

The Costello School

Crossborough Hill, London Road, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 4AL

Inspection dates

6–7 March 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Overall, pupils do not make the progress they should.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make strong progress. They lag behind their classmates. The differences between their performance and other pupils nationally are not diminishing quickly.
- The most able pupils, and those who join the school with high levels of attainment, do not go on to excel consistently in their GCSE examinations.
- Results in English, at GCSE level in science, and for many pupils in humanities and languages are strong. In other subjects they are not as good as they should be.
- A new system to measure pupils' progress and attainment is yet to enable teachers to account accurately or convincingly for outcomes in their classes.
- Many parents and carers are not sure how well their children are doing. Teachers' use of the system lacks precision.
- Teaching is inconsistent across the school. Many pupils are fortunate to have a good experience. Other pupils are hampered by weaker teaching and make slower progress.
- Frequent changes in personnel over the past three academic years have led to instability in the school's leadership.
- Some parents, and a few staff, who raised legitimate and well-founded concerns were not listened to until the school's decline was evident in published information.
- The governing body has been through an unhelpful period of turbulence. Governors, until recently, did not hold leaders to account. They did not exercise their duties with appropriate levels of professionalism.

The school has the following strengths

- The pastoral care of pupils is good and is aided by a dedicated and committed team.
- The school has a strong curriculum, with a small but impressive vocational element. Leaders are increasingly tailoring the curriculum to the specific needs of each pupil.
- The school is an inclusive community which celebrates individual pupils' differences, and promotes tolerance and equality effectively.
- The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils is good and contributes well to the good order of the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the performance and attainment of disadvantaged pupils by:
 - continuing with the successful strategies that have increased their rates of attendance
 - focusing teaching even more directly on addressing their remaining barriers to learning
 - targeting the pupil premium even more closely on tried and tested improvement strategies.
- Challenge the most able pupils and those with high prior attainment to make rapid progress and achieve greater numbers of GCSE grades 7 to 9 by:
 - setting even higher expectations of what such pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that the strong practice that exists in some areas of the school is distributed more widely
 - insisting that teachers prepare work that extends such pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and deepens their ability to reason and study independently.
- Strengthen the quality of governance by:
 - stabilising and consolidating the current governance arrangements
 - increasing governors' engagement with training.

A review of the governance arrangements was commissioned by the school's existing trustees in the autumn of 2017.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The current arrangements for senior leadership are unusual. The headteacher was not present during the inspection.
- Leadership of the inspection process was undertaken by two acting co-headteachers. These personnel are employees of the Bohunt Education Trust. BET is to be commended for agreeing to provide senior leadership support, at short notice, in January 2018.
- BET is currently providing a range of educational services to the governing body of The Costello Academy Trust. These services are being delivered while the governing body negotiates the inclusion of The Costello School into BET's multi-academy trust. This process is intended to conclude by 1 May 2018.
- All headteacher functions are now carried out by the two acting co-headteachers. They are supported by the remaining senior leaders. All leaders are clear about their roles. They share a common purpose and that is to return The Costello to the school parents believe it should be.
- Parents are rightly concerned about the turbulence in leadership in the recent past. They are generally optimistic about the future direction of the school. One parent commented, '...looking forward to positive changes being made by new headteachers'.
- Leaders have focused on raising the standards of teaching overall, and reducing the proportion of weak or less-effective teaching. Effective systems for school improvement have been put in place. It is too early to judge whether they have had significant impact on standards.
- The acting co-headteachers have quickly acquired a realistic evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the school. They know what is working well and what needs to improve urgently.
- Senior leaders responsible for the pastoral care of pupils have been unwavering in their attempts to maintain good behaviour and strong levels of well-being among pupils. They have, over time, evolved highly effective systems for identifying vulnerable pupils. They have a proven track record of enabling the vast majority of these pupils to complete their education successfully. They have also contributed to improvements to pupils' rates of attendance.
- The special educational needs coordinator is held in high regard by all members of the community. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are cared for well and are supported to make steady progress from their individual starting points.
- Leaders ensure that the additional funding the school receives is used increasingly wisely. The pupil premium and literacy and numeracy funding, as well as funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are spent on personnel or resources that support specific learning needs. In keeping with the school's inclusive ethos, some of the pupil premium is used to fund cultural activities for pupils who would otherwise miss out. Some of the money is used to purchase generic materials which cannot be

guaranteed to make a difference to the removal of individual pupils' barriers to learning.

