



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report

Name of School: The Ursuline Academy, Ilford

LEA: Redbridge

Inspection Date: May 10th 2018

Inspectors: Damian G Fox (lead inspector)
Derek Kelly (associate inspector)

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School:	Secondary comprehensive	School Address:	Morland Road
School Category:	Academy Converter		Ilford, Essex,
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18 yrs		IG1 4JU
Gender of pupils:	Girls	Tel. No.	0208 5541995
Number on roll:	797	Chair of Governors:	Mr J Anthony
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	Headteacher:	Ms K Reilly
Date of previous inspection:	21 May 2012		

Information about the school

The Ursuline Academy is a Girls' Catholic school in the London Borough of Redbridge in the Diocese of Brentwood. The school serves mainly the Catholic parishes of the Redbridge Deanery. There are currently 797 students aged 11-18, including 163 in the Sixth Form. The school is oversubscribed. 64% of pupils are Catholic. 3% are from other Christian faiths. 33% of pupils are from other faith backgrounds. 25% of places are reserved for non-Catholic and non-Christian pupils, reflecting the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood.

Levels of attainment on entry are broadly in line with the national average. The majority of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Currently, 4% of pupils are on the Special Needs Register, below the national average. This includes 1% of pupils with a statement or EHC plan. There are 54% of pupils for whom English is not the first language. 16% of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is below average.

There are 43 full time equivalent teachers of whom 49% are Catholic. Four teachers hold the CCRS and six have other Catholic qualifications in Theology and Catholic Leadership. There are five teachers of Religious Education, four full time and one part time.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires Improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic School

Grade 1

The Ursuline Academy is an outstanding Catholic school. It has a strong ethos and mission based on the charism of St Angela Merici. One governor said that it is a "truly Ursuline school". The school's commitment to pupils, staff, families and the wider community demonstrates its central mission of service that is firmly based on Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church. The school is successful in establishing a strong Catholic education for all pupils. The Headteacher said that they are all "companions in mission".

Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and demonstrate excellent leadership in all areas. They are supportive and are fully informed of progress and areas for development. The Headteacher is an inspirational presence in the school. She is strongly supported by the Senior Leadership Team and together they work highly effectively in the context of the Catholic Life of the school and Religious Education. The Head of Department provides outstanding leadership of Religious Education. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils have continued to improve. Pupils make excellent progress.

Pastoral care is a significant strength. Pupils work and play in a safe and caring environment where each one is valued and encouraged to achieve their full potential. They respond respectfully and willingly to the mission of service to others. Diversity is a strength of the school. The school is totally inclusive of pupils with different strengths and offers unstinting support to their families. One parent commented: "I am so impressed with the way the Ursuline Academy shapes not just the minds but the hearts and souls of its pupils".

Prayer and worship are central to daily life in the community. Pupils have many opportunities to practice their faith and to experience the love of God throughout each day. The spiritual and moral development of pupils is a central feature of the school. The Catholic ethos and identity are visible to the community and to visitors through the centrality of religious icons and images displayed throughout the school.

What the school should do to improve further

Continue to develop training for teachers of Religious Education to ensure greater expertise in providing high level challenge for more able students.

Outcomes for students

Grade 1

Outcomes in Religious Education at GCSE are outstanding and continue the upward trend over the last three years from 81% to 86% in 2017. Grades achieved at A*/A have been impressive over the last three years, rising from 34.5% to 43.4%. 69% achieved A*/B. Outcomes for pupils with various needs are very good in relation to the school average. Most groups of pupils make at least good progress with some making outstanding progress. The gap between them and other pupils has narrowed over the last three years, although leaders acknowledge that this is an area for development.

Lesson observations showed that pupils are highly motivated. Their interactive work and exemplary behaviour reflect their willingness to learn. The presentation in exercise books was of a very high standard and showed pupils were proud of their work. Year 11 pupils said that they were being well prepared for exams.

Pupils say they enjoy their lessons and benefit greatly from the range of teaching styles used by teachers, including debates, role play and paired working. They value their teachers highly. Relationships are based on mutual trust and respect.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school and derive huge benefit from attending the Ursuline Academy. The Ursuline ethos pervades all aspects of school life with Serviam at its heart. Pupils were overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school. They were erudite in articulating their understanding of the Serviam values that underpin the life and work of the school. They were happy to talk about how they actively seek to support one another and being part of a family where everyone is valued, respected and cared for. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent and are based on mutual respect and a belief that they are there to serve each other rather than be served.

