

Costello Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116406
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	326384
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1002
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Royston Barker
Headteacher	Mrs Julia Mortimore
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2006
School address	Crossborough Hill London Road Basingstoke RG21 4AL
Telephone number	01256 321263
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school with similar numbers of boys and girls. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups. There are below average numbers of students who are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties (mainly behavioural, emotional and social difficulties) is also below average. The school has had a big turnover of staff in recent years and high numbers of students join or leave the school at other than the usual times. Costello has been designated a specialist college in technology since September 2002.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Costello Technology College is an improving school with many good features and its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. There are strong signs of improvement in many areas of the school, not least in rising standards, the quality of teaching and in the effectiveness of leaders to drive forward change. It rightly prides itself on the quality of the support it provides its students. As one parent said '...this is a school which cares about students and their needs'.

Leadership and management are good. Under the clear direction of the headteacher, a highly effective leadership team has been built whose members are deeply ambitious for the school, have high expectations and have begun to successfully redress the issues that have been holding back students' achievement at Key Stage 4. In particular, they have ensured that the school is fully staffed with specialist teachers, that middle leaders are empowered and encouraged to monitor and account for standards in their subjects and that there is a very strong focus throughout the school on nurturing more effective teaching and learning. All middle leaders support the drive for improvement but there is variation in ways in which how well they monitor teaching and learning, and the progress students make, in their subject areas.

Standards overall are above average and students' achievements are satisfactory in relation to their starting points. They make a good start in Key Stage 3, but progress slows in Key Stage 4. Standards in Key Stage 4 have fluctuated too much over the last four years and too many students have not made the progress they should have. This was due largely to the large numbers of teachers who left or joined the school, interrupting students' learning. This has now been redressed. Recent initiatives have shifted the focus from how teachers teach to how students learn, improved the tracking of students' progress and provided effective support to those who are identified as underachieving. These changes are beginning to speed up students' progress, but achievement is still only satisfactory because there has not been time for improvements to have their full impact. Standards at the end of Year 11 in 2008 showed a big improvement over earlier years and most students made the progress that they should. There are strong signs that this improvement in achievement is now being felt in Years 10 and Year 11, where standards are rising and progress in many subjects is good. The curriculum is good and meets students' needs and interests, through, for example, a growing range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.

Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 are currently good with a high proportion that is outstanding. Teaching is especially good in religious education, history, science and modern foreign languages. Much of the good teaching has been brought about by a stronger focus by senior and middle leaders to identify and disseminate good practice, fostered by the appointment of 'lead practitioners' in key subjects. Teachers, typically, have strong subject knowledge and they use it to provide clear explanations and select appropriate examples to illustrate a point. There is, however, some inconsistency in practice across the school. Assessment information, for instance, is not always used well to set tasks that provide a suitable level of challenge for students. Not enough use is made of existing staff expertise to help colleagues improve their practice.

The school is highly successful in promoting students' personal development and well being and in the care, guidance and support it provides. As one parent commented, 'My daughters are treated as individuals and are growing in both confidence and knowledge.' Students enjoy and feel safe in school and the recent focus on attendance and behaviour has ensured that

both have improved. Behaviour is good and attendance levels have risen to the national average. The school works well with a wide range of external agencies to support vulnerable students. Those students with learning difficulties are provided with effective support and achieve in line with other students in the school. Community cohesion is a particularly good feature of the school with all groups of students consistently providing valuable contributions to life in school and the wider community.

Technology School status has led to improved provision in many areas of the school. The school's focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, for example has been enhanced by many of the initiatives supported through the specialism, most notably work done on developing specific learning styles and the use of assessment to support learning. Its clearly defined, measurable targets and actions for improvement indicate that the school's focus is firmly on learning and the capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make greater use of existing expertise to make teaching more consistent, so that every lesson builds well on students' existing skills and knowledge.
- Ensure strategies to monitor teaching and learning and students' achievements are consistently implemented in all subject areas.
- Raise students' achievement by rigorously implementing the school's system for monitoring progress, identifying underachievement and targeting support.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' standards on entry to the school, in Year 7, are above average. They achieve well and make good progress during their first three years, attaining standards that are significantly above average at the end of Key Stage 3. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have been rising steadily over the last four years and are significantly above average in English, mathematics and science. This rate of improvement has been fastest in English and students' progress here is better than in the other two core subjects. All groups of students make equally good progress through Key Stage 3.

