

The Costello School

Crossborough Hill, London Road, Basingstoke RG21 4AL

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:		
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Leadership and management	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Achievement is good overall and very good for girls and middle ability students.
- Actions taken by senior leaders have had a positive impact in speeding up the current progress for most groups of students at Key Stage 4.
- Teaching is good, particularly so in mathematics, science, art and modern foreign languages where expectations are high.
- The school has concentrated on improving the teaching of reading, writing, speaking and numeracy across all subjects at Key Stage 3, which has enabled students to make good progress.
- Attendance for most students is good and higher than the national average.
- Students feel highly appreciated as individuals. They behave consistently well and interact easily with one another. Students say they feel safe, secure and happy in school.
- The acting headteacher is a strong leader who has taken decisive and successful action to improve the school this year.
- Appointments to the senior leadership team have strengthened the capacity of the school to improve. It gives the acting headteacher support in driving behaviour, achievement and teaching towards the highest standards.
- Governors check how well leaders and teachers meet their targets very carefully. They act swiftly to tackle any weaknesses. Governors know a lot about the school and its strengths and areas for improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of marking is not consistent across all subjects. It does not always provide students, particularly in English, with a clear understanding of how to improve.
- Attendance for some groups of students is not consistently high enough.
- Subject leaders do not always apply school policies consistently to set high expectations for students' achievement. This is especially true for disabled students and those with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for free school meals.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was triggered due to issues arising from a qualifying complaint.
- Inspectors observed 38 lessons involving 37 teachers, five of whom were jointly observed with senior members of staff. In addition, inspectors visited a number of other lessons to determine how well the needs of individual students are taken into account and to look at the quality of marking.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students, the Chair and three other members of the governing body and a wide variety of staff including senior and other leaders. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the school’s educational consultant. Inspectors also had telephone conversations with three off-site training providers.
- Inspectors visited an assembly and tutor time to find out how well the personal needs of individual students were met. Students’ planners were examined in four classes to check how consistently homework is set across year groups and subjects.
- Inspectors listened to two groups of students reading aloud.
- An inspector also carried out observations in the inclusion zone to check on progress for those students who need extra help to catch up.
- Inspectors took account of 84 responses on Parent View, three written letters from parents and had two telephone conversations with parents.
- There were 34 staff questionnaires returned and considered by the inspection team.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including examples of students’ work, the school’s own information on students’ attainment and progress, records of attendance and behaviour, and information about meetings of the governing body, subject departments, safeguarding, school planning and setting targets for teachers.

Inspection team

Sheila Crew, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janet Hallett

Additional Inspector

Roger Fenwick

Additional Inspector

Joseph Skivington

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Costello School converted to become an academy on 1 July 2012. When its predecessor school, Costello Technology College, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good.
- The Costello School is slightly larger than the average-sized secondary academy and numbers on roll have remained stable over the last three years.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for additional government funding, known as pupil premium, is below average. In this school it is for students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportions of students who need some extra help is slightly above the national average. Students who need more extra help and those who have a statement of special educational needs are well below the national average.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is below average, as is the number who speak English as an additional language.
- A number of students at Key Stage 4 attend off-site courses at Basingstoke College of Technology. Small numbers of students are also currently educated away from school at Chute House, the Ashwood Education Centre and Inclusion Hampshire in Hook.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The acting headteacher has been in post since January 2014. There is also a new acting assistant headteacher who has responsibility for child protection and students who are at risk of not doing as well.
- There are new subject leaders in mathematics and science since January 2014, and an acting subject leader of English since September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise the levels of achievement of all students by:
 - ensuring teachers' marking provides clear guidance on how to improve, particularly in English
 - ensuring all lessons provide challenge and high expectations for all groups of students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, disabled students and those with special educational needs or those who need extra help.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and student's achievement still further by:
 - ensuring that subject leaders fully implement the school's policies, particularly the ones concerning checking on students' progress and behaviour
 - promoting higher levels of attendance for disabled students and those with special educational needs, and those known to be eligible for free school meals.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with above average attainment.
- For the last three years standards for students at the end of Key Stage 4 have been above the national average, apart from in 2013, when results dipped for students gaining five or more good quality GCSEs, including English and mathematics. This was because results in English fell

to below the national average. However, the school's internal information shows that this dip has now been decisively reversed as results already achieved in the 2014 monitored checks exceed last year's pass rate.

