Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Summerhill College
Sligo, County Sligo
Roll number: 65170Q

Date of inspection: 24 October 2013
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>23 and 24 October 2013</th>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
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<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during eleven class periods</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning in all lessons observed was good or very good.
• Teachers’ preparation for lessons was very good with an emphasis placed on the application of business theory to real life events and the business environment.
• Bookkeeping is positively emphasised throughout junior cycle and this was reflected in the high degree of accuracy in the accounts completed by students.
• A number of teachers are engaged in developing and expanding the range of assessment approaches used.
• The uptake of Business Studies at junior cycle is good, though there is a decline in the number of students opting for business subjects at senior cycle.
• The business focus within the school’s Transition Year (TY) programme is very good however; some additional work is needed to ensure that the content of the business modules is balanced with the whole-school objectives for TY.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The content and focus of the business modules within TY should be reviewed.
• Using the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, students’ participation rates and the factors affecting students’ choice of business subjects should be reviewed.
• Teachers should work collaboratively on extending the range of assessment modes used as part of the formative assessment process across all year groups.
INTRODUCTION

Summerhill College is a long established boys-only voluntary secondary school located in Sligo. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin, and has a current enrolment of 782. All curriculum programmes at both junior and senior cycle are offered to students. Recently, the school moved to a new state-of-the-art building which broadens the range of resources available for teaching and learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• In all the lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good.
• In a few lessons it was evident that the planned lesson outcomes were overly ambitious. Prioritising the outcomes to those most relevant to the students’ learning needs should ensure that they are achievable within the lesson timeframe.
• Good classroom management techniques were evident.
• In nearly all lessons, there were sufficient opportunities for the more able and motivated students to progress to a higher level.
• There was a good mix in classroom layout and seating arrangements which provides good potential in promoting the use of active teaching and learning methodologies.
• Students’ presentation of accounts was remarkably good across all class groups. This mirrored teachers’ very good presentation of material. In addition, students’ accuracy level in accounts-based questions was very high.
• All teachers’ knowledge of the current business environment was very good. A common feature of all lessons was teachers’ introduction of relevant, student-centred business examples to enhance learning.
• There were a number of good examples where teachers integrated interactive business resources and co-curricular activities to support students’ engagement with the subjects. There is potential to increase the use of these resources in a variety of settings that will positively support the development of students’ applied business skills, especially those relating to work and financial management skills.
• In some instances there is a need to look at broadening the range of support materials used in particular, to reduce students’ dependency on note-taking and promote note-making.
• The use of visualisers in a number of the lessons to facilitate students’ self-assessment of their homework was good. This approach could also be used for peer assessment.
• Written homework is an integral part of the assessment strategy within the subject department. Some very good examples of homework correction and monitoring were observed. In particular, the use of self-assessment with first-year students and the bookkeeping aspects of homework assigned was effective. There was also evidence of teachers’ annotation of theory aspects of business studies homework throughout junior cycle. Greater consistency in the most effective approaches to use could be achieved through discussion at department level.
A number of teachers have started to develop their own summative assessments, including portfolio assessment, with some year groups. In further developing this approach, the inclusion of more high-level outcome verbs in structuring assessments will promote greater differentiation in the assessment process. In addition, teachers should consider extending the range of assessment modes used as part of the formative assessment process across all year groups.

Although keyword charts were evident in each room they were not frequently referred to during lessons. The teachers should agree the most effective approach to use. Among other approaches that should be considered are the use of word searches, matching exercises, keyword dictionaries and pre-reading to develop comprehension skills.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Timetable provision for the subjects subject in both junior and senior cycle is good and the inclusion of double periods in each year of junior cycle provides a very good opportunity for the completion of the bookkeeping outcomes of the syllabus.
- First-year students select Business Studies from a range of optional subjects prior to entry and approximately half of the students take the subject. However, there is a decline in the number of students taking business subjects at senior cycle. A detailed analysis of the factors influencing subject take-up at senior cycle, using the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, should be undertaken.
- Continuity in subject provision is good with two senior cycle business options offered. The economic content within the TY programme has been increased in order to induce demand for the subject at senior cycle. In the short-term, this has not achieved its primary objective. Further work is required on the module to achieve this objective in the medium term to long-term.
- The subjects are well resourced and it was evident that the teachers have availed of subject-specific continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and have engaged with the whole-school professional development programme.
- The analysis of outcomes in the certificate examinations is undertaken at subject department level and the number of students taking the subjects at higher level is very good especially at junior cycle. Some additional analysis of attainment relative to ability levels is required.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A subject department structure is in place with the role of co-ordinator rotated annually. The records of subject department meetings indicate that a broad range of topics are discussed including subject development and teaching methodologies. This approach is well-focused and provides a good base for future developments.
- The detailed schemes of work require further development and should be organised using a tabular format that includes for example: learning outcomes, teaching methodologies and assessment approaches, and literacy and numeracy.
- The use of SSE was evident from the use of student reflection sheets at the end of chapters and topics. As this approach develops it should positively impact on discussion of teaching and learning strategies within the subject department.
• The business content within the TY programme is significant. However, there is a need to review it. The emphasis on marketing should be decreased and among the aspects to be considered for inclusion should be the development of students’ financial literacy skills, in addition to introducing students to a broader range of business concepts.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.