Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT

Summerhill College
Sligo, County Sligo

Roll number: 65170Q

Date of inspection: 6 November 2014
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</strong></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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MAIN FINDINGS

• The standard of teaching ranged from good to elements of excellent practice and the standard of students’ learning ranged from fair to aspects which were excellent in the lessons observed. Where teaching was of an excellent standard, there was a clear focus on students’ learning.

• A good variety of methodologies including differentiation strategies were used to engage students well and a range of resources enhanced many lessons.

• There is scope to further develop practices and procedures in relation to homework and assessment.

• Very good rapport between teachers and students was evident.

• Provision and support for Home Economics at whole-school level is very good.

• A collaborative approach exists within the subject team, subject planning is well advanced.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• In instances where learning was found to be fair, greater attention should be given to: advance preparation of lessons; teacher inputs during practical lessons; setting and monitoring of homework as well as ongoing monitoring of students’ learning.

• Teachers should formalise the sharing of professional expertise so that the very good practices observed in some instances can be consolidated across the department in order to raise expectations and enhance student attainment.

• Procedures for homework and assessment should be further developed, with a clear focus required on enhancing students’ capacity to learn.

• The team should develop and implement action plans, including establishing timeframes, which will focus on achieving their key developmental priorities.
INTRODUCTION

Summerhill College is a long-established voluntary secondary school for boys which operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. The school is one of five providers of post-primary education in Sligo and has an enrolment of 786 students. The school offers the full range of second-level curricular programmes at both junior and senior cycle, including an optional TY.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The quality of teaching in the lessons observed ranged from good to elements of excellent practice. The quality of students’ learning, ranged from fair to excellent in some aspects. Where teaching was of an excellent standard, there was a very good emphasis on enhancing students’ capacity to learn. Teachers’ preparation for lessons was generally of a very good standard.

• Very good links were made with students’ prior knowledge and this was built on effectively during most lessons. There was good awareness of the need to teach to the range of students’ learning styles within class groups.

• There was very good teacher-student rapport during all lessons, which lead to a positive classroom atmosphere.

• Teachers made good use of a range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), in planning and to support learning. Students were also encouraged to make good use of ICT.

• There was evidence of some good examples of the use of differentiation, for example by questioning and by teacher intervention during practical work. There is scope in some instances for students to be appropriately challenged to foster independent learning in oral, written and practical work.

• Most lessons were well structured and while teacher instruction was always accurate, on occasion the lesson pace was too slow and the lesson content lacked adequate challenge. It was advised that this be addressed at both lesson planning and delivery stages.

• Questioning of students was a key feature of all lessons, and was valuable when utilised well. In some instances, however, there was a need to be more focussed on supporting learning when questioning students.

• Practical food studies lessons were generally well executed, however, in some cases, there was scope to further develop students’ learning and skills. Best practice was observed when there was a strong emphasis on the development of good practices in the areas of food preparation, cooking skills, hygiene, safety, resource management and self-evaluation. There was some very good use of spot demonstration at key stages, with scope to use whole-class teaching to consolidate key learning points, especially at the start of lessons.

• Students should undertake a range of practical textiles tasks to support the incremental development of students’ skills in accordance with their abilities.

• There is scope to further develop the homework and assessment practices for Home Economics in some instances, and this could inform the development of a whole-school policy to support homework and assessment.
• Teachers’ should collaborate to develop and implement a wider range of strategies in order to support the assessment of diverse student learning needs, and to further facilitate student self-assessment and peer-assessment. In some cases, students would benefit from the provision of more evaluative formative feedback on their work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Home Economics is available to all year groups and students are provided with an open choice from a variety of optional subjects. Subsequently option bands are developed based on students’ preferences. Such a student-centred approach to subject choice is laudable and the school allows a degree of flexibility if students wish to change their choices.

• Class period provision is in line with syllabus recommendations; however, provision should be made for at least one double class in each year group to facilitate mandatory practical coursework.

• All students of the school’s optional TY undertake a well-developed seven-week cookery module. The TY home economics programme should include an overview of all aspects of Home Economics. A small number of Leaving Certificate Applied year one students currently undertake the vocational specialism in Hotel, Catering and Tourism.

• The school has two rooms for Home Economics, one specialist room, which functions as a kitchen and a textiles room, as well as a general classroom for theory lessons. The facilities are very well maintained and resourced. Management is committed to the ongoing updating of resources and servicing of equipment for both food and textiles studies. The annual budget for class materials should be reviewed.

• The school has a health and safety statement in line with current guidelines and legislation. Risk assessment ought to make reference to the dual-purpose nature of the specialist room. The involvement of the subject specialist should be considered in the context of undertaking future risk assessments.

• A strong commitment to continuing professional development is evident.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• There is good collaboration in the home economics department with a committed approach to supporting all students to achieve their potential. The teachers have developed a very good insight into individual students’ learning needs and are commended for their flexible approach to supporting students with additional educational needs.

• Very good progress has been made in developing a subject plan. Outline schemes of work, including learning outcomes have been developed for junior cycle, however, these should be further developed into more detailed short-term plans. For senior cycle both outline and detailed schemes of work exist, however, the learning outcomes to be attained should be added. It is commendable that plans are used as working documents.

• As an initial step in self-evaluation the teachers recently carried out a short subject review. To further develop self-evaluation it is recommended that a SCOT (strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats) analysis be undertaken with regards to various aspects of Home Economics. Once developmental priorities have been identified, from the SCOT analysis and shared with school management, action plans, including
timeframes for their implementation, should then be developed to achieve these priorities and performance indicators should be designed to review progress. The key focus should be on raising expectations and improving students’ learning.

- Students and their parents are advised regularly on their progress in the subject. Records of student achievement in certificate examinations are analysed annually and there is scope to use this analysis to inform future planning.

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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management wishes to welcome the positive comments on the standard of teaching; including excellent practice, the good variety of methodologies including differentiation strategies and the very good rapport between teachers and students.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

In order to further the very good work being carried out in this area, the board of management has requested the home economics department to furnish it with a plan of actions designed to build on the recommendations of the inspection report. Work on this plan along with its implementation is already at an advanced stage. For example:

- A whole school homework policy is now being put in place. Homework is assigned and monitored in all home economics classes in order to consolidate student learning.
- Teachers in the home economics department continue to work collaboratively, in particular as regards the sharing of expertise.
- Learning outcomes and activities have now been included in the department plan and are implemented in all classes to ensure all students are actively engaged in learning.
- Continuing professional development (CPD) on assessment for learning is currently being implemented as a whole school strategy.