- The school has a good curriculum. It supports pupils' learning in traditional academic subjects. It also gives those pupils who wish to the chance to follow a vocational pathway. Leaders are keen to offer a completely open choice to pupils at key stage 4 so that they can all prepare to follow their career aspirations.
- Leaders make sure that pupils' academic or vocational studies are supported by a wide-ranging and rich programme of personal, social, health and economic education. They also encourage staff to make available a good range of extra-curricular activities. There is, for example, a good choice of musical ensembles and sports clubs in which pupils can participate.
- Teachers ensure that the whole curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to explore ideas and to learn about other people's experiences, beliefs and values. Pupils are taught about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. They are also taught positively about democracy, the rule of law and the importance of equality.

Governance of the school

- The current governing body has been in place for a very short time. There were three changes to the chair of the governing body in the last calendar year.
- Governance requires improvement because:
 - it has been through a period of considerable turbulence
 - a comprehensive audit of governors' skills has only just taken place and is yet to result in decisive action
 - not all of the recommendations of the thorough and accurate external review of governance, completed in January 2018, have been implemented as yet
 - previous governing bodies did not hold senior leaders to account rigorously enough
 - governors were slow to respond to signs that the school was not doing as well as it should
 - governors did not always address adequately the well-founded concerns of some parents and a small minority of staff
 - despite the best efforts of the experienced and efficient clerk to the governing body, historically, governors were slow to meet contemporary expectations relating to governor training.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils are safe in the school. Visitors are checked in via a secure system. Staff control the exit from school carefully, as traffic, including service buses, passes close by the front gate.
- Governors check that safeguarding procedures are in place. However, they are too willing to take external advice uncritically. They do not match the school's work to their

own understandings of clearly published current frameworks. For example, it is unusual not to record on the single central register the disclosure and barring service clearance for peripatetic music teachers and external contractors.

- Teachers receive frequent, good-quality and up-to-date training on safeguarding matters. They undertake some of this training online, using the same system that the school uses for sharing homework with pupils and parents.
- Teachers are all aware of the key personnel who work well to keep pupils safe. This team is one of the school's main strengths. When pupils display any signs of being at risk, they intervene quickly and arrange for additional help. Pastoral leaders have good working relationships with providers of specific external services.
- Leaders ensure that pupils who are found to have emerging mental health issues are supported to get help quickly.
- Leaders also ensure that pupils have access to good teaching about e-safety and the dangers of cyber crime and online bullying. Leaders are aware that some unpleasant incidents in school begin in online contexts, including those accessed through mobile phones.
- Leaders work collaboratively with external providers to maintain the safety of pupils when they are learning in alternative provision settings. Clear communication with the settings supports the safeguarding of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it varies too much from class to class and from subject to subject and within subjects.
- Undoubtedly, many pupils benefit from a diet of teaching that is planned thoroughly, delivered skilfully and assessed accurately. Too many other pupils, purely as an outcome of the timetabling process, do not get the same good-quality experience.
- In too many lessons, all pupils get the same work whatever their starting point. For many, the work is too easy. In other classes, teachers do not have full command of their subject so that pupils' misconceptions are reinforced or they are occasionally taught the wrong things.
- Where teaching is at its strongest, particularly in English, some parts of science, modern foreign languages and the humanities, teachers possess good subject knowledge and complementary teaching skills which aid progression.
- In vocational subjects, teaching is supported by good-quality materials, expert visitors, and programmes of study tied specifically to the overarching learning aim. Teaching in these subjects is also characterised by strong relationships with pupils, and high expectations of what they can achieve.
- Pupils, in too many other classes, are not sufficiently challenged and have to settle for teaching that is only just good enough. This helps them make average progress but not the strong progress that would help them to attain the highest standards.
- From the samples of work seen, teachers generally adhere to the school's reasonable policy on assessment. Few pupils, however, make use of the work teachers have done

to help them move forward in their learning.

