

Principal examiner reports for teachers

Principal examiner reports for teachers summarise what candidates did well and what candidates needed to improve for this examination series only.

This report is to be used in conjunction with the question paper and mark scheme.

For guidance on teaching and learning we provide resources for many of our syllabuses.

Resource	Where to find it
Grade descriptions – Grade descriptions describe the level of performance typically demonstrated by candidates achieving the different grades awarded for a qualification.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Syllabus and specimen materials
Schemes of work – Schemes of work are designed to support you in your teaching and lesson planning.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Lesson planning – Guidance on how to plan a lesson.	Lesson planning
Resource plus – There may be additional resources such as teaching packs containing lesson plans, resources and worksheets and videos for aspects of your syllabus.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Teaching tools	Teaching Tools
Exemplar candidate responses	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Learner guide – A guide for students to help them understand what the course involves.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Community forums – Do you have a question or something to share? Our online forums are great way to keep up to date with your subject and the global Cambridge community.	Community forum on the school support hub
Access to scripts for this series.	Access to scripts service
Results analysis is available for some syllabuses.	Results analysis
Test maker is available for some subjects.	Test maker

Other services from Cambridge International Education

- [Digital mocks service](#)
- [Insight assessments](#)
- [Professional development](#)
 - [Focus on assessment](#)
 - [Online marking workshops](#)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11 Reading
--

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Answered almost all parts of all questions.
- Noted the marks allocated, and/or the space available for answers to help them to organise their response time efficiently.
- Based their answers on the correct section of text.
- Responded to the general demands of each task.
- Engaged well with explicit and implicit details.
- Used generally clear expression.

What candidates needed to improve

- Paying careful attention to the guidance offered in questions to help them – for example, in **Question 1(h)** identifying the writer's different feelings and providing three details from anywhere in the text up to line 27 to support their answer.
- Using context to help make sense of meaning and avoid misreading.
- Planning and organising their ideas for longer responses effectively.
- Checking longer answers to ensure all the ideas planned beforehand have been included.
- Understanding precise meanings of a wider range of vocabulary – for example, to understand why a writer might choose to use one word rather than another with a similar meaning.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly correctly identified the roaring/sound of the lions.

Limited responses

- Some candidates identified 'the lions' alone, without reference to the sound made.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Some candidates successfully explained the meaning of both words, in context.

Limited responses

- Some candidates missed the focus of the question and incorrectly focused on the breakfast itself.
- Some candidates repeated the words of the question.

(c) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates suggested a correct reason from the text, reworking the material and/or using their own words where appropriate to evidence clear understanding.

Limited responses

- Some candidates lifted material from the text, for example 'in search of new land'.

(d)(i) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly identified that they 'sold the animals'.

Limited responses

- Some candidates identified that they 'found new homes for the animals' without reference to the sale/transaction.
- Some candidates incorrectly included reference to selling the animals to zoos in India.

(ii) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly correctly offered that it gave them time to 'get used to the idea'.

Limited responses

- Some candidates offered simply that 'it made the departure easier'.

(e) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly offered a correct feeling, with two distinct details from the text to support their answer.

Limited responses

- Some candidates asserted that Mother was 'happy or excited'. In these cases, many candidates were still able to identify one or two relevant supporting details.

(f) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly correctly offered two details through straightforward lifting from the text.

Limited responses

- Some candidates omitted that the noises were 'loud'.
- Some candidates incorrectly selected the lift 'father wanted us to travel with all our belongings'.

(g)(i) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly identified dawn/a shooting star.

Limited responses

- Some candidates incorrectly suggested that writer hoped to see 'Ravi's face'.

(ii) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly correctly offered that Ravi would be annoyed or shocked.

Limited responses

- Some candidates repeated the question and offered simply that he wanted to see Ravi's face.

(h) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates offered three distinct feelings with three correct supporting details from the text.

Limited responses

- Some candidates offered text details unrelated to the focus of the question/feeling identified – for example by providing details relating to Mother and her feelings about the move.
- Some candidates chose one feeling only and provided three text details to support the single feeling identified.
- Some candidates did not offer three distinct feelings and instead provided synonyms for the same feeling in their response.

Question 2

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates identified two distinct effects expressed clearly and in their own words.

Limited responses

- Some candidates relied on recycling of text vocabulary – for example 'dramatic' or 'incredible'.
- Some candidates used vocabulary that was not precise enough to adequately convey the effect – for example 'bad' or 'rough'.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly successfully inferred the suggestion that the writer was scared or the situation was dangerous.

Limited responses

- Some candidates missed the suggestion of danger and instead identified the literal – that it was cold.

(c) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explained two distinct impressions and expressed them clearly.

Limited responses

- Some candidates repeated the text vocabulary – for example ‘the water was blocking the way/was frothing’.

(d) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly successfully explained that ‘monstrous’ suggested something huge or frightening.

Limited responses

- Some candidates explained simply that it was out of the ordinary.

(e) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates selected and clearly indicated the one well-chosen example they were planning to explain.
- Candidates explained and explored the meanings of the word(s) they had selected precisely, using their own words, to illustrate what impression the writer created about the ship sinking.

Limited responses

- Some candidates provided explanations which were too general or repeated rather than explained words from their selection.

Question 3

(a) Reading

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates focused on the task and selected a wide range of relevant points and used these points to answer the question.
- Candidates navigated around redundant material and presented the key ideas economically and concisely.

