



## **DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD**



### **Inspection Report**

**Name of School:** Ilford Ursuline Academy

**Unique Reference Number:** 137498

**Inspection Date:** 21 May 2012

**Reporting Inspectors:** Dr Michael Sutherland-Harper and  
Mr Derek Kelly

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

**Type of School:** Academy Converter  
**School Category:** Voluntary Aided  
**Age range of students:** 11 - 18  
**Gender of students:** Girls  
**Number on roll:** 767  
**Appropriate Authority:** The Governing Body  
**Date of previous inspection:**

**School Address:**  
Morland Road  
Ilford, Essex  
1G1 4JU  
**Tel. No.** 020 8554 1995  
**Fax No.** 020 8554 9537  
**Chair of Governors:** Andrew Dodd  
**Headteacher:** Alex Burke

## **Introduction:**

The Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education (Schools) Act 2005 by two inspectors appointed by the Diocesan Bishop at the request of the Governing Body of the School.

The Inspectors acknowledge and are appreciative of the full support, co-operation and courtesy they enjoyed from the Governors, Headteacher, Staff and Students of the School both before and during the Inspection. The Inspectors wish to express their gratitude to all concerned.

## **The focus of the Section 48 Inspection was:**

- Classroom Religious Education
- The Catholic nature of the School through;
  1. Worship
  2. Links with the Catholic and wider community
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

## **The Section 48 Report**

**Iford Ursuline Academy  
Morland Road  
Iford  
Essex  
1GI 4JU**

**Head Teacher:                      Alex Burke**

**Date of Inspection:                21 May 2012**

## **Description of the School:**

Iford Ursuline Academy is a voluntary aided Catholic girls' school with academy status situated in Iford in the county of Essex and in the diocese of Brentwood. The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. The school serves 12 main Catholic parishes in Iford and the surrounding areas. A quarter of places are reserved each year for non-Catholic families reflecting the religious and cultural diversity of the area served. This mix serves the school well, strengthening its Catholic ethos and contributing significantly to strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

### **Record of Evidence Base:**

Two Diocesan Inspectors were in the school for the equivalent of two inspection days.

- The study of pre-inspection documentation including the Self-Evaluation Form/ Denominational Provision (SEF/DP).
- The observation of eight lessons.
- Participation in an assembly.
- Scrutiny of students' written work.
- Meetings with the following: the Headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, the Head of Religious Education (R.E.), the Parish Priest and other governors, the School Council and a second representative group of students.
- Observations of R.E. displays in the classrooms and around the school.

### **What the School does well:**

Iford Ursuline Academy is a good and improving Catholic school. Governors, including a parent, praised the strong care, support and guidance provided by the school which enables the girls to emerge as confident young adults, able to face the challenges of the world around them and with a secure set of personal values. Likewise, the headteacher spoke about his caring and increasingly prayerful community, centred on a compassionate approach which enables every student to feel valued for her particular skills and talents. Students themselves appreciate the sense of family created by the school and the positive atmosphere which is protective of others. Teachers and other adults offer structured support to help students achieve personal and academic targets. Students are expected to make a difference to the lives of others, based on the application of values like justice and faith which are prominently displayed around the school, and in line with the mission statement which is to 'nurture and support each other towards the fulfillment of our true potential'. Students have a clear understanding of right and wrong and strong respect for each other, shown by the respect with which they listen to the opinions of their peers. The school is a multi-cultural community with an enquiring approach to the world around it and a growing sense of the awe and wonder of that world. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is one of the strengths of the school. The focused and effective work of the head of R.E. and of the chaplain is reinforced by regular visits from the reflective parish priest. Students also have a strong sense of their duty towards the local and wider communities, as shown by their work with Ursuline communities around the country and across Europe. The headteacher is deeply committed to the school vision of a 'community with Christ at its centre' and which sends its girls into the world imbued with 'the Ursuline spirit'. In this, he is fully supported by a knowledgeable governing body. Rising achievement, the care with which the head of department has taken his subject forward, the growing sense of involvement from the

students and the outstanding care and support shown by staff mean that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Students are proud of their school and there is a shared belief that it is helping them to achieve their goals. They have good attendance and high expectations of each other. Good behaviour helps them to learn well. Interviews with two groups of students showed a highly articulate set of girls with good ideas and a shared determination to contribute to moving their school even further forward. The effectiveness of pastoral care was underlined by the speed with which the girls responded that difficulties of any kind would be quickly sorted out because adults ensure that students are safe in school at all times and that there is no bullying of any kind. The work of the recently appointed school chaplain is much appreciated.