- In general, higher and middle ability students do very well in consistently achieving the highest GCSE grades by the end of Year 11, particularly in art, English literature, French, geography, mathematics, physics and sciences.
- Achievement is not outstanding because students who need more help in lessons and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals are still achieving one grade lower than their peers. This is particularly the case in English and mathematics, and the gap is not yet closing. Governors have approved the use of additional government funding to buy in extra staffing for Years 10 and 11. The school's checks show that this trend has been reversed and these students are predicted to make much better progress this year.
- Most students from minority ethnic groups, including those who speak English as an additional language, make very good progress in English and mathematics; this is also the case in science, where students' achievement is excellent.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make some progress from their starting points, but it is below the national average.
- The school enters students early for GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 10. Consistently excellent mathematics results over the past three years confirm that this policy is successful and students who pass with A* and A grades go on to study for a further mathematics examination in Year 11. Students entered early science modules in the past. However, this practice has now ceased due to changes to examination arrangements.
- The small proportion of students in Key Stage 4 who attend courses in other local colleges achieve well in level 2 qualifications in childcare, construction and automotive engineering.
- The additional catch-up funding for students in Year 7 has been used well to provide students with targeted support to improve their work in English, particularly in reading, and in mathematics where progress is good. This is especially true for students who need extra help who receive support from older students as part of the paired reading scheme and attendance at a club that helps students practise their phonics (the sounds that letters make).

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is typically good. Teachers plan interesting activities, set high expectations, use modern technology to support learning and have good subject knowledge. They provide opportunities for students to write extensively.
- In most lessons, activities are well sequenced, imaginative and stimulate students' curiosity. A good variety of approaches is a strong feature in some subjects, such as in art and physical education, where students are encouraged to learn from each other and teachers use well-focused and challenging questions that help students explore new ideas.
- Teachers know what students already understand and use this knowledge to plan demanding work, to which students respond enthusiastically. For example, in science lessons students were engrossed in research tasks investigating the properties of volcanic rocks and in solving problems of magnetism to a question about the flight of carrier pigeons in the First World War. Teachers provide a range of stimulating resources where students find information at their own pace.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because not all activities are set at the right level and students are all expected to complete the same task. This means that some students complete the work quickly and can't move on, while those who need extra help struggle to complete tasks. Some have work that is incomplete. As a result, although most students make good progress, they are capable of making more.
- Teachers provide helpful comments in their marking in some subjects, particularly in geography and religious education, but in others students are provided with little guidance that shows them how to improve. In some subjects, for example in English, not all teachers assess students' classwork frequently and there is little evidence that students act upon teachers' comments.

- In the most effective teaching, positive relationships exist between teachers and students which promote good learning. For example, in French and German lessons teachers provided a good climate for learning where Year 7 students enthusiastically memorised vocabulary and together practised speaking sentences aloud.
- The support provided for developing students' literacy skills across subjects is good. There is a focus across the school on spelling, punctuation and grammar. Teachers make good use of key words and appropriate language in most subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour is good. Parents and students confirm that this is typical across the school.
- Positive attitudes to learning are evident, where students are lively and courteous towards one another. Behaviour around the school, as seen during the inspection, was orderly and calm. A wet break was well supervised and students in the canteen and learning resources centre chatted amicably together.
- Good behaviour is reflected in high attendance figures, which are above average for most groups of students.
- Behaviour is not yet outstanding because attendance for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who need extra help and disabled students or those with special educational needs is low. Exclusions are higher than national averages. Governors have approved the use of additional funding for extra staff to improve the attendance of these students and school records show some improvement.
- The pastoral system in the school is highly appreciated by students and parents. Form tutors play an essential role and parents informed inspectors how beneficial they feel this is. One parent wrote, 'In her first year our daughter was bullied and as soon as I told her tutor the situation and the culprits were dealt with swiftly and our daughter was also helped through the process. Her tutor handled the situation superbly.'
- A few parents expressed concern about how consistently behaviour policies are applied. Inspectors discussed these concerns with students in groups and individually and they said they are confident that staff deal effectively with any poor behaviour. Although a small minority of students did express some reservations about bullying and how it is managed, the overwhelming majority believe that if incidents happen, they are dealt with very rapidly.
- The school provides many opportunities for students to succeed. Racism, or any form of discrimination, is not tolerated and students of various nationalities say it does not happen. They are equally clear on homophobic and cyber bullying and they mention memorable assemblies which have covered these issues.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students understand risks and know the school rules. They find teachers very approachable and say it is always easy to talk to them. Students say they have always felt completely safe at school and know exactly who they would turn to if there was a problem.
- Older students commented on the effectiveness of a scheme where they provide support for Year 7 students in dealing with any problems they might have. They described a range of opportunities to contribute to the local community through after-school activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher is a strong leader who has taken decisive and successful action to improve the school this year. He has improved the senior leadership team by appointing an acting assistant headteacher who has responsibility to improve what the school provides for students who are disabled, have special educational needs and those known to be eligible for free school meals.

