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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Introduction

This is the first year of the new specification and centres and candidates on the whole seem to have adapted well to the different Assessment Objectives and mark distributions on the paper. Examiners commented that there was evidence of some good teaching and learning in preparation for this examination in the responses seen and examiners commented that many candidates seemed well prepared on the whole.

Examiners commented that the texts about housing were accessible across the full range of abilities and candidates were able to engage with the tasks and respond appropriately.

Better candidates were able to engage fully with both texts and respond thoughtfully and articulately. Their writing responses were often engaging and effective and were well controlled and accurate. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages and the questions. Their writing was often pedestrian or lacked coherence and had weak language controls.

There were candidates who copied out all, or considerable chunks, of the extracts in response to Question 8. This can never be a successful way to respond as the candidate is required to produce their own work and show the ability to adapt the original texts for a different audience and purpose.

Section A (Questions 1-7)

This consists of two short retrieval questions and a question on the writer's use of language and structure to create effects on each text and a question requiring candidates to compare the two texts.

Question 1

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

The majority of candidates correctly chose the words 'comfortable', 'cosy' or 'cheap' to identify one point made about living in the steel box.

There were two common errors that candidates made. Some used references to lines outside of lines 8-18, most commonly from line 5 'It takes time to adjust to living in a steel box'. Others missed the focus of bullet point 1 on the mark scheme by writing 'he feels like it is a slum'. To achieve the mark the candidate had to mention that this was his first impression e.g. 'His first impression was that he thought the place looked like a slum.'

Candidates must ensure they read the text and the question carefully.

Question 2

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates provided correct examples of the types of housing such as 'student housing' or 'starter flats'.

Some candidates used references to other part of the extract and ignored the line references mentioned in the question. Other unsuccessful responses were either too general, 'To create housing', whereas others were too descriptive, 'underfloor heating and high-end lighting systems'. These did not answer the question.

Candidates must ensure they read the question carefully.

Question 3

The question asks the candidate how the writer presents his ideas. Responses to this question were on the whole encouraging. Examiners commented that most candidates demonstrated at least some understanding of the text and awareness of the devices used to present ideas.

Successful candidates explored the range of language techniques used by Forrest, paying detailed attention to the effects achieved. Many candidates chose to focus on the rhetorical question in the first paragraph and the inclusion of quoted opinions from inhabitants. Facts and figures were another popular focus with many candidates showing an ability to comment upon concrete evidence, validating the authenticity of the article.

Examiners commented that most candidates were able to explain the language and structure and identify features and support them with a relevant quotation from the text, but they failed to add an evaluative comment, explaining how these features helped the writer to achieve his effects. Many responses that did add a comment failed to make specific reference to the writer's ideas, saying little more than 'this emphasises' or 'this makes the reader want to read on'. There was also evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular language features but do not explain them.

Examiners commented that a number of candidates did not identify the difference between the author and those quoted in the text.

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content based without much focus on 'how the writer presents his ideas'. Some of the weakest responses were simply summaries of the text.

Centres need to remind candidates that this question asks how the writer achieves effects not what he says.

Question 4

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates answered correctly with 'squalid huts', 'piles of rubbish' and 'animal waste'.

Many incorrect responses referred to what Ashok sees but missed the reference to slum housing in the question. The most common incorrect response was, 'naked children in dust played with mangy dogs'. Others referred to women cutting vegetables and men lazing in the sun. Other unsuccessful responses used the wrong part of the text or gave incomplete responses with a single word e.g. 'plastic' without the required reference to roofs.

Candidates need to make sure they have read the question carefully.

Question 5

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates answered correctly with 'six guards' or 'barbed wire'.

Incorrect responses were sometimes incomplete e.g. 'unguarded door' but this would need 'locked' to answer the question on how the house is protected or another example 'locked' – to achieve the mark 'locked door' would have been needed.

Some candidates referred to high metal gates which is outside the line references.

Some misunderstood the question and spoke of 'magnificent peacocks' which can be found on line 50 which neither answers the question, nor is it in the correct part of the text.

Candidates need to make sure they have read the question carefully.