Religious Education (R.E.) is at the heart of the school's work. Standards in R.E. are good and rising as the well-qualified departmental staff work carefully together under the strong, focused leadership of the head of department. The school has recognized the need for more student involvement in discussion and exploration of faith and is working to refine its approach in discussion with students. The departmental development plan is carefully linked to the whole school improvement plan and has clear objectives which are regularly reviewed. The head of department is in the process of evaluating the impact of efforts so far as he seeks to further improve provision. Work to raise achievement levels has been strong and focused. The R.E. curriculum incorporates a wide variety of social and cultural links which tie in well with students' understanding of the world around them. The department delivers courses in line with the expectations of the diocese, bishops' conference and Catholic Education Service. It is currently reviewing its schemes of work in line with the new 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' syllabus. The school meets both the national and diocesan requirements for the allocation of curriculum time for taught R.E. Visits and visitors are used wherever possible to enhance student understanding. Attainment is above average. In R.E. lessons, students settle readily to work because expectations are clear and the teacher is always ready to help with an explanation. Relationships with fellow students and adults are good. There are increasing opportunities to reflect on lesson activities. All groups of students make good progress in R.E. and best practice is now being more frequently shared in the subject to continue the upward trend in results. During the inspections, inspectors were able to observe some very well prepared and effective examination revision sessions which added an extra dimension to pastoral and academic care.

The quality of teaching and learning in R.E. is good and improving, Lessons are well-prepared, including with good use of electronic technology and a good, but sometimes overly general, match of work to student abilities. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and an excellent understanding of the pastoral needs of the students, who are known as individuals. Staff have a clear focus on continuing the trend of improving results with particular reference to increasing the number of top grades and eliminating any possibility of underachievement. Lessons provide good levels of challenge but are occasionally teacher dominated. As a result, in these lessons, there are fewer opportunities for students to contribute, especially through the expectation that students

will provide reasons and examples for their conclusions. Thoughtful displays, regarded by students as some of the best in the school, link the school with its Ursuline past and with its commitment to improving the world around and outside the school. They also reflect the school's commitment to charitable work and are increasingly composed of work generated by the students themselves. Exercise books are regularly marked with good use of praise to recognise and encourage efforts. Presentation is generally good but assessment is sometimes inconsistent in giving students precise guidance how to take their learning and efforts to the next level.

The strong commitment to the value and development of each individual means that spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding are outstanding and a strength of the school. Students feel that they in turn can contribute to the world around them and are actively looking at ways to increase their range of contributions. They lead prayer in assemblies and other gatherings and welcome the opportunities which the R.E. syllabus provides for reflection. One governor mentioned with pride how students have helped to ensure the welfare of younger children in the neighbouring preparatory school over time. Display increasingly celebrates the rich cultural mix in the school. Assemblies focus on Gospel values, highlight student achievements of any sort and provide further evidence of how well the school knows and cares for its students.

#### **What needs to be improved?**

- **Raise all teaching and learning to the highest levels by increasing opportunities for students to contribute in lessons and ensuring that these contributions include reasons for their opinions and conclusions.**
- **Ensure that all marking and assessment provides students with clear guidance about how to improve their work and take it to a higher level.**

The Inspectors endorse the areas identified by the school for improvement in the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Form.

Iford Ursuline Academy is a good and improving school with a good capacity for sustained improvement. The school offers students a caring learning environment which prepares them well for the world beyond the school gates.