Ursuline links are prominent through the Chaplaincy. There is a designated person who works with pupils on volunteering projects. Sixth Form students, for example, have been involved in an activity camp for East London primary children, working in soup kitchens and foodbanks and with the Ursulines rebuilding homes in New Orleans. Chaplaincy staff give lessons to the younger pupils on Serviam and the work of the Ursulines across the world. They teach sign language to enhance the liturgy and run retreats for Year 7. The school is committed to offering the young women in their care a nurturing and challenging educational environment in which they can learn and develop the confidence to make a difference. One pupil described how she had flourished and become more confident since joining the Academy.

The school supports several local, national and overseas projects through fundraising events. In the last year just over £5000 was raised. Many charitable causes are nominated by individual pupils, form classes and Year Groups. In addition to raising money, pupils provide food items for the local foodbank and the Christmas shoebox appeal.

Sixth form students are excellent role models. They serve the school community by acting as LSAs in the classroom, helping with Year 7 retreats and coordinating fund raising activities. They run several Chaplaincy activities, such as 'Girl talk', which is organised by students for students. Sixth form students serve Christmas dinner to the school in December. Many pupils choose to give service in their parishes and to members of the community who are elderly or disabled.

Excellent use is made of the Chapel. It is an oasis of calm. The vibrant Chaplaincy is popular with pupils. It offers a variety of opportunities for them including discussion groups, in house retreats and a voluntary Mass. The Rosary and Stations of the Cross were introduced in Lent 2017. There is a Chaplaincy calendar of events and regular features in the Headteacher's newsletter to raise awareness and promote activities with pupils and their parents. A highlight for the school was the "Big Sing". Pupils participated in singing workshops and a performance with other Ursuline schools. A recent highlight was the Easter liturgy, "Born for This" based on the story of the Passion. Pupils used drama and music to enhance the real spiritual message of Easter. It was well received by pupils and their families and reflects the impact of the faith in the lives of students. The "First Give" assembly is a celebration of the fundraising by Year 8 pupils. The winning group receives extra funding for its chosen charity.

Pupils respond enthusiastically to the many opportunities to lead and participate in prayer. They said everybody was included, regardless of their faith background. The student chaplaincy team is very active in taking a lead in preparing liturgies and retreats with the Chaplain. They spoke of how highly they value the opportunity to help classes prepare Masses by choosing readings and writing prayers. They have contributed to the Chapel with their own displays of words and pictures to make it a place of worship for groups and individuals. One pupil in the team said she enjoyed having the responsibility as it helped her "get closer to God". Pupils are keen to lead prayers and to write their own prayers. Each day starts with a prayer and Collective Worship whether in the form class, year assembly or upper and lower school assemblies. The choir and musicians participate regularly which enhances acts of worship.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The self-evaluation carried out by governors and school leaders was fully endorsed by inspectors in all key areas. Leaders and governors are totally committed to the welfare of teachers, support staff, pupils and their families. They demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in providing a community of prayer, one that is strongly founded in the commandment to love. They have the vision and the passion to develop the Catholic life of the school further. They understand that strengthening the spiritual and loving ethos is a core responsibility.

Governors are passionate about the ethos and history of the Ursuline community. The commitment to fostering Ursuline values in the lives of young people was evident in the discussions with Inspectors and in responses from pupils. They have planned finances wisely to appoint the Head of Department to the Senior Leadership Team and a full-time Chaplain. Governors provide a powerful blend of challenge and support to senior leaders. They are highly experienced and fiercely loyal to the school. Governors visit the school at least once a year, and more when possible, as part of the role of monitoring and supporting the school and its leaders. They fully understand the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The Headteacher has a clear vision of what a Catholic school should provide for the pupils. This is shared and fully supported by all stakeholders. For example, to support the governors, she gave them a "Mission Priorities" card that encapsulates the mission of the school. The Headteacher is highly respected and valued by pupils, staff, governors and parents alike. She cares deeply about the pupils and feels passionately about providing the highest quality Catholic education.

Chaplaincy is a significant strength. It is effectively led by the Chaplaincy staff and a vibrant team of pupils. The Catholic life of the school is not the remit only of the R.E. Department and Chaplain. All those who have responsibility for managing any aspect of the curriculum and pupil development are managers of the Catholic life of the school.

Governors are regular visitors to the school for special events and Masses and visiting lessons. The Ethos Committee evaluates and monitors the Catholic Life of the school. The Headteacher also reports termly to governors.