Question 6

The question asks the candidate how the writer describes what Ashok and Eketi see and feel. Some examiners commented that candidates coped slightly better with this question than they did on Question 3, however other examiners observed that candidates did not do as well on this question.

Examiners saw some responses with some very impressive literary analytical skills which focused upon the figurative language used by Swarup to portray the unpleasantness of the slums and the impenetrability of the farmhouse.

Better candidates were able to identify individual words and phrases, such as 'ugly patchwork' and 'small, squalid huts', for commentary. A few candidates successfully commented upon the end of the text: the luxuries within the farmhouse and the abundance of opulence - which was a stark contrast to the slums.

Most candidates were able to identify and explain the sights and feelings and the language used to express this although there was often a tendency to explain what the language meant rather than how it was used for effect.

Examiners commented that a number of candidates focused on one aspect of the question and neglected the second one, tending to comment on either what they saw or felt. Similarly candidates tended to focus on the description of the slums and missed opportunities to focus on the description of the farmhouse.

Some candidates began their response in a very detailed and precise way, developing their responses with real insight before lapsing into narrative. Some candidates stated that the writer had used many techniques to describe what the characters saw and felt but then did not exemplify. There was also evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular language features but do not explain them. Weaker candidates tended to re-tell the events.

Some candidates appeared to have understood the question as 'Describe what Ashok and Eketi see and feel' which led them to re-tell the events of the text rather than analysing the use of language and structure.

As with question 3, centres need to remind candidates that this question asks how the writer achieves effects not what he says.

Question 7

This question requires candidates to compare how the writers convey their ideas and perspectives. Examiners commented that the majority of candidates were able to identify and discuss basic differences at a minimum, and many produced well-thought out comparisons of the extracts.

More successful responses focused on a wide range of writer's approaches in conveying ideas and perspectives, embedding relevant words and phrases as quotations alongside their own well-developed opinion. Successful responses answered both parts of the question and compared both texts concurrently. These candidates were effective in their comparisons and could not only identify writers' ideas and perspectives and an appropriate reference but make an incisive and penetrating series of comments. It was pleasing to see some candidates also managing to look at the texts holistically by identifying positive or negative language choices and factual or fictional devices employed to convey authorial perspective about housing.

Most candidates did make comparisons between the texts and write about both. Some examiners commented that the responses to this question mostly resulted in the selection of obvious points and a comparison of these with some supporting textual references. Some candidates wrote about the texts separately and the comparison was done implicitly by the examiner. The main pitfall was a lack of comparative vocabulary. If candidates had used comparative connectives it would have helped to improve their responses. Some candidates failed to note the clear difference in purpose and tone of the texts.

Weaker candidates often compared the content. They sometimes focused on exploring one text in some detail and then simply added some undeveloped points about the other text afterwards. The least successful candidates wrote very little or wrote about one text and then wrote about the other text, with no comparison at all. However there were only a tiny number who only considered one text.

A small number of candidates responded as if this question was the Question 10 from the legacy specification which meant that they were not addressing the task. One examiner commented that there were more candidates who did not attempt this question or offered very short responses than any other question on the whole paper.

Centres will need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts. This should

include how to analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve their effects and how to write comparative responses.

Section B (Question 8)

Although the mark allocations for the different Assessment Objectives has changed and there is a greater weighing for AO5, the task is familiar to those centres who have been used to the legacy specification.

There was some evidence of good teaching and learning in the responses to this section. There was some evidence of planning which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet. Some examiners commented that candidates who planned their responses seemed to respond in a more focused manner.

One examiner commented that it was very interesting to read the different responses from candidates in different social and cultural situations. There were a good number of lively, well written responses to this task. Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a school or college magazine. It was generally felt candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. The most successful responses had a strong sense of audience and purpose and included personal touches and rhetorical language to engage the audience. Many candidates were able to adopt an appropriate register and there was clear evidence of an understanding of the purpose, audience and format required although some examiners commented that a number of candidates struggled adopt an appropriate register.

