

Ursuline College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131583
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	293785
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Robert Ellis HMI

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

Type of school	Other secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	764
6th form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Kaine
Headteacher	Alice Montgomery
Date of previous school inspection	29 January 2001
School address	225 Canterbury Road Westgate-on-Sea CT8 8LX
Telephone number	01843 834431
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Age group	11–18
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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

Ursuline College is a smaller than average secondary school with a medium-sized sixth form that operates as part of a sixth form consortium with other local schools. It is a popular school which became a specialist sports college in September 2004. The college serves a socially disadvantaged community in the area of Thanet. There are more girls than boys and the proportion of students claiming free school meals is below average. The percentage of students who have learning difficulties and disabilities is similar to that in most schools. A large majority of the college population are of White British heritage and around one in eight students come from other diverse ethnic heritages. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is below average. The school has previously had difficulty recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers in English and mathematics.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The college leadership rightly identifies that it provides a good education for its learners and that some aspects of the college's work are outstanding. Students join the college with standards that are below average but they make good progress in Key Stage 3 so that they achieve standards that are above average. Standards are rising at GCSE. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2006 were below average but given their starting points the students' achievement was satisfactory

Personal development and well-being are outstanding because learners' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Most learners enjoy learning and feel safe and well cared for because of the outstanding pastoral care and good guidance and support they receive. Most students behave well, develop good relationships with teachers and other students and have positive attitudes to school. The number of students excluded from the college is much lower than in most schools because it has good procedures for supporting students at risk of exclusion. The college attributes much of its success in this area to the work of the learning support unit. Attendance is satisfactory and improving.

The curriculum is good and allows students to choose courses that meet their needs and interests. It is enriched by an extensive range of activities which are well attended, including an active and successful group undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Learners make good progress in lessons and most are on course to meet or exceed challenging individual targets. Teaching is good overall and some lessons are outstanding. However, the college recognises that some teaching requires development and that a few lessons have significant weaknesses because assessment information is not used consistently to plan what students should do next. Students say that they get good guidance and support which enables them to prepare for the next stages in their education or the workplace. Most parents and carers are supportive and value the support that the college provides, particularly in relation to the pastoral care of their children.

Students who have learning difficulties and disabilities and other vulnerable groups are well supported and make the same, and in some cases better, progress than other students.

The college is well led and managed. The senior leadership team has a clear vision for the future and increasingly high expectations of what learners can achieve. Senior leaders monitor the work of the college and have an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development. However, not all actions taken are evaluated sufficiently to inform strategic planning. Challenges posed by the limited accommodation for sport have been addressed by the building of a new sports hall which will open shortly. This and the positive impact of actions taken to address the areas of weakness identified by the previous inspection report and other recent improvements demonstrate that the college has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is well led and managed. Students begin their sixth form courses with standards which are generally lower than those seen in most sixth forms. They make good progress and most complete their courses of study and achieve or exceed their targets. An increasing number continue into higher education. The college recognised that the previous sixth form curriculum did not meet the precise needs of the students and made a number of improvements to address

this, including participation in a sixth form consortium with other local schools. Too many classes in the current Year 13 are small and do not represent good value for money but this is offset to some extent by larger groups in Year 12 and some mixed age classes. There are good opportunities for students to take responsibility and to contribute to the college and the wider community. Sixth form students are good role models for younger students. They receive good care, advice and guidance which enables them to become confident and responsible young adults. They speak positively about their experiences in the sixth form and say that they have good relationships with their teachers and value their support and guidance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use evaluation more effectively to identify and address underperformance.
- Raise the quality of all teaching to that of the best in the school.
- Use assessment information consistently to identify students' next steps for learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards of attainment on entry to the college have generally been below average, with a smaller proportion of students who have reached the higher levels of attainment than in many schools. At Key Stage 3, students make good progress and by the end of Year 9 attain standards that are above average. For the last three years, the average points scores of students who took national tests at age 13 were above the national average.

The rate of progress at Key Stage 4 has not been as impressive and the college recognises that in the past targets for some students were not sufficiently challenging. In 2006, half the students achieved five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above and 36% of students achieved the five higher grades including mathematics and English. Although standards remain below average, the rate of improvement is the same as that of similar schools.

Analysis of the college's assessment data and observation of lessons show that most students make good progress in lessons.