To promote the school, Catholic feeder primaries are offered Year 5 retreats in the summer term. They are staffed by the Chaplain and 6th form volunteers as their way of giving service and representing the school in the community.

Leaders and governors have an excellent understanding of how to deliver sustained improvement in attainment and progress. Governors ask strategic questions offering appropriate challenge to school leaders. They receive and understand very comprehensive data and analysis of outcomes. Governors have taken on the recommendations from the last report regarding outcomes. Leaders and governors work very effectively together in enhancing pupils' learning. The A*/A and the A* - C grades in key stages 4 and 5 reflect the quality of their leadership and commitment to success.

The effectiveness of departmental self-evaluation as a means of improvement is very good. The new Head of Department is accurate in his appraisal of the strengths in the Department. Leaders monitor the planning and opportunities for assessment to ensure that the needs of all learners are met. Resources take account of different learning styles and are designed to stimulate pupils of different abilities and with diverse interests and styles of learning.

The Head of Department has had an excellent impact in the short time in post. Assessment and tracking are rigorous and robust. Drop in observations and book checks are frequent. The curriculum has been adapted to meet the new GCSE requirements. The three-year trend for GCSE results shows Religious Education is performing well against other core subjects. Regular meetings ensure accuracy in moderation and strong mutual support for all teachers.

Links with Ursuline schools are very strong. Initiatives and good practice are shared in a spirit of cooperation to ensure that the girls at the Academy are given the best opportunities to succeed. The school is part of the Agnus Dei Teaching Alliance as part of its commitment to learn and improve. Their aims are to develop new teachers and to make every teacher skilled across all key stages.

Provision

Grade 1

Inspectors agreed with the school's self-evaluation that teaching is good overall with some examples of outstanding practice. Effective lessons were characterised by excellent subject knowledge and a range of methods that motivated pupils to engage in their own learning. The Year 11 revision lessons were very good. Pupils were able to revise in their own way or to move partners to teach each other various topics.

Generally, pupils were engaged throughout the lesson, working collaboratively and enthusiastically in groups and when giving feedback to the class. The school should now ensure that teachers are consistent in ensuring pupils participate in the peer working tasks. There was evidence of high level questioning that encouraged them to think for themselves and to make contributions to the group or to their partner.

There was differentiation in the way extension tasks were set. The school acknowledges that this could be developed to ensure higher ability pupils are challenged throughout the lesson. Pupils who needed extra support were helped, although this was not always the case in every lesson. A robust and rigorous process of assessment ensures pupils know their levels and targets.

10% of the curriculum time is allocated to Religious Education. This meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. At key stage 3, pupils follow 'The Way the Truth and the Life' programme, although the school is aware that more time could be given to 'Judaism'. The curriculum has been adapted to include more philosophy and the study of the person of Jesus. In year 7 "Catch up Christianity" for non-Christian pupils has been introduced. This includes basics such as prayer and the Rosary. The impact is seen in the high level of religious literacy in lessons. The GCSE programme is Edexcel. At 'A' level pupils study OCR Philosophy and Ethics and Christianity. There are good cross-curricular links in the 6 week General R.E. course led by teachers and the Chaplain. One aspect is studying the work of Caravaggio with the History and Art departments.

The provision for collective worship is outstanding. It is a central part of daily life. The highlight is the celebration on St Angela's Day. The Chaplain is highly effective in providing many opportunities for pupils to attend acts of collective worship. She works in collaboration with form teachers and key stage leaders to provide a programme of Masses and assemblies linked to the liturgical year. The school makes excellent use of the Chapel. It is a wonderful place that enhances the strong prayerful spirit in the school. It is open throughout the day for staff and pupils. There is a fortnightly voluntary Mass at lunchtime. Year group and class Masses and Holy Days are celebrated. A Year 7 commissioning service welcomes new pupils and families. Sixth Form students have an annual welcome service. There are class Masses for years 7 and 8. It is hoped that Masses for Year 9 will be introduced this year. Two assemblies a week for each year group are provided.

Retreats are a feature of the provision for collective worship. Pupils have opportunities to spend a day in reflection and prayer. One pupil said that she enjoyed the retreats and gained a lot from them. This year the Chaplain is introducing a retreat at the Comboni Missionary House for year 10 students. This will include an Emmaus walk. There are day retreats for year 7 in the Chapel. Pupils in years 8 and 9 have a day retreat at Walsingham House. Pupils in years 11 and 12 have in-house retreats. Year 13 pupils have outside speakers to complement the General R.E. programme.