AO1

Most candidates referred to the three bullet points and managed to cover a reasonable number of points. However, although relevant points were selected, they were not always developed and interpreted effectively enough. Many candidates tended to focus more on the first two bullet points: 'the different types of homes' and 'the good points'. The final bullet point ('the bad points') tended to be covered in much less detail or depth.

The vast majority of candidates used the bullet points provided in the question to prompt the content of their articles, with some opting to use only the information provided in the two texts while others also used their knowledge of housing to inform their article.

Those achieving at the higher levels often demonstrated a good, interesting knowledge of how these extracts related to contemporary concerns about

housing, student loans, worldwide poverty and expensive cities in comparison to vacated rural communities.

There were some interesting interpretations of alternative housing including boats, beach huts, tree houses and igloos.

Weaker candidates simply retold the texts, without exploring the good and bad points. In weaker responses there was evidence of lifting from the original texts without any attempt to re-work the material. The weakest candidates had very little knowledge of housing issues and had not understood the source material.

A04

Examiners commented that most candidates were able to produce a successful article about varied housing from around the world using form, tone and register appropriately and effectively. There was clear evidence of an understanding of the purpose, audience and format required.

Some candidates managed to skilfully portray a real flavour of a magazine article. The most successful seemed to be those who chose a particular approach or 'angle' to their writing and used the ideas to build a persuasive or informative piece.

This seemed to be a style of writing that many candidates enjoyed, providing invented statistics, facts and quotes from 'professionals' and interested parties. There was much use of rhetorical questions appealing directly to the reader which made for a lively and enjoyable read. However there were responses which, whilst clearly and competently written, did not consider audience or purpose.

Candidates sometimes struggled with communicating their ideas in the form of an article written for college candidates, with some writing in essay form instead and others going too far with informality, using slang inappropriately.

Some candidates only acknowledged the register at the beginning and ending of their response, rather than maintaining it through the whole response. Weaker candidates had problems sustaining the required register throughout their response.

A05

There were examples of successful responses with high levels of accuracy. These candidates were adept at using a wide range of punctuation marks and sentence types in order to draw attention to particular information or to clarify and direct the reader. Most responses were structured and organised

reasonably effectively, although only the more able could use structural and grammatical features effectively and deliberately. There was some evidence of candidates attempting to use extended vocabulary when they really did not know how to use the words correctly. Spelling and punctuation were often correct and many candidates tried hard to use a range of sentence structures and punctuation for effect.

Some examiners commented that some candidates had problems with grammar, despite good spelling and punctuation.

Centres should continue to work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt ideas from texts and how to write appropriately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Question 9, 10 and 11)

Although the mark allocations for the different Assessment Objectives has changed and there is a greater weighing for AO5, the tasks are familiar to those centres who have been used to the legacy specification.

Question 10 was the most popular question.

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section. There was evidence of planning which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

Examiners commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 9

AO4

Many examiners commented positively on candidates' responses to this question. However some examiners thought that candidates struggled to develop and sustain a response.

There were some strongly argued and engaging responses with very competent writing and some very well-developed and well-expressed ideas. The majority of candidates were clear about the discursive approach required by this question. There was a good range of rhetoric present in the arguments and the purposeful inclusion of linguistic techniques, designed to persuade the reader. There were some heart-warming discussions which celebrated the inclusive and safe atmosphere of a home, whilst there were some candidates who were able to use wry humour to enforce their

opinions. Many candidates discussed the philosophical differences between merely having shelter and creating a homely space. Some candidates responded in a very personal way to the subject, often very successfully. Some candidates wrote well and with great perception about the subject, including the subtleties of home as a country, home as family and home not having to be perfect all of the time.

The majority of candidates could distinguish, with lots of examples, the differences between house and home although, for some, these points were not always fully developed.

Weaker candidates offered points that were quite predictable and found it difficult to sustain an argument, often leading to repetition.

Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop their ideas effectively.

A05

The majority of candidates were able to construct texts with grammar and punctuation which was mostly accurate but there was a very little variety to create effects or emphasis.

