



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
Of the Education Act 2005
URN 131583

Ursuline College
225 Canterbury Road
Westgate-on-Sea
Kent CT8 8LX

Inspection date: 1, 2 October 2012

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

The Ursuline College is a voluntary aided co-educational comprehensive school founded in 1904 as Ursuline Convent School by the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union (OSU). The Order transferred trusteeship to the Archdiocese of Southwark in 2009. The college is situated in the Thanet Deanery of the Diocese. It is maintained by Kent Local Authority, which operates a selective system top slicing some 35% to grammar schools. The principal parishes which it serves are St Peter's, Westgate; St Ethelbert's, Ramsgate; St Augustine's, Ramsgate; SS Austin and Gregory's, Margate and Our Lady Star of the Sea, Broadstairs. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 38.6%. The college takes pupils from 15 primary schools, five of them Catholic. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10 % in Key Stage 3, 10% in Key Stage 4, 5% for Sixth Form General Religious Education and 20% for Sixth Form AS and A2 courses related to the subject.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 18 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 769, including 161 in the Sixth Form. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average due to the local authority's selective system. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below that found nationally. The proportions of the students supported at School Action Plus or with a Statement of Special Educational needs are above average. The large majority of pupils are from White British heritage. The remainder of the student body comes from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. One in 10 of the school population speaks English as an additional language, although very few students are at the early stages of learning English. The school has retained its status as a specialist college for sport.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

GRADE
2

The Ursuline College is a good Catholic school overall, with many outstanding features. The school has a distinctive Catholic identity which reflects the charisms of St Angela Merici, the founder of the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Order. It seeks to serve the Catholic, local and wider community and makes the serving of the Common Good part of its mission. Its Catholic ethos provides a safe and welcoming environment for all who work there. The school provides care, guidance and exceptional support for all within its community. Relationships between all members of the school are outstanding. The leadership of the school is developing strategies for self-improvement such as Assessment for Learning (AfL) in Religious Education. This is being further developed with the national levels of attainment at Key Stage 3 and target setting at Key Stage 4 to ensure AfL has a greater impact on pupils' learning. This will enable teachers to develop a more consistent approach to planning in order to meet the differing needs of pupils. The school is aware of the importance of leadership and management of Religious Education and the need to further develop this in the light of recent changes in staffing. Opportunities for prayer and worship through Masses, assemblies and other liturgies are good with many outstanding features. All four issues highlighted in the last inspection, have been fully met. The accurate self-evaluation and robust planning indicates that school leaders have accurately identified priorities for development. Thus the school has a strong capacity to improve even further.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Further enhance the existing good provision for assemblies by involving more active pupil participation and by using music and appropriate displays in order to create a prayerful and reflective atmosphere
- Continue to develop assessment for learning to enhance the planning of differentiated tasks and strategies
- Further pursue the introduction of Philosophy for Children in order to promote the use of higher order thinking skills in Religious Education
- Continue to embed the robust tracking system in Religious Education in order to identify pupils' underachievement at Key Stage 4 and lead to the adoption of appropriate strategies to drive up standards

The Catholic life of the school

GRADE 1

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The school has a distinctive Catholic ethos which is based on the charisms of the Ursuline Order. The headteacher is an exemplary role model. Her vision as a leader is skilfully articulated and shared throughout the school community. This vision is effectively and ably supported by the governing body and the leadership team. The school works with other Ursuline schools and communities as companions in mission to strengthen and ensure a consistent ethos. Leaders at all levels are empowered to flourish owing to the clear strategic direction given by the governors and headteacher. Future leaders are identified and supported through appropriate professional development, such as work shadowing and leadership project work. Teaching and support staff receive induction into the Catholic and Ursuline ethos of the school. Governors support senior leaders and hold them to account by monitoring their work to raise standards both in the Catholic and academic life of the school through the work of the Ethos Committee and Curriculum Committee. The school's leadership secured the appointment of the school chaplain through the creative application of prudent financial planning. The Mission Statement is lived out in its aim for the school community to '... work together in the spirit of the Gospel to serve the local community and the Diocese ...' An additional aim of the Mission Statement is '... to enable each individual to grow spiritually and intellectually in order to make a unique and positive contribution to society.' It is prominently displayed in the prospectus, in pupil planners and is the first statement in school policies. Religious displays and artefacts, such as the thoughts and writings of Sister Angela Merici, the impressive models, posters and crucifixes from a Year 7 project on 'Christ taking on the sins of the world' and the '100 Days of Peace' associated with the Olympics, in the classrooms, meeting rooms and corridors mark the school as distinctively Catholic. Skilfully led by a member of the senior leadership team, the pastoral provision in the school is outstanding.

