

SUMMERHILL SCHOOL

Founded 1921



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English Teacher Job description

Summerhill School- General Information for Applicants

Summerhill School is a multinational boarding school community with between 50 to 90 students aged 5-17 and a full-time team of teachers and house parents supported by part-time teachers and ancillary staff.

You probably know something about the school as the founder, A.S. Neill is internationally renowned for his achievement in setting up this free democratic school as well as for his books about his life as a teacher and educator. The school is still run as he started it: by a democratic meeting where everyone's vote counts equally; and with the children having the freedom to attend lessons or not as they see fit.

The Principal, Zoë Readhead, is Neill's daughter and an ex-Summerhillian and thus a continuity of traditions is maintained at the school.

Working at Summerhill can be a life-changing experience as it is founded on principles of optimism, trust and cooperation that are rare. It is hard work during the term for full-time staff as there is no set knocking off time and the unique character of the social environment can lead to intense activity well into the evening. However, the setting in 11 acres of wood and field is peaceful and there are opportunities to escape to the beach or the town, whilst the holidays are exceptionally long by any standard!

We are careful not to behave like 'adult carers' as the kids do not like it. The important thing about our relationships with the kids here is that we are all equal and we have no more right to snoop around their problems than they have ours. Having said that, we are responsible for them - this is a school after all! - so we try to work it so that we are aware but not intrusive, available but not pushy.

This is a residential post. Summerhill is a boarding school and a close-knit community. A full engagement with the broader life of the community is deeply enriching and satisfying and is not to be seen as an extra round of duties and responsibilities. Indeed, as a self-governing school many of the traditional roles of the teacher, such as discipline and order, bedtimes, are taken care of by the children. However, as a member of the community you will be expected to become involved in school activities of one kind or another. We are all equal members of a community and as such we are expected to take our turn when needed, be part of a social event committee or be a beddies officer, "litter-pick-up" amongst others.

A week in Summerhill is structured like this: Wake up on weekdays is at 8.00am and classes begin at 9.00am. There are seven 40m lessons, there is a 20-minute break at 11am and 1 hour for lunch at 12.40pm. Lessons finish at 3.00pm and we have a 15-minute tea break. Afterwards on Monday and Friday there are school meetings at 3.15pm and on Tuesdays a staff meeting. On Fridays the staff meeting is immediately after the school meeting. There could be other meetings added to these ones depending on the needs of the community. Supper also varies but at the moment is set for 5.30pm.

Accommodation and Pay

There is a variety of accommodation for staff including rooms in outlying buildings and rooms next to children's dormitories.

Terms are eleven weeks long on average and you have three complete weekends off per term. These begin at 3.00pm on Friday afternoon and end on Sunday evening. The holidays are long (4+ weeks, 4+ weeks and 8+ weeks). It is alright to have a friend down to visit in term time from time to time, but it has to go through management first and then the general meeting.

Other time taken off, for example going for walks along the coast, must be negotiated with the other staff to ensure there are always enough adults in the school. You are expected to cover for a houseparent for one day and night on a rota sharing the duty with another member of staff, approximately 11 days in a term, participate on school party rotas, invigilate exams and write some articles for the Summerhill newsletter amongst other duties.

The pay includes all accommodation, bills and food during term time and is currently set at £18,200 per annum. Additional duties, such as airport trips attract small extra sums of money.

If you are serious about working at Summerhill you will probably not be principally attracted by financial gain, but you might like to consider that the experience you gain could not be bought and is certainly unique.

English Teacher Position at Summerhill

The English teacher for the older students (*children aged 13-17*) at Summerhill School offers the right candidate the opportunity to work imaginatively in a free environment where children are encouraged to grow at their own pace. You will be in charge of creating curricula and planning lessons. You must be able to teach GCSE exam curricula in a positive and encouraging manner, free of stress and worry. Although we take examinations seriously with those students who wish to sit them, the responsibility for lesson attendance and work done is the student's. Realistic dialogue is acceptable but teacher pressure is not.

This structure is flexible and can be changed according to the teacher. You will have a great deal of freedom to discover the best way to teach free children, with the support and advice of other experienced staff, with regular staff meetings and practice meetings with other teachers. You will also be appointed a staff mentor.

