



Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115377
LEA ESSEX LEA
Inspection number 279591
Inspection dates 21 February 2006 to 22 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Melanie Kavanagh LI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Queen's Road
School category	Voluntary aided		CM14 4EX
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01277 227156
Number on roll	984	Fax number	01277 229454
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Angela Bradley
Date of previous inspection	9 October 2000	Headteacher	Miss. Vicky Squirrel

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School is a voluntary aided Catholic comprehensive school serving primarily the Brentwood Deanery. Students also come from a wider geographical location drawn from approximately 40 primary schools. The school is of average size for a secondary school. Approximately 83% of the students are from White British backgrounds and 17% of students are from different ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average as is the proportion of students with statements of special educational needs. The school was awarded specialist arts status in 1998.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school is providing a satisfactory education overall and some aspects of its work are good. The personal development and well being and care, guidance and support of students are good. Students feel safe and well supported. The few instances of bullying are dealt with effectively. Students are well behaved, confident and polite. Sixth form students provide good role models for younger students and take a very active role in the life of the school. Standards achieved by the students are good and progress is satisfactory. However, there is too much variation between subjects and progress in mathematics between Key Stages 2 and 4 is weaker than in English. Standards in the sixth form are good in many subjects but students' progress in some subjects is below what could be expected from their prior attainment at GCSE. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and are well supported by staff in that area. However, much of the school building is inaccessible to students with restricted mobility. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and some is good. The best teaching and learning encourage effectively students' active participation and good progress in their learning. In some lessons, however, students remain passive for too long and students' progress, although satisfactory, is slower. The school has good links with local and partner primary schools that have been further enhanced by its specialist arts status. The curriculum offered is satisfactory with aspects that are good, including the provision of minority subjects. There are insufficient opportunities for students to study vocational courses both in the whole school and the sixth form. The school has accurately identified key areas it needs to improve through a rigorous and self-critical self-evaluation, most of which were affirmed by the inspection team. The recently appointed headteacher provides strong leadership and has initiated many appropriate changes designed to bring about improvements indicating that the school has a good capacity to improve. However, these developments have yet to impact fully across the whole school. The school has addressed the main issues identified at the last inspection. The significant majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire were supportive of the school. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is satisfactory overall, and not as good as judged in the school's self evaluation. Students enter Year 12 with above average standards and, overall, make satisfactory progress. Pass rates at GCE A level are well above average in many subjects. However, students make too little progress at GCE A level in some subjects when their results are compared to their prior attainment at GCSE. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and some is good. The best teaching is stimulating and effective. However, there is variation in the quality of teaching and learning across subjects and students are not always encouraged effectively to develop independent learning skills. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. There is well established success in helping students mature and develop their personal skills but monitoring academic progress and setting

demanding targets are less well developed. The personal development of students in the sixth form is good. They show very strong commitment to the school and serve it well through taking on responsibilities such as running clubs and societies and organising charity events. They provide very good role models for younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the progress made by most students more accurately reflects their good prior attainment. - Improve the proportion of teaching which encourages effectively students' active participation and good progress. - Develop further the systems for monitoring and supporting subject leaders in order to reduce the variations in quality between subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory both in the main school and the sixth form. Students enter the school with above average attainment, make satisfactory progress, and achieve above national average standards in Years 9 and 11. The school is successful in enabling students of all abilities to achieve some success. The proportion of students achieving 5 A*-G grades is consistently above the national average at broadly 99%. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. There is variation in performance across subjects, as the school's self evaluation makes clear. For example, students make satisfactory progress in English between Key Stages 2 and 4 but their progress in mathematics is weaker. The proportion of students achieving 5 GCSE passes at grades A*-C is well above the national average and students achieve well in some subjects including English, information and communication technology (ICT), music and physical education. However, in mathematics and most science subjects, students achieve results that are broadly at the national average. In 2005, the proportion of students achieving 5 GCSE passes at grades A*-C was significantly above the national average but below the challenging target set by the school. Overall GCE A level results have been broadly at or slightly below national averages for the years between 2003 and 2005. The pass rates declined slightly in 2005 and the proportion of students achieving high grades declined significantly to below the national average. Progression and destination data show that the overwhelming majority of students progress to further or higher education after Years 11 and 13.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good and they clearly benefit from the strong Catholic ethos that permeates the school community. The warm and helpful welcome extended by students, for example, to visitors to the school, is impressive. Students are supportive of the school and value the opportunities to take part in its wider artistic, cultural, sporting and religious life. As a result of undertaking