Two years ago the school moved seamlessly from a horizontal year group pastoral system to a vertical house system. The impact is seen in the extremely caring and positive relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff. In particular, many older pupils mentor younger pupils so that they are helped to make a smooth transition from the primary phase to the secondary phase. The Insieme academic and pastoral intervention suite, which is run by trained, term time only staff, is a great strength of the school, catering for pupils who have additional educational needs. The Student Council has a high profile amongst pupils in the school. As a result of regular discussions with senior leaders the pupil voice in the school is effective and has led to a number of initiatives. For example, senior leaders agreed to the Student Council's suggestion that new furniture should be purchased for the on-site café.

The Student Council is an excellent vehicle for the pupil voice to be heard and to help pupils learn about how the democratic process works within a community. In a recent survey, parents' comments were overwhelmingly positive. Communication was flagged up as an issue by a few parents but the inspectors found secure evidence that the very well-presented and informative newsletter was sent home during each of the six terms in conjunction with text messaging to parents, notifying them that the document was being issued to their child. One parent wrote: "As parents we couldn't have chosen a better school for our son. The care and input from all staff of Ursuline College is excellent and shows in the development of the students and is paramount for the students becoming hard working and caring people," whilst another commented, 'We are very happy with the Catholic education which our daughter is receiving at Ursuline College. The school is very well run and full of encouragement and spiritual inspiration.'

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

GRADE 2

The quality of provision for personal and collective worship is good with many outstanding features. The headteacher, school chaplain and head of Religious Education work extremely well as a team to ensure that prayer and collective worship is central to the life of the school. The full-time chaplain's contribution to the liturgical and spiritual life of the school is exceptional. He works in partnership with the Head of Religious Education to provide a programme of Masses, liturgies and assemblies linked to the liturgical year and to the Way the Truth and the Life Religious Education programme. Pupils confirmed that they were actively involved in Masses and liturgies in leading prayer, as readers, servers and musicians. The Eucharist is celebrated by priests from the Deanery, including all Holy Days of Obligation which occur during term time. Moreover a whole school Mass is held in the sports hall each term. Reconciliation services, which are open to all, take place during Advent and Lent. Within these services, priests of the Deanery celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with those Catholic members of the school community who wish to do so. A number of other members come forward to have a one-to-one conversation with the priests. This highlights the inclusivity of the school. The school encourages the pupils to ground themselves in prayer. The chaplain has produced an excellent set of daily prayer sheets to which pupils and staff may refer. The student planners also provide pupils with a rich source of materials including the Ursuline prayer and prayers for the school day. The styles of prayer include the formal prayers of the Church, contemplative prayer and reflection. Opportunities for quiet reflection are provided during the school day, as was evidenced on the inspection day during two outstanding tutor group meetings which focused on the upcoming Cafod Harvest Day. Pupils were also involved in leading prayer. This good practice should be consistently applied across all school assemblies. A strength of the school is the 'Mothers who Pray' prayer group who meet to intercede for the well-being and needs of the school. The chaplain organises and facilitates day retreats for every year group at venues such as Aylesford Priory and Minster. Guest speakers at the last sixth form retreat on 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation' were Camila Carr and Barry and Margaret Mizen. The sixth form passed on what they had learnt and organised a whole school reconciliation service based on the same themes. The school provides staff with the opportunity of participating in a triennial retreat. For April 2013 a staff retreat on the Year of Faith and the Ursuline Vision is being planned. The Convent chapel is an outstanding resource for the school. The local community of Ursuline Sisters is a constant source of support and succour for the school community. As a result of the above, personal and collective worship makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and cements the positive relationships clearly evident within the school.

Community cohesion

GRADE 1

The promotion and achieving of community cohesion in the school is outstanding. Skilfully led by an assistant headteacher, there is a very strong sense of community. At its heart lies the Ursuline ethos which pervades all aspects of school life. The Sisters, who reside in the neighbouring convent, make their spiritual and pastoral presence felt to great effect at school events and when pupils and staff visit the chapel. In addition, four from their community are attached to each of the houses, giving spiritual and pastoral support in great measure. The school is very inclusive and makes the understanding of and acceptance of those from diverse faith backgrounds a priority, whilst maintaining the distinctive characteristics of a Catholic school. It provides outstanding pastoral care for all in the school community regardless of faith backgrounds or educational abilities. Pupils flourish at this school because of these features. Provision is made for the most able pupils through many enrichment opportunities. For example, local outreach work to 45 schools included student leadership of an Olympic learning day for 2,500 students. Also, some students received scholarships to Taiwan to broaden their understanding of other cultures

