governors know that the most important actions are taken to keep pupils safe, they are not as clear as they should be that the best actions are taken to support pupils in all situations. Leaders need to review and improve their processes for organising and recording safeguarding information so that these, and their oversight of them, are more thorough and efficient.
- Leaders do not make sure pupils get a sufficiently wide range of guidance and experiences to be ready for their next steps. This includes students in the sixth form. As a result, pupils do not have all the information they need to make the best and most informed decisions about their future choices. Leaders need to review their careers provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks and use this to improve the advice and guidance they give to pupils about their options for education, employment or training.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138834
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10255224
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,154
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	148
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Trevor Kemp
Headteacher	Richard Wilkin
Website	http://www.brentwoodursuline.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a Christian character and was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 on 11 June 2019.
- Leaders use one registered alternative provider off site.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Initially, a team of two inspectors conducted an ungraded inspection on 7 March 2023. However, at the end of the first day, Ofsted deemed this a graded inspection due to concerns about safeguarding. The inspection was paused to assemble a larger team. Six inspectors, including a new lead inspector, completed the inspection on 17 March 2023.
- Inspectors held meetings with governors, a representative from the Diocese of Brentwood, the headteacher, senior leaders, other leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, modern foreign languages and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- As part of the evaluation of safeguarding, inspectors checked the school's single central record of recruitment vetting checks, considered its safeguarding policy and procedures and spoke to leaders, staff and pupils.
- As part of evaluating other areas of provision, inspectors met with leaders, staff and pupils, and scrutinised a range of policies and documents.
- Inspectors reviewed the 240 responses that were submitted from this academic year by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and 169 free-text responses submitted during the inspection. Inspectors considered the 48 responses to the staff survey, and the 351 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector
Jason Carey	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Hemmings	His Majesty's Inspector
Steve Woodley	His Majesty's Inspector
Marc White	His Majesty's Inspector
Peter Whear, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
James Shapland	Ofsted Inspector

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