Your teaching can be divided into several areas:

- Reading, Writing and Handwriting skills
- GCSE First Language English
- GCSE Literature in English
- GCSE English as a Second Language
- KS3 English
- Special Needs English

It is not appropriate at Summerhill to focus all work through examination courses and there is always a non-examination track on offer: *all* of our students must have the opportunity to improve their skills and enjoy their work.

Reading, Writing and Handwriting Skills

Students at Summerhill frequently state that their primary concerns in English are spelling, punctuation and handwriting. It is important to respond to these anxieties directly, whilst at the same time using a sufficiently broad selection of starting points and texts to keep up interest. Students are not used to working from one textbook and we would discourage this. You must be flexible enough to accommodate students returning regularly to lessons at a variety of entry levels.

GCSE First Language English

Many students choose to work towards this qualification as it is often a prerequisite for College entry. Currently, the course being offered is the Cambridge IGCSE, but this is negotiable.

Literature in English

A small number of interested students enrol for the IGCSE Literature course. Other classes will choose to read books, plays and short stories as part of their English studies.

GCSE English as a Second Language

Because Summerhill is an international school, many of our students are not native speakers of English. Some students are confident enough to be able to attempt the First Language qualification, but some prefer to follow the Second Language course offered by Cambridge International.

KS3 English

Some of the younger students - those aged 13 or 14 - will already have decided that their long-term aim is to study for a GCSE qualification. In this case, it is the responsibility of the English teacher to prepare them appropriately.

Special Needs English

One of the primary roles of the English teacher is to help students who have problems with reading and writing. You need to be very patient and flexible, open to responding to what the children want to do and aware of the range of factors that might be inhibiting progress in this area.

Other responsibilities

Head of Department

Although you will be working with many experienced staff and the Principal, every teacher is the head of a department and as such must keep up to date regarding examination boards, appropriate syllabuses, exam entries and access arrangements, setting mock examinations etc.

You will be responsible for a Summerhill Curriculum Outline, Schemes of Work and Self-Evaluation.

Library

Adjacent to the English classroom is the Library containing fiction and non-fiction texts aimed mainly at those students with a reading age of 10 and above. There is also a small designated study space as well as a separate classroom used by part-time teachers. It will be your responsibility to maintain and develop the Library and to act as general supervisor of the space.

Working with Colleagues and Individually

Collaboration regarding Literacy throughout the school is essential, and includes regular communication between the individual staff members at any time. You will be required to attend termly Literacy Practice meetings where discussion focuses on teaching strategies and practices, as well as record keeping, new ideas and specific concerns in the classroom. These meetings are also valuable as a means of supporting one another in our roles as literacy teachers.

The timetable consists of seven, forty-minute lessons each weekday, beginning at 9.00am and ending at 3.00pm. You are at liberty to decide, in consultation with the student, how many lessons you would like to allocate to each student who has signed up with you.

The ideal candidate for this position will find the challenges and opportunities provided by free education exciting. You will be liberated from the incessant rounds of bureaucracy and testing you may have experienced elsewhere, but you will be faced with the challenge of providing stimulating and structured lessons for children who are under no compulsion to attend.

Qualities we are looking for in an English teacher

Ideally, you should be:

- A dedicated English teacher with imagination and flair.
- An organised and self-motivated individual, able to work without supervision.
- Able to offer lessons to students of different ages and mixed ability levels.
- In possession of the appropriate academic qualifications and the relevant teaching experience.
- Confident and able to be in sole charge of this crucial stage of learning.
- Capable of keeping up to date regarding appropriate syllabuses, new methods, etc.
- Able to maintain a safe and attractive classroom environment, organising and managing the space and the materials in the classroom
- Someone happy to live and work in a multi-national community where many children's first language is not English.
- Sensitive to the reasons that children may not want to attend classes.
- Tolerant of differences and willing to work cooperatively with other staff.
- Willing to create a Curriculum Outline and a yearly Self-Evaluation.
- Enthusiastic- willing to play a full and active part in the life of the school.
- In command of a good sense of humour-this is essential!
- Willing to live in a community of children as an equal member whilst retaining a responsible attitude towards the children, staff and community in general.
- Aware of the unique philosophy of Summerhill School and sympathetic to the aims of the school.

You are recommended to read *Barefoot in November* by Zoë Readhead as well as *Summerhill and A.S. Neill* which are available in the school shop online. These texts will help you understand Summerhill and the philosophy behind it.