

Inspection of The Costello School

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

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

New leadership has transformed this school since the previous inspection. Parents, pupils and staff enthuse about the many improvements. As one parent said, 'I cannot wait for my other children to get to Costello,' before adding, 'the headteacher inspires parents and children.'

Leaders and teachers help pupils to develop their own unique talents beyond their chosen subjects. Learning is enriched and extended through the huge array of interesting clubs, trips and visits on offer. There is something for everyone here. Staff work together to raise pupils' aspirations and then support them to achieve their goals.

Pupils' well-being and their pastoral care are at the heart of how leaders provide education. Leaders are well aware of how recent times have impacted on many in the school community. Leaders' caring and compassionate support is enabling staff and pupils to thrive.

Pupils understand and respect the school's behaviour system of consequences and rewards. Good relationships between staff and pupils ensure typically calm, respectful behaviour across the school. Any form of deliberate unkindness or bullying is rare. There are trusted adults pupils can turn to should they have any concerns. Pupils enjoy school and feel happy and proud to be here.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

In 2018, the school joined the Bohunt Education Trust (BET), and the new headteacher took up post. Working together, leaders swiftly introduced the trust's ethos of 'enjoy, respect, achieve' while encouraging pupils to become 'game changers' here. Staff and pupils have embraced these raised aspirations, which now underpin everyday life at Costello. Leaders have significantly improved pastoral support for vulnerable pupils and the quality of education for all pupils, especially the most able.

Costello's ambitious curriculum ensures that pupils access all the national curriculum subjects and their choice of a wide range of relevant vocational subjects. With increasing numbers of pupils opting for modern foreign languages, the proportion of pupils taking the suite of subjects known as the English Baccalaureate is rising.

BET's comprehensive training and coaching programme for teachers has improved curriculum planning across all subjects. English and mathematics have improved significantly. Here, subject leaders know just what they want pupils to learn and in what order, and teachers explain subject matter and check pupils' understanding well. There is similarly strong practice in the vocational subjects too.

In some subjects, teachers regularly use assessment to check what pupils can remember. However, checking whether pupils can connect and link different aspects of a subject occurs less frequently. In Years 7 and 8, pupils have too few opportunities to practise their extended writing skills. Consequently, some pupils are not sufficiently stretched, while others find the work too hard. Occasionally, some pupils call out or become passive.

Inspiring leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils ensures that these pupils flourish. Teachers are well equipped with useful information to support pupils' learning. Leaders, teachers and support staff work together as a tight-knit team to meet these pupils' pastoral and academic needs very well.

Behaviour is typically good throughout the school; most pupils are respectful and well mannered. They are keen to learn, and they actively engage with the tasks set by their teachers. Staff have access to useful information and training to help them set clear expectations and manage pupils' behaviour well.

The provision for pupils' personal development is exceptional at Costello. High-quality personal, social and health education equips pupils to become respectful citizens in 21st century Britain. Pupils benefit from over 50 artistic, sporting and activities-based clubs, as well as cadets and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which staff willingly provide. Leaders ensure that all pupils benefit from regular trips and visits to enrich their learning. A well-organised programme of careers education and guidance ensures that all pupils are very well prepared for their next steps beyond school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, staff and governors give top priority to pupils' safety, welfare and well-being. Pupils say they feel safe and happy here, and parents confirm this. All staff receive regular and appropriate training on safeguarding. Well-managed school systems are in place to record and share any concern that staff may have about pupils. Safeguarding leaders' records demonstrate how swiftly and effectively the school supports vulnerable pupils. Leaders proactively seek and secure support from external agencies, when necessary, to ensure that pupils get the help they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- New assessment approaches in some subject areas require further refinement so that, through these approaches, teachers can more accurately diagnose what pupils know, can remember and do. Currently, not all teachers are able to modify teaching strategies in time to address pupils' learning needs. The design of

assessments needs refining to ensure that teachers gather and respond to not only what pupils know in their subject but how they learn in the subject too.

- In some subjects, there are too few opportunities for pupils to reflect and produce their own independent extended writing in key stage 3. This limits their depth of thinking and the application of their learning in the classroom. Building on best practice in the school, leaders need to improve pupils' oracy and extended writing skills to ensure that all pupils are challenged effectively.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	138287
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10203128
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1180
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Raymond Morton
Headteacher	Randall Jull
Website	www.costelloschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 March 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the BET on 1 September 2018.
- Since 2018, the headteacher has taken up post, and there have been changes to the senior leadership team.
- The school uses two alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Deep dives were conducted in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and physical education. As part of these, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, talked to pupils about their work and met with teaching staff to talk about their approach to designing and delivering the curriculum. In addition, meetings were held with leaders of vocational subjects to discuss curriculum plans and provision in these areas.
- Meetings were held with the chief executive officer of BET, three leaders of BET who have been working with the school, the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and other members of teaching and support staff.
- A remote meeting was held with the chair and a member of the board of trustees. A second remote meeting was held with the chair and two members of the local governing body.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils to discuss their views about many different aspects of their school. Inspectors also held informal conversations with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff represented in meetings and the responses to Ofsted surveys were considered.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's policies and practices and met with safeguarding leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding. Records of safeguarding incidents were scrutinised and discussed. Inspectors also reviewed the school records of the recruitment checks made on adults working in the school.

Inspection team

Matthew Newberry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alison Robb-Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Culling	Her Majesty's Inspector

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