- Leaders are increasingly making good use of the outcomes of regular internal examinations. These tests enable them to see how well pupils are progressing towards end-of-year or GCSE expectations. As the information derived from these tests becomes more reliable, leaders are able to plan interventions for some pupils who are about to fall behind or who need help to catch up.
- Leaders have recently tightened their expectations about both the basics of what teachers must do and the minimum standards they expect them to operate on a daily basis. This is helping to improve consistency.
- Inspectors observed some strong practice in pockets of the school. Inspectors also evaluated the work of subject directors from the BET who are currently supporting developments and improvements in mathematics. Inspectors concluded that teaching is set to improve quickly with the wider distribution of existing expertise and the external support of the trust.
- Leaders check that pupils attending alternative provision placements continue to make steady progress away from the mainstream setting. The intention is always that the pupils will be reintegrated quickly into the correct year group.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school's comprehensive programme for personal, social, health and economic education, known as 'PDL', gives good support for their learning. The key stage 3 beliefs, philosophy and ethics programme also enables pupils to develop and practise thinking skills that they can transfer into other parts of their work at school.
- Parents commend the school's transition arrangements which help pupils settle quickly and get off to a good start at The Costello School.
- Pupils are supported skilfully to develop resilience. Those facing personal challenges benefit from endlessly available pastoral team leaders who know the pupils well.
- Leaders ensure that the school's work is inclusive and supports each pupil's individual differences. They counter racist and homophobic language or behaviour. A member of staff leads a group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pupils. This is a positive example of the ways in which adults model appropriate values for the modern world.
- The school's system of sanctions and rewards also enables pupils to understand both the positive and negative consequences of their choices. Leaders celebrate pupils' successes and this helps build their self-esteem and confidence. Pupils have a generally good sense of right and wrong and treat each other, for the most part, with respect.
- The school's right-minded work ensures that pupils are suitably prepared for life in contemporary Britain. The whole curriculum, including the extensive array of extra-curricular trips and activities, makes an important contribution to pupils' spiritual,

moral, social and cultural development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Conduct around the school is generally good. Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors. They speak clearly when asked questions and many contribute well orally during class discussions.
- Pupils maintain this good behaviour in lessons for the most part. Some pupils drift off task when teaching is weaker, and a small minority are easily distracted. However, they rarely disrupt others and incidences of lessons being interrupted are few.
- Pupils take pride in their uniform, which they wear smartly. Most teachers reinforce simple uniform rules consistently. There is greater variation in the pride pupils take in their work. Often the quality of presentation is determined by the degree to which teachers challenge poor presentation and insist on high standards.
- Attendance overall is good. This is largely due to the highly effective work of the family liaison officer and the pastoral teams, who work consistently to get pupils to school on time and regularly. There has been a noticeable increase in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils over the past three years. The difference between their levels of absence and that of others has diminished and is steadily getting closer to the national average for all pupils. It is broadly in line with the national average for disadvantaged pupils.
- There have been similar improvements to the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This is important because it was an area for improvement at the last inspection.
- Teachers and the pastoral team act quickly when incidents are brought to their attention. They carefully examine any behaviours reported as bullying. They work sensitively to ensure that victims and perpetrators understand whether or not actions are rightly judged to be evidence of bullying. They are clear that some incidents are perceived wrongly as bullying. They work equally with victims and perpetrators when bullying is found, and this is helping to reduce the frequency with which bullying is both reported and proven. There is more work to be done with some parents to convince them that not all incidents experienced by their children amount to bullying.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes in historical, published information about the school show that, in the past, pupils did not do as well as they should. From high average starting points at the end of key stage 2, not enough pupils went on to make strong progress across their time in the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils, for example, fell further behind their peers and other pupils nationally during their time in school. In 2016, the school's performance meant that it met the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school.
- The performance of pupils with high prior attainment, was lower, in many measures,

than those with similar starting points in other schools. For example, such pupils achieved a lower Attainment 8 score than their peers; smaller proportions were successful in mathematics and English literature GCSEs than is typical for their cohort; and their overall Progress 8 score was below the national average.