and religions as one of many Ursuline international outreaches. Pupils state that they feel included and look favourably upon the positive ethos reflecting the school's Ursuline traditions. Pupils say that they feel safe and that incidents of bullying seldom occur. On the very rare occasions when they do take place, pupils follow the school's anti-bullying policy and have no hesitation in informing members of staff. One Year 8 pupil said, 'There's not much bullying here and, if there is, it's sorted by teachers within two days.' Pupils are considerate and courteous toward visitors and relationships between the staff and pupils are mutually respectful and positive. The Religious Education curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to study other world religions and this positively impacts on pupils' understanding and respect for other communities. The school has invited members from the local Muslim community to demonstrate Islamic dance for Key Stage 3 pupils, whilst a local Rabbi has spoken to sixth form students about Judaism.

Pupils readily support local, national and international charities and initiatives. For example, as part of one of many Ursuline international outreaches, in the summer holidays of 2011 and 2012 Year 12 students travelled to New Orleans and helped to rebuild housing for homeless victims in the wake of hurricane Katrina. These trips were self-financed through fund raising. The students planned and delivered assemblies to describe their acts of service and inspire others to action. The school has strong links with local feeder schools. For example, the school hosts an annual Year 5 retreat for three feeder schools entitled 'Journeying'. On-going collaboration with Catholic primary schools in the Deanery ensures that the Catholic distinctiveness of these institutions flourishes. Also, the school has employed its sports college status to nationally recognised standards for the 45 local schools including an outreach where Year 11 sports leaders minister to pupils needs in a special school. There is a strong link with an Ursuline college in Taiwan, where trainee teachers undergo a school experience in the school at Westgate for five months, sharing Chinese culture and language. As a result of all this outstanding work, pupils recognise the importance of the contribution they make to communities locally, nationally and worldwide. There is a strong and active parents and friends association (PFA). The members raise funds through the '200 Club', cake sales and car boot sales for enhancing the environment and for assisting pupils to attend events. For example, both the new furniture for the café and the whole school trip to the London Paralympics were subsidised by the PFA. They have also sponsored a shield for courage, in memory of a deceased member of the student community, which is awarded to pupils who have displayed determined resoluteness in the face of adversity. One parent wrote, "I am very happy with the school and the opportunities they offer the children such as going to the Paralympics this year."

Religious Education

GRADE 3

Achievement and standards in Religious Education

Pupils enter the school with below average literacy levels. This has an impact on attainment in Religious Education. At Key Stage 3 pupil tracking data indicates that they make good progress as does the work in their books. At Key Stage 4 the attainment of pupils has shown a downward trend over the past three years. However, attainment in the subject exceeds English at this level. Work in their books is of a variable standard owing to pupils' starting points in literacy. Pupils with additional educational needs progress particularly well because of the targeted and outstanding support they receive. Observations in lessons and scrutiny of pupils' Religious Education books show that empathetic skills are well developed. The levels of pupil behaviour are extremely good. The strong Catholic ethos and Gospel values are particularly evident in the excellent relationships members of the department have with pupils in their care. The spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of pupils is a strength of the school. This can be attributed to the powerful influence of the Ursuline ethos around the school and in the classrooms and to the increasing pupil involvement in the Catholic life of the school, particularly through events linked with the chaplaincy. Many pupils say they enjoy Religious Education and their behaviour is exemplary. In the sixth form, Religious Education A level results are in line with the national average and, given pupils' starting points, sometimes exceed expectations.