Standards in Key Stage 4 have fluctuated year on year, reflecting the difficulties the school has faced in recruiting specialist teachers in some subjects. From above average in 2006, GCSE results fell to below average in 2007. Results in 2008, however were much better and 65% of students gained five or more A*-C grades, a big improvement over the 53% achieved in 2007. Students have not made sufficiently good progress in recent years, as they move from Year 9 to Year 11, because their learning has been interrupted by teachers leaving before the examination course had been completed. This period of disruption is now behind the school. Stable staffing coupled with the school's strong focus on improving teaching and learning led to students in 2008 making satisfactory progress. There are strong signs, especially in subjects such as science, that students are beginning to make good progress as they move from Key Stages 3 to 4. Externally marked tests and the school's tracking of progress show standards are continuing to rise and are well above average in Years 10 and 11. All groups of students make similar progress throughout the school and the school has met its specialist college targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with social and cultural development being particularly strong. The personal development programme ensures that their understanding of social and moral issues is good, giving students effective strategies to help them cope with issues such as smoking and bullying. Students show a good awareness of other faiths and cultures and this contributes to the harmonious atmosphere. There is a good understanding of health and environmental issues and of how to be safe in a school or wider environment. Attitudes round the school and in lessons are positive. A few parents express a concern about behaviour but inspectors found behaviour in lessons and around the school to be good during the inspection. Attendance at clubs is good, particularly in sport. Older students provide very influential role models and, by acting as young governors and prefects, they make a valuable contribution to the management of the school. They work well within the wider community, for example, by fundraising for the school and a range of charities. Careers guidance, work experience and school placements help to ensure that they are confident and well prepared for the post-16 college places and the range of training and employment available to them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The school's focus on developing teachers' skills through monitoring and sharing of good practice has recently led to big improvements in learning, particularly in Key Stage 4. Typically, in lessons, teachers' enthusiasm and good subject knowledge have a tangible effect on students' motivation to learn. Students' levels of enjoyment and work-rate are high because there is mutual respect between teachers and students. Working relationships are warm and productive. One parent commented '...students are respected and dealt with in a positive manner which leads to them wanting to learn'. Teaching is lively; highly imaginative tasks and activities are carefully designed to challenge the students to learn at a swift pace. Teachers take care to ensure that students know exactly what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve. Good use is made of assessment to show students how well they are doing and to set targets for further improvement. However, not all lessons make good enough use of the detailed information the school has on the performance of each student to plan activities that challenge all of them. Guidance for students on how to move towards their targets is also inconsistent between subjects. This variability in using assessment information is starting to be addressed by increased monitoring, particularly by subject managers and the recently appointed lead practitioners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is good and meets the full range of pupils' needs and capabilities. In Year 7, a 'Thinking and Learning Skills' course encourages students' study skills and promotes an enquiry approach. At Key Stage 4, thoughtful use of assessment information allows the school to identify courses and pathways that are best suited for students' needs, for example apprenticeships and diplomas. The school's specialist status is reflected in the emphasis on all students studying a technology subject. Students are introduced to the range of vocational

courses on 'Taster Days', where gender stereotypes are challenged. The school's website provides a virtual curriculum that can be accessed at home. This additional curricular breadth and choice contributes to the students' pride in their school. An increasing emphasis on vocational opportunities contributes well to meeting the needs of all students including those with learning difficulties. The school, however, recognises that it does too little to ensure ICT skills are properly developed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care and guidance are good. Requirements for safeguarding students and ensuring their welfare, including first aid and medical needs, are fully met. Pastoral care is effective. Year 7 students have settled in well this year, because of the strong focus on transition from primary school. Students say that they feel well supported at all levels and that careers guidance is good and gives them information about the range of college course available to them after Year 11. Attendance is improving because of the increasing rigour of the school's systems for monitoring absence. The school makes very clear to parents the importance of regular attendance in promoting learning. Provision for vulnerable students is good and good use is made of outside agencies in supporting and mentoring students. Extra provision is made for students who need learning support, for example through the breakfast club. Academic guidance is good. Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, although this is variable between subjects. Information about students' performance and potential is readily available and is used well by most subject staff and tutors.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The Headteacher has a clear vision for the school which is shared by a very competent senior leadership team and by middle managers. Recent re-structuring of the staff has provided considerable responsibility for middle managers and they are making a significant contribution to the improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. The school's procedures for evaluating strengths and weaknesses are very secure and are well used to inform the school improvement plan which in turn focuses on developing the quality of teaching and learning. Strategies to continue to raise achievement are in place and understood by all staff.

Considerable staffing disruption during the last two years has been well managed and the school is now entering a period of staffing stability. Financial planning is good and efficient use is made of resources. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Well-informed governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are very supportive 'critical friends', who make a significant contribution to many aspects of school life. There is clear guidance on management processes such as the monitoring of teaching. However, follow up on action points often lacks rigour at middle leadership level. The result is an inconsistent approach by some middle leaders on driving agreed priorities that are central to improving the students' learning. The school's sound self-evaluation recognises that this needs to be more effective, in order to raise achievement and standards. Recent appointments to the senior leadership team and the governors' developing scrutiny and challenge to the school mean that capacity for improvement is good.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

16 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Costello Technology College, Basingstoke, RG21 4AL

We enjoyed visiting your school recently to inspect it. Thank you very much for making us feel welcome and for talking to us so frankly. We have now written our report and hope some of you will want to read it. This letter is addressed specifically to you and sums up what we think of Costello Technology College.

We judge your school to be satisfactory and improving with many good features. Overall, standards are above average. The standard of work you produce in lessons, though, does vary depending on the subject and teacher. Most of you are making the expected progress as you move through the school. The teaching in your school is good. When teachers make the work interesting and when they make sure you know what is expected from you, you do well. In some lessons, though, teachers do not always make use of their knowledge of how well you have done previously and so the level of challenge is too low so you do not make as much progress as you should.

We saw that your teachers care about your personal development. You feel safe and well cared for, and you are confident that there are adults you can go to with problems. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and you look out for each other.

We have asked staff to do three things to improve the school further.

- Make more lessons as good as the best by sharing the good practice present in the school.
- Ensure that all subject leaders check on how well you are taught and the progress you make very carefully.
- Make sure that you all do as well as you can by ensuring all teachers implement the school's systems for checking your progress and giving you support.

Your headteacher and her staff have a good capacity to continue to improve Costello Technology College further and help you reach even higher standards in your exams.

Good luck with your studies.

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant

Lead Inspector