- In 2017, however, Year 11 pupils did better than their predecessors, indicating that planned improvements were underway. This was notably the case in the overall Progress 8 measure. Disadvantaged pupils' average progress increased but was still behind the progress of others, and with differences not diminishing fast enough.
- Leaders showed inspectors clear evidence that these improvements are set to continue, so that outcomes in 2018 will be better again. These forecasts are based on several tried, tested and reliable methods.
- Results at GCSE, in some subjects, are strong, such as in English, science, the humanities and modern foreign languages, but even in these subjects, the performance of disadvantaged pupils lags behind their peers. For example, in 2017, very few disadvantaged pupils completed a GCSE in a modern foreign language.
- Similarly, outcomes for all pupils in mathematics are not good enough. As this is a key subject for all pupils, the new leadership team is rightly providing considerable additional resources to the department and expert coaching from other schools in the region. It is too early to be certain that this additional support will bring about the necessary improvements.
- Outcomes in vocational subjects are broadly in line with figures nationally and are the result of highly focused teaching. Teaching in these subjects ensures that all pupils' work is aligned to the requirements of the course. It also provides pupils with individual study support and examination skills to enable them to achieve to the best of their potential.
- At the start of the academic year, leaders put in place a new system for assessing pupils' progress in key stage 3. Information about current pupils' progress and attainment shows a patchy and inconsistent picture across the school. There is variation in the effectiveness with which teachers are using the system to give precise accounts of pupils' current performance in their subjects. A substantial minority of parents commented that they are not clear how well their children are doing in school.
- Leaders are determined that, with more training, teachers will be better able to use the system to show accurately, in due course, the different levels of attainment and progress of pupils, and groups of pupils.
- Over time, pupils are generally well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. A tiny proportion are not in either education, employment or training within six months of their leaving school. They benefit from good-quality, independent careers advice and guidance, and many go on to pursue further studies in colleges locally.

School details

Unique reference number	138287
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10043105

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hilary Todd
Headteacher	Leigh Adams
Telephone number	01256 321 263
Website	http://www.costelloschool.co.uk
Email address	cadmin@costello.hants.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school is a larger-than-average secondary school.
- There are slightly more girls than boys in the school.
- The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have support for their special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is well below the national average.
- The community served by the school has below-average levels of deprivation.
- At the time of the inspection, 10 pupils were receiving alternative educational provision

elsewhere. The school has active partnerships with Ashwood alternative provision centre and Inclusion Hampshire, a charitable foundation.

- The governing body of the Costello Academy Trust currently receives services from the Bohunt Education Trust (BET). This includes the provision of the two acting co-headteachers, one of whom has been supporting the school since January 2018. The second has been working at the school since February 2018. During the inspection the governing body discussed its plan to incorporate the school within the BET multi-academy trust as soon as is practicable. Each action is intended to stabilise further the leadership of the school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 77 parts of lessons. Some parts of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed learning in registration and tutor times.
- Inspectors observed learning in all parts of the curriculum and all subjects. At the request of leaders, inspectors observed specific activities or lessons.
- Inspectors spoke informally with pupils in lessons and around the site. Inspectors held meetings with a group of Year 7 pupils, a group of Year 9 pupils and a group of Year 10 pupils. Inspectors examined a sample of pupils' work. None of the pupils completed Ofsted's confidential online pupil survey.
- Inspectors met with the co-headteachers and the school's deputy headteacher regularly throughout the inspection.
- The lead inspector met the clerk to the governing body on the first day of the inspection. On the second day of the inspection, he conducted a meeting, by conference call, with the chair of the governing body who is also the chair of the trustees of The Costello Academy Trust. Four other governors contributed to this conference call.
- The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer of the Bohunt Education Trust.
- Inspectors met with groups of teachers in different leadership roles and at different stages of their careers. Inspectors took into account 73 responses to Ofsted's confidential online staff survey. At their request, inspectors spoke privately to two members of staff.
- Inspectors met with a group of eight parents and considered 135 responses to Parent View. They also took into account 86 free-text comments, one letter from a parent, and one phone call.
- Inspectors conducted phone calls with leaders of Inclusion Hampshire and Ashwood alternative provision centre, and with a colleague headteacher locally who provides school improvement services to the leadership team.

Inspection team

Simon Hughes, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anne Cullum	Ofsted Inspector
James Rouse	Ofsted Inspector
Suzanne Richards	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Williams	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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