Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT

Summerhill College
Sligo, County Sligo
Roll number: 65170Q

Date of inspection: 13 May 2014
Report
On
The Quality of Learning and Teaching in Special Educational Needs

Information on the Inspection

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<th>Dates of inspection: 12 and 13 May 2014</th>
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<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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Main Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the observed lessons ranged from good to very good but few teachers shared intended learning outcomes with their students.

- Overall, the provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is inclusive and responsive to student needs.

- The school provides a range of quality provision including two special classes for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

- An established planning process is in place but the short-term planning template would benefit from further development.

Main Recommendations

- Current assessment practices should be reviewed and a whole-school assessment policy should be developed.

- A core SEN team should be identified and the overall number of support teachers should be reduced.

- SEN provision should be timetabled when the main school timetable is being constructed.
INTRODUCTION
Summerhill College is a voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Catholic diocese of Elphin. Current enrolment consists of 781 students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds with a range of abilities and needs. The school provides the Junior Certificate and Junior Certificate School Programme, and the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied. An optional Transition Year programme is also available.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• The quality of teaching and learning in the observed lessons ranged from good to very good. Lessons were structured and purposeful, and targeted the needs of students in developing skills, and providing curricular support. A range of strategies was employed with direct instruction and guided learning featuring as the dominant methodologies. Lessons were paced appropriately, and repetition and reinforcement activities were used effectively to consolidate learning.

• Skill was displayed by teachers in engaging students in discussions and in encouraging them to answer questions and to attempt challenging tasks. Teachers used their knowledge of student interests and abilities to motivate students and to create positive learning environments. Successful differentiation was seen in individualised support, and in the levels of questions asked and how the responses were accepted.

• Many teachers used visual and graphic supports effectively to explain and reinforce verbal information. In most lessons, there was a good focus on the acquisition of general and subject-relevant vocabulary for comprehension, reading and writing. At the start of lessons, most teachers outlined the planned activities, but few shared the intended learning outcomes with their students. This aspect of assessment for learning should be integrated into all lessons.

• Teachers were caring and supportive of their students. Students were encouraged and challenged appropriately and teachers gave particular attention to showing students how they could improve their work. Students were attentive and actively engaged in their learning. They were respectful of their teachers and appreciative of the support given.

• A positive and supportive ASD-friendly learning environment was provided for the students with ASD enrolled in the school’s designated unit. An appropriate curriculum targeting student needs was provided and there was good evidence of the use of ASD-relevant methodologies.

• A significant range of appropriate SEN continuing professional development (CPD) has been completed by individuals but opportunities for whole-school SEN-related CPD has been limited. An audit of staff needs in relation to the implementation of inclusive teaching practices is recommended.

• A range of assessment instruments is used to gather information on students’ cognitive abilities, and literacy and numeracy attainments. Students are assessed at entry and at the end of first year to track progress. There is some scope to improve current assessment practices in relation to their value in informing teaching and measuring progress. It is
recommended that the school draft a whole-school assessment policy to detail all assessment practices, and to outline the purposes of assessment and the use of the results in improving teaching and learning.

- The school has a literacy core team and there is a good whole-school literacy policy in place. Targets have been set and whole-school practices are promoted.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Overall, the provision for students with SEN is inclusive, flexible and responsive to student needs. The school’s admissions policy is inclusive and provides good information regarding the provision, support and enrolment of students with SEN. The SEN policy provides a comprehensive overview of provision and details the roles and responsibilities of all school personnel. There is evidence that allocated resource teaching hours are used appropriately.

- The school is commended for establishing a SEN committee which has been tasked with reviewing and improving the quality of the provision. The membership includes external experts as well as school management and staff. The SEN co-ordinator has extensive responsibilities and has put good structures in place. She leads the development of student profiles and individual education plans (IEPs), and disseminates essential information to staff. The SEN folder contains the SEN department targets for 2013-14. This is good practice.

- At the time of the evaluation nineteen teachers were involved in delivering SEN support. This number should be reduced significantly. The school should nominate a core SEN team of four to six support teachers who can meet regularly to ensure collaborative planning and efficient organisation of the provision.

- Junior cycle students are placed in mixed-ability class groups although there is some setting in Irish and Mathematics from second year. Commendably, students enrolled in the JCSP are integrated in classes with their peers and have access to a broad curriculum.

- SEN provision consists of individual and small group withdrawal. In addition, the school is piloting team teaching and plans to extend the practice as an alternative to the withdrawal model. It is recommended that SEN provision be timetabled when the main school timetable is being developed. This should support the reduction in the number of support teachers, ensure that qualified SEN teachers are allocated to students with high level needs and avoid the current situation where students attend two or more support teachers in the same subject.

- The school has hosted two ASD special classes since 2008. An experienced and well-qualified teacher acts as the ASD co-ordinator. Higher-functioning students receive specific ASD-related support in the unit, but attend mainstream classes for most of the day. Students with more significant needs spend a greater amount of time in the unit following a structured and appropriate curriculum. There is an important focus on the development of essential skills for independent living and socialisation.
• The school employs eight special needs assistants (SNAs). The SNAs are assigned either to the ASD unit or to provide shared-support to students in the mainstream. The SNAs are clear about their roles in supporting student access to the curriculum. SNAs should be encouraged to record incidents, note behaviours and progress in a standard log book.

**Planning and Preparation**

• An established planning process is in place for resource teachers. Each teacher creates individual or group long term and short term plans with reference to student profiles and in consultation with the SEN co-ordinator, mainstream subject teachers and the student. The short-term planning template should be extended to act as an evaluative record of work completed and achievement towards targets. In addition, a common template to record learning objectives, content and learning activities for students availing of support should be developed to facilitate the tracking of student progress.

• IEPS are created for students with complex needs. The IEPS reviewed contained specific and measurable academic and non-academic targets. These targets should be shared with mainstream teachers to ensure consistent support for students in attaining targets.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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