responsibilities in these areas, they develop their work-related skills and gain confidence in dealing with others. However, there are insufficient opportunities to pursue vocational courses. Attendance is above average and students are punctual and attentive. Students feel safe and report that there is little bullying. They behave well in lessons and when less closely supervised. They respond positively when teaching encourages their active participation. Very few students have been excluded from the school. Students influence the life of the school through their discussions in the school council and issues raised by them are acted upon. For example, they have contributed to initiatives aimed at securing a healthier school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' personal development are good. Their spiritual development is a priority and students from all backgrounds gain much from the school's strong ethos as a faith community. A genuine concern for others is evident not only from the way in which students interact and support each other, but also by the range and extent of their charity fund raising efforts. Students' cultural and social development is enhanced by the performing arts and they particularly enjoy and value the focus on drama, dance and music that the arts specialist status has brought to the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. A significant strength is the quality of working relationships throughout the school that contribute to students' good behaviour and their willingness to learn. Students value in particular the high quality of teaching in the specialist areas of performing arts and also physical education. The diverse range of techniques, resources, extra-curricular activities and exemplary use of assessment, support effective learning in these subjects. There is variation in the quality of teaching across the school. In the best examples, students enjoy the experience, participating actively and learning effectively. In these lessons, students with a range of abilities make good progress. Teachers' planning in some areas is insufficiently rigorous and teaching does not always provide adequately for the full range of students' abilities. In such lessons, students remain passive for too long and their progress, although satisfactory, is slower. Support provided through teachers and learning assistants for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Opportunities for those who are gifted and talented have recently been improved. In the sixth form, teaching is satisfactory and some is good. However, it does not always effectively promote independent learning. Assessment is carried out routinely in all subjects. In a few areas, there is insufficient rigour in the use of available data to identify underachievement and to promote learning. Targets are set but not all students' are clear about how to improve their work. The school has begun to promote the extension of good practice to all subjects through the sharing of expertise.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The overall quality of the curriculum is satisfactory with some aspects that are good. As a Specialist Arts College, the performing arts are clearly evident. The school has also established successful links with local primary schools through its specialist status. There is a broad range of subjects taught in Years 7 - 9 and discrete provision is made for study of citizenship and ICT across the whole school. A good range of options is available in Years 10 and 11. However, as the school has recognised in its self evaluation, there are insufficient opportunities to study vocational subjects both in the whole school and in the sixth form. Preparation for the world of work is enhanced through good work experience and careers education. A wide range of subjects is offered in the sixth form, including photography. The curriculum is enhanced effectively through extension activities. Curriculum extension days are held for specialist activities such as local studies, the development of cross-curricular links and, for example, the mentoring of Year 12 students. The opportunities for extra-curricular activities in music, dance, drama and physical education are good and very popular. Many productions are held in drama and music. Students participate in many external events such as cross country running and public speaking, often very successfully.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The school has a very inclusive approach in keeping with its ethos. Individual students are well known to staff and are cared for effectively. There are effective arrangements for the protection of children and the monitoring of health and safety issues. The school provides a safe and welcoming environment. Students enjoy open and trusting relationships with adults in the school and particularly value the work of the school's chaplain. Assessment data is not always used consistently to support students' academic development. They do not always have a clear understanding of their current attainment levels and what they need to do to improve. Students receive effective support and advice on career choices and progression opportunities. Students with special educational needs make good progress as a result of the rigorous procedures, commitment and expertise of the staff involved with their support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory and is enabling students to make satisfactory progress and achieve good standards. This is not quite as positive an overall judgement as that made by the school in its self-evaluation. The leadership of the recently appointed headteacher is a particular strength. She has set a clear strategic direction for improvement that is understood and supported by staff. Management roles have been redefined and reflect the experience and expertise of staff. Many appropriate changes have been initiated, including new staffing structures,

procedures for monitoring, plans for a more flexible curriculum, collaborative activities and arrangements for tracking students' progress. However, these changes are too recent to have had a measurable impact on students' progress or to be sufficiently embedded across the school. The good practice that exists in some areas is, as yet, insufficiently replicated in all areas. Overall, self-evaluation is self-critical. The school has been accurate and open in identifying most of its strengths and weaknesses. There is extensive observation of teaching and learning and systems for monitoring of middle managers, although leadership and standards remain variable between subjects. The school is committed to being inclusive. It has very effective and well managed support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Governors give satisfactory strategic guidance and support to the school. They are strongly supportive of its work. Some governors have good direct contact with the school and observe its day to day work. The governing body questions and holds senior staff to account appropriately.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Earlier this week, a small team of inspectors visited your school. We met and talked to many of you and sat in and watched your lessons. We also met with your teachers and had letters from your parents and carers. This letter is to tell you about our findings and explain what we think the school does well and how it could be even better. One of the strengths of the school is you. We were impressed by your behaviour, attitudes to work and support for your school. Those of you who are in the sixth form are very good at guiding and supporting younger members of the school. In our meetings, you spoke confidently and expressed yourselves well and with maturity. I particularly enjoyed listening to the Chamber Choir, which performed excellently. You attend well and are punctual to lessons. Your school helps you to develop and grow into well rounded adults. One of the ways that you can help the school to improve is to continue to pay attention and concentrate in all your lessons. Your teachers work hard to make your lessons well organised and interesting. We have asked the school to make sure all your lessons are as interesting and challenging as they can be so that you make good progress in every subject. We also want you all to be very clear about your targets and how you can improve your work. We also think that more of you are capable of achieving the highest grades in your examinations. You can help in this by always listening to your teachers and working to the very best of your abilities. You told us there was very little bullying at the school and that you knew where to go for help if it happened. Remember that your teachers will always help you and tell them straight away if you, or a friend, need help. I wish you well for the future and hope that you are successful in whatever you want to do.