4 May 2012

Mrs L Abbott
Headteacher
The Connaught School
Tongham Road
Aldershot
Hampshire
GU12 4AS

Dear Mrs Abbott

**Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 25 and 26 April 2012 to look at work in English.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils’ work; and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

**Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has been well below average in the past, but there is clear evidence of an improving trend over the last two years. The school’s own assessment data, the accuracy of which is confirmed by inspection evidence, indicates that current Year 11 pupils are on track to meet or exceed challenging targets for A* to C in both English language and literature, which are 10% higher than in 2011. The percentage of pupils on track to achieve A* or A is also much higher than in previous years. This positive improvement in attainment is reflected throughout Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Pupils start at the School in Year 7 with attainment in English that is significantly below average. As a result of very well focused interventions, rigorous monitoring and good teaching, pupils throughout the school make good progress and attainment gaps are rapidly narrowing between groups within the school (especially boys and girls) and against national
expectations. Pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with disabilities or special educational needs similarly make good progress, relative to their starting points.

- Achievement in reading is a strength, especially in Key Stage 3. Although writing is improving rapidly, handwriting and presentation are weaknesses because policies are not applied rigorously enough. Achievement in speaking and listening is good because pupils are encouraged to speak clearly and confidently.

**Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding. This is the main reason why achievement is improving so rapidly. Lessons are consistently well planned to take account of the varying abilities of pupils and teaching is flexible so that it can be adjusted to meet their emerging needs. As a result, the pace and structure of lessons is good. In the best lessons, highly imaginative activities effectively motivate and engage pupils. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson on Ghazal poetry where pupils’ appreciation and understanding of this poetry form were deepened as a result of highly motivational teaching.

- In lessons, very clear links are made to pupils’ prior learning and excellent use is made of questioning to probe and extend their learning. Teaching assistants very effectively support pupils with disabilities or special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. In both key stages, pupils have very positive attitudes towards English and are enthusiastic learners. As one pupil commented, ‘Pupils behave well in English lessons because they like them’.

- Accurate assessment and rigorous monitoring systems are being used very effectively to identify progress and inform teaching. Pupils are fully aware of their targets and what they need to do to achieve them. The quality of teachers’ marking is good overall with written commentary that provides helpful guidance to pupils on how they can improve their work. However, opportunities for pupils to assess their own and others’ work so as to encourage them to become more reflective learners, are not sufficiently embedded.

**Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is well planned to provide a good balance between reading, writing, speaking and listening. Modules have been designed well to meet the varying interests and abilities of pupils, and poetry modules are particularly well designed. A strength is the way in which the excellent library provision is being used to encourage and develop pupils’ skills and interest in reading.
The school’s commitment to strengthening literacy across the curriculum, for example through the work of literacy champions, is having a very positive impact on pupils’ achievement. Other initiatives such as the ‘Double Club’, Literary Society, Spelling Bee and the Seniores Society are helping to enrich the curriculum and raise standards, especially those of the more able pupils. Intervention and support programmes are particularly effective. For example, summer schools and increasingly close links to feeder primary schools are having a very positive impact on ensuring the early identification of pupils’ learning needs in English.

**Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- Good leadership and management effectively underpin the department’s capacity for sustained improvement in English, which is illustrated by recent significant improvements in achievement. The department works as a very committed and collegiate team with a shared passion for English. A strength is the way in which the department works with other departments to drive up standards in literacy. Resources are excellent and the newly equipped library is extremely well used to support teaching and learning in English.

- Self-evaluation is accurate and based on a rigorous analysis of data and detailed and wide-ranging monitoring of teaching and learning. This is accurately informing improvement planning which identifies suitable priorities, sets challenging targets and details well-conceived actions to address them. However, systems to gain the views of pupils on the provision for English so as to further inform improvement planning are underdeveloped.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- developing opportunities for pupils to assess their own and others’ work
- improving standards of handwriting and presentation by consistently applying existing policies
- ensuring that strategic planning takes pupils’ views into account.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Chris Nye**

**Her Majesty’s Inspector**