Standards on entry to the sixth form are generally lower than those seen in other schools and colleges but by the end of their sixth form courses examination results are in line with the national average. Taking in to account their starting points, this represents good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Learners' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Most of them are articulate, confident and mature young people. Almost all of them take pride in their school and attend regularly. The number of exclusions is low. Relationships reflect the college's Christian ethos; learners get on well with each other and with their teachers. They feel safe in school. Racist incidents are rare and have declined in number since learners were given more guidance through citizenship lessons and collective worship. If bullying occurs, it is dealt with promptly. Religious tolerance is evident throughout the school. Behaviour is usually good around school, although occasionally in lessons, when work fails to engage the students, there is low level disruption. Learners respond well to opportunities to develop healthy lifestyles. Just over half of them

participate regularly in extra-curricular sporting activities. Many are also taking part in the sports leadership programme. Learners appreciate the new salad bar in the dining room, although some still bring less healthy snacks into school. Learners show responsible attitudes in their contributions to the school council, which is capably chaired by the head boy and girl. They contribute generously to their school and local community, for example, through mentoring and fundraising for charity. Work experience and development of a wide range of interpersonal skills prepare learners successfully for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning have improved and are good. In the majority of lessons, teachers have forged good relationships with the students and know their students well. When there are high expectations of what students can achieve in lessons and over time, learning is good and sometimes outstanding. Most lessons are appropriately planned and learning is noticeably better when teachers demonstrate the skills to be learned and then give students an opportunity to be actively involved in activities to develop those skills. Students say that they enjoy learning when lessons are interesting and there are challenging things to do.

Although there is some outstanding teaching, the college recognises that some teaching could be better and that a few lessons have significant weaknesses. In the minority of lessons which are less successful, the pace is too slow, mainly the result of too much talking by the teacher which leads to students becoming bored and restless. Some teachers are less skilled in using appropriate questioning techniques to find out what students know and understand and do not encourage the students to think for themselves or try to evaluate their own learning. In a few lessons, the teachers did not have effective strategies to deal with low level disruption caused by off-task chatter and inattentiveness.

The college is developing systems and procedures to record assessment information and to track the progress that learners make towards their targets. Although a good start has been made, the use of assessment data to identify the next steps in students' learning is not consistent across and within subjects

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of most learners. It reflects the strong Christian ethos of the college and its sports specialism. The college's sport specialism has had a positive impact on attainment by increasing learners' motivation, maintaining their engagement with learning and developing healthy lifestyles. All students study a modern foreign language and classics is offered to all parallel sets in KS3. Those students capable of higher attainment study Latin. There are good opportunities for learners to develop an understanding of the world of work and to develop skills which will be useful in later life. Learners benefit from opportunities to participate in a wide range of visits and extra-curricular activities and more than half the students are actively involved in some kind of extension activity in sport. There are strong links with a range of external agencies, including the Connexions partnership,

which help students make career choices. An alternative curriculum has been developed for disaffected and other students in Years 10 and 11 to follow vocational pathways.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pastoral care is outstanding, and support for students who have learning difficulties and disabilities is very good. Students feel that they are well supported and given help when it is needed. The learning support unit helps students overcome behavioural and emotional challenges and has had a significant impact on reducing the number of exclusions for inappropriate behaviour. All students now have challenging targets and most students have a clear understanding of the progress they are making and what they need to do to achieve their targets. However, the use of assessment data to inform planning for the next steps in students' learning is inconsistent and as a result academic guidance is not as strong as care and support and is only satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good with some outstanding features. In this school every individual matters and this is at the heart of the strong leadership and direction given by the headteacher and followed through at all levels of leadership, particularly in the recently reorganised senior leadership team. Learners are encouraged and supported to achieve their best, both academically and personally.

The school has good systems to monitor its performance but it is not sufficiently systematic in evaluating the outcomes of actions taken and their impact on raising attainment. For example, there are data systems to track the progress of individual students but some departments are more effective than others in analysing this data and taking action at an early stage to address underachievement. Teaching and learning are regularly monitored and there are good links to the professional development of staff which has contributed to improvements in teaching.

The governing body has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors offer good support but also ask well informed questions about the achievement of learners and challenge the staff to do more to raise standards. The headteacher and senior leadership team know where improvements are needed and have the drive and capacity to implement them, many of which are already being addressed.

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Annex A

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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Ursuline College, Westgate-on Sea, CT8 8LX

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and helping us with our inspection. A special thank you to the school council and those of you who held discussions with us and showed us around.

We think that some of the things that the college does are outstanding, although there are some things that we think could be better, and we have judged the college to be good overall. We saw how well you behave and how well you look after the college and each other. You told us that you enjoy being at school and feel safe and well cared for. You demonstrated that you understand the importance of being healthy. Most of you have the right attitude to learning and this helps you to make good progress. Some of you work even harder and make better progress than expected. However, there are a few of you who don't concentrate as much as you should in lessons and chatter too much. We want you to try a bit harder so that you do not disrupt your own learning or the learning of others.

The people who have responsibility for leading and managing the college know it very well and already have some good ideas about how it can be made even better. We would like them to do a bit more to evaluate the changes they make to see what is working well and what is not.

We want the school to continue to try to make sure that all lessons are as good as the best so that you are able to work as hard as you can and learn as much as you should. We hope we can rely on you to support your teachers in achieving this.

We all enjoyed our visit to your college and look forward to hearing about your future successes.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis Her Majesty's Inspector