One examiner commented that candidates made a good attempt at starts and finishes, aware of the cohesion of the piece (although, for some, punctuation had disappeared by the end), as well as using a variety of sentence types. Another examiner commented that sentence structure was a weakness.

Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Question 10

A04

Examiners commented positively on the quality of some of the responses to the title 'The Locked Door'.

This question seemed to be the most successful out of all the Section C responses. It was the most popular choice in Section C with the locked door, being an opening to a whole array of other places, such as torture chambers, shrines and other worlds. There were also lots of haunted houses, new homes and a number of dead siblings' rooms. Their stimuli

came from a range of sources from computer games to personal anecdotes to metaphorical interpretations of the theme.

Better responses not only understood the genre but could subvert it with humour. They kept the suspense to the end, very much aware of reader requirements. More sophisticated responses made good use of the narrative structure to release the plot in a way which secured reader engagement.

Many responses employed safe and methodical narrative structures but were still able to convey a sense of drama. Most candidates were animated in their storytelling, showing an understanding of the genre, but with some forgetting that there was a reader at the other end. Most candidates seemed to enjoy the opportunity to tell a story.

A number of examiners commented on the problems with the endings of narratives as being a significant issue for some candidates. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of an effective ending as narratives often started well but then lost momentum.

Weaker candidates would do better to focus on a short 'episode' and describe in detail rather than trying to cram enough plot for a three volume novel into the available time. Weaker candidates struggled at times with clarity, with muddled storylines and weak endings that were not closely related to the events that had unfolded.

Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response.

A05

Better candidates controlled the tempo and the release of information with precise uses of shorter or longer sentences, using punctuation to add emphasis where required.

Vocabulary could have been more advanced and it was clear some candidates had learned a number of high level words and attempted to use them inappropriately.

Spelling and punctuation were often correct, and many candidates tried hard to use a range of sentence structures for effect.

Where candidates focused on content-driven plots it was easy for punctuation, cohesion and coherence to dwindle as the story progressed.

Weaker responses tended to have weak language controls with problems with grammatical structures as well as inconsistent spelling and punctuation.

Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Question 11

A04

Candidates produced some well written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing their journey. Better responses were detailed and lively with fully developed ideas. There was some excellent description with close attention to detail throughout. There were many that managed the task well, taking the reader with them across different landscapes and scenarios and offering insightful glimpses into other worlds. These candidates included description, interesting observations and, at times, some humour. Successful responses set the early morning quiet followed by bustle very well and all followed the natural ending of arrival at the school, college, or work by providing insights into feelings of excitement or dread or resignation (the latter mostly in respect to school!) There were one or two perceptive responses where the journey was interpreted as metaphorical rather than literal. These responses were often more engaging and sustained.

Most candidates interpreted this question as an actual journey and were able to write descriptively at length about various journeys to school, college or work (mostly to school). Most were clearly and competently written.

Weaker responses tended to be linear narratives that were often repetitive in structure and lacking variety. Some read like directions.

Centres need to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary which they can use appropriately.

A05

Whilst the majority of candidates were able to construct texts with grammar and punctuation which was mostly accurate, less able candidates used very little variety to create effects or emphasis.

Some candidates found it difficult to communicate the difference between past, present and future tense and this was most apparent in descriptions of the journeys.

The task of describing a journey lent itself to paragraphing, through each new part of the route, for less able candidates.

Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

A05 Comments across Questions 8, 9, 10 and 11

Better responses were accurate using a wide range of grammatical constructions, punctuation and vocabulary.

There was evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation but most examiners commented on candidates who had problems with grammar and expression. Some of this was unidiomatic English but there were also problems with tenses and sentence structure including missing words. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication.

Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and idiomatic English to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- were able to explore language and structure and show how these are used by writers to achieve effects
- were able to select a wide range of comparisons and explore the writers' ideas and perspectives
- were able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well developed and controlled (Questions 9, 10 and 11)
- used ambitious vocabulary
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to identify language and structure or made little comment on how these are used by writers to achieve effects
- were not able to compare the texts or offered very limited comparisons
- sometimes narrated the texts in response to Questions 3, 6 and 7
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 8
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Question 9, 10 and 11)
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

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