GRADE 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Overall, teaching and learning in Religious Education is good with some outstanding features. The well-qualified teachers have excellent relationships with their pupils, which promotes a calm atmosphere conducive to learning. During the inspection all the lessons observed were good or better. Characterised by a brisk pace and meticulous planning, there is a good balance between teacher input and pupil activity. Teachers have very good behaviour management skills and use a wide variety of teaching methods, such as role play, skilful questioning and talk partners to engage pupils' interest. There is a variety of activities, including pair and group work, which is appropriately matched to ability in order to challenge all students and motivate them to achieve clear learning objectives. For example, in an outstanding Year 11 lesson on the 'Argument from Design', to stimulate pupils' interest, the teacher used Escher's thought-provoking waterfall optical illusion as a starter activity to elicit the response that our eyes depend on the interpretation of our minds. This thought was developed as the lesson progressed. Using talk partners and through skilful questioning the teacher facilitated pupils' understanding by challenging them to write their own questions on Paley's theological 'watchmaker analogy'. Through opportunities given for reflective thinking, one pupil observed, "We're not designed to read. We learn to read". Another countered with the argument, "We're designed to learn to read". Differentiated outcomes were achieved through all pupils comprehending the argument from design through to some identifying how the topic causes conflict for some Christians. Since the last inspection, teaching strategies and materials, which are more closely suited to the abilities of the pupils and to meeting their individual learning needs, are now in place, with skilful use being made of the electronic whiteboards. The department's rigorous monitoring system enhances the learning opportunities experienced by the pupils. In all lessons observed, pupils' books were consistently marked with formative comments informing pupils how they might improve their work. Sixth Form teaching is very sound and pupils are articulate in expressing themselves. In a very good lesson on Descartes' and Kant's critiques of Anselm's ontological argument, the teacher successfully encouraged Year 12 students to engage in co-operative learning through the employment of Kagan strategies, such as 'think-pair-share' and carousel learning. Students felt very comfortable in expressing themselves in this setting and some profound ideas were exchanged. Assessment for learning was evident in the peer assessment opportunities afforded by the teacher in the lesson planning.

The Religious Education curriculum

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is excellent. The curriculum follows Diocesan guidelines, meets the needs of the pupils and satisfies the requirements of the Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools. At Key Stage 3 the department delivers the curriculum on 'The Way the Truth and the Life' Religious Education programme, supported with material from the National Project, ICONS. At Key Stage 4 the programme followed is the Edexcel GCSE course, where pupils study Catholic Christianity and Mark's Gospel. In the sixth form, Year 12 and Year 13 students follow the General Religious Education programme validated by the National Open College Network (NOCN). The school currently offers this qualification at level 1 for Year 12 but for this academic year has introduced level 2 for Year 13 with the option of level 3 for the more able. In addition the department offers Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) A level courses in Year 12 and Year 13 on the Philosophy of Religion and Religious Ethics. The school meets the Bishops' Conference and Diocesan curriculum time requirements of 10% at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and of 5% for sixth form General Religious Education. However, there are a few sixth formers who are unable to access the 5% provision owing to timetabling constraints such as January GCSE retakes. The curriculum makes a very significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and they are taught to respect other faiths and cultures. The Religious Education department works effectively with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust to provide opportunities for pupils to learn lessons and share the memory of those people who were persecuted and died in the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. The department also collaborates with the English, science, physical education, geography and art departments to provide integrated learning opportunities for all pupils. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is taught throughout the school and is set in the context of the Church's teaching and values. The policy has been ratified by governors and endorsed by the parents.

Leadership and management of Religious Education

Leadership and management of Religious Education are good. A strong team ethos ensures that Religious Education is at the heart of the curriculum and maintains a high profile throughout the school. The governors, headteacher and all members of staff work closely together to promote the Catholic ethos of the school and to ensure that pupils receive a firm grounding in the knowledge and understanding of their faith. The well qualified head of department, who is line managed by the headteacher, leads by example. He attends Diocesan training on a regular basis and supports his department with clarity and empathy. This has led to the development of a high quality Religious Education curriculum. The Head and Deputy Head of Religious Education share an effective complementary leadership with great success. This has greatly benefited all pupils because it has led to the robust delivery of Religious Education. The planned introduction of Philosophy for Children across a number of subjects, in order to promote the use of higher order thinking skills, will have a positive impact on learning for all pupils in Religious Education, including the most able. The subject is supported by INSET and staff professional development. The Deanery Religious Education leaders meet to discuss issues such as assessing and moderating pupils' work. There is an impressive pupil tracking system in place within the department, effectively overseen by the deputy head of Religious Education. Moreover, the school has prioritised the employment of a new school performance tracking system which identifies vulnerable groups and their relative performance, as part of their whole school planning. As the analysis and evaluation of the data produced from these two systems becomes more refined and embedded, this will have a positive impact on achievement and standards in the subject. Staff are well briefed and governors are aware of the importance of Religious Education. Governors attend a school improvement planning and self-evaluation meeting annually with the staff of the

school. A member of the Ursuline Sisters is a link governor who works closely with the department and they meet regularly to monitor pupils' work. The impact of these interventions is seen in the improvement in progress that the pupils are now making. Religious Education is viewed as a core subject in the school. Hence the department receives a budget commensurate with English and mathematics. The subject is well-resourced with textbooks suitable for the requirements of the curriculum and with age-appropriate Bibles. Parents give Religious Education an above-the-mean satisfaction rating as seen in the 2010 Kirkland Rowell survey.

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