- The leadership team has acted quickly to improve the leadership in English following the drop in the 2013 GCSE pass rate, and school records show this has had a rapid impact in raising standards.
- Leadership is not yet outstanding because the school has undergone a period of rapid change and many subject leaders are new. In order to support these new leaders, the acting headteacher has ensured that the school's systems for checking on students' progress for Key Stage 4 students are used rigorously. This is helping maintain high expectations for students, and ensures staff are accountable for achieving high standards.
- The school has an accurate view of its own performance and leaders are determined to move towards becoming outstanding. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher carry out systematic lesson observations. Records show that good teaching is typical. The setting of targets to improve the quality of teachers' work is linked to pay progression and linked to students' progress.
- Strategies to improve the leadership of teaching also include a two-year cycle of subject reviews, some of which are conducted by external organisations. The school has good productive links with Hampshire and Surrey educational consultants who have supported the school in a number of effective ways. Subject leaders are aspirational and determined to do their best for the students. One subject leader believes 'good isn't good enough'. This ensures that all staff in their teams understand the importance of planning for different groups of students and closing the gap for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Subject leaders share good practice which have been particularly successful; for example, an initiative in art, using students as lead learners to support other students in developing skills, has now spread across other subject areas.
- The school has had a priority to improve systems for checking students' progress over the past two years and it is an ongoing area for improvement. Some excellent practices exist in providing students with regular and helpful marking in subjects such as French and German, but senior leaders are aware of the need to ensure these are consistently applied across all subjects.
- The school provides a good range of programmes for students including GCSE subjects together with courses provided at the local technology college. There are also work-related subjects taught in school, which include cabinet making, hair and beauty, catering and hospitality.
- The promotion of students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is variable. There is some good practice in religious education where students demonstrate a good understanding of right and wrong, but is not regularly included in the tutorial programme.
- Additional funding is well managed and the tracking of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is rigorous. School records for 2014 show that the funding is having a positive impact. Funding to recruit staff to improve behaviour and attendance is starting to work.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire said they were pleased with the way the school is led and would recommend it to others.
- Staff questionnaire responses indicate that they believe the school to be well led.
- Safeguarding procedures meet all current requirements.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors hold the acting headteacher to account for the accuracy of predictions for students' achievement, examination results, the quality of teaching and attendance. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and spend time in the school with their link departments. They set the headteacher's performance targets in consultation with a Hampshire educational consultant. Governors are developing a sound understanding of performance information on how well the school is doing in comparison to all schools nationally. They take up opportunities for training and have completed recruitment, safeguarding and training in helping to understand national and school based information on students' progress.
- Governors have a firm grasp of the finances and of systems for pay progression and rewards for good teaching. They have supported the acting headteacher in decisions about staffing and promotions. Governors ensure that the additional funding is well managed and they are

developing an awareness of how to evaluate its impact on students' achievement.

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138287
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	446113

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act. This inspection was brought forward principally due to issues arising from a qualifying complaint.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy–Converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1058
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carole Bode
Headteacher	Nick Price
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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