Limited responses

- Some candidates included irrelevant material and repetition.
- Some candidates relied on lifting sections of text.

Writing

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader.
- Candidates wrote with clarity and fluency, using varied original structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions and punctuation that was accurate and helpful.
- Candidates produced well-crafted and well-organised summaries with appropriate linking devices such as ‘moreover’ and ‘likewise’ correctly used to guide the reader through the summary.

Limited responses

- Some candidates included significant stretches of copied text, often spliced together, leading to minimal writing which could be assessed as original or reworking.

- Some candidates did not write with the formality required and responses contained errors in grammar, with awkward expression.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates mostly successfully and consistently demonstrated the correct perspective, supported by detail from the text and developed with sensible inference – for example, ‘it stores personal information/invades privacy’ developed with ‘my whole life is being monitored/I feel uncomfortable’.

Limited responses

- Some candidates did not demonstrate full understanding of the task or the text, writing about both positive and negative aspects of smart homes.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12 Reading
--

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates demonstrated the different skills required by each question, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension and **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language.
- Candidates selected relevant content to answer a question precisely and avoided unselective and extensive lifting.
- Responses were clear and unambiguous.
- Candidates paid attention to the correct paragraphs and line references.
- Candidates noted the marks allocated and space available for answers to help them organise their responses.
- Candidates wrote answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(f)** and **Question 2(e)**.
- Candidates used their own words when instructed.
- Summaries did not exceed 150 words.

What candidates needed to improve

- Some candidates needed to select content more precisely and avoid unselective lifting.
- For **Question 2**, focus needed to be on the effect of language. Identification of language features, such as simile or metaphor, is not required.
- Candidates needed to read the questions carefully. For example, in **Question 1(c)** 'snow' was confused with 'winter', and in **Question 3(a)**, summaries included the problems caused by smartphones.
- Candidates needed to follow the rubric for each question, for example, when 'own words' and a word limit are specified.
- Candidates needed to check responses for clarity and accuracy.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates identified one of many possible details about the house. For example, it was a mansion or it had chandeliers.

Limited responses

- Some candidates needed to read the question more carefully. Baba was rich or that he had servants did not answer the question which asked for a 'detail about the house'.
- Some candidates selected too much text which resulted in an incorrect answer. For example, 'It had marble floors and a shack at the bottom of the garden'. These answers needed to demonstrate more careful selection.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates inferred that the reason why the writer never stepped inside Hassan's home was because of their difference in class.
- Candidates stated that Hassan was either a servant or the son of a servant, or that Hassan's home was the servant's quarters.

Limited responses

- Incomplete responses lifted the text details that the writer went to school and Hassan helped with the chores.
- Some candidates focused only on the differences in their homes.
- Responses which stated that Baba would not approve needed to provide a reason why.

(c) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates identified two correct answers, such as building snowmen and the sound of snow crunching underfoot.

Limited responses

- Some candidates misread the question, substituting 'winter' for 'snow'. This resulted in incorrect answers: 'the kite fighting tournament' or 'the warmth of the cast-iron stove'.
- Some responses were incomplete: the 'soft pattering of snow' omitted a reference to 'window'.
- Some responses imprecisely lifted 'turnip curma and rice for lunch after a morning building snowmen' which did not answer the question.

(d) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates provided two correct reasons. For example, their designs were flawed and Saifo sold sharp string.

Limited responses

- Some responses included an incorrect lift: 'they were better kite fighters than kite makers'. This did not clearly state that they were poor at kite making or that their kite designs were flawed.
- Some responses offered two answers which overlapped. For example, 'Saifo was a famous kite maker and his kites were the best'.

(e) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates provided a meaning for each of the words 'planted' and 'seed' in the context of the passage and in their own words. Examples included 'instilled an idea' and 'made him think'.

Limited responses

- Some candidates offered partial responses with only one of the words explained, such as 'he planned to win' or 'the words stuck in his head'.
- Some candidates answered with narrative details and did not offer any meaning for either of the words.

(f) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates provided a correct feeling, such as anxious or scared. This was supported by two correct details. Both feeling and details were written in the designated spaces.

Limited responses

- Some candidates needed to read the question carefully. They provided a feeling more relevant to the earlier part of paragraph 5, 'a few days before the tournament', and not 'the night before'.
- Some candidates explained the text details rather than just quoting them.

(g)(i) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates inferred that the writer was scared of losing or he did not want to disappoint Baba.

Limited responses

- Candidates gave incomplete answers. They needed to explain what 'the outcome' was that the writer feared or why Baba's 'watching me' made him anxious.

(ii) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates identified that Hassan had raised the kite. They recognised that the word 'But' on line 37 indicated that there was no option of withdrawing for the writer.

Limited responses

- Some candidates did not identify Hassan as being the agent.

(h) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates selected three different feelings/opinions, such as anxious, determined and happy.
- Candidates supported each feeling/opinion with a relevant quotation.
- Candidates organised their responses, with each feeling/opinion clearly supported by a quotation.

Limited responses

- Some candidates chose only one feeling/opinion and provided three text details to support the single feeling identified.
- Some candidates did not offer three distinct feelings/opinions and instead provided synonyms for the same feeling/opinion in their response. For example, 'the writer was scared and he felt nervous'.
- Some responses paraphrased the events without offering a feeling/opinion.

Question 2

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates offered a clear explanation that the writer manoeuvred or directed the string, or that he was in charge.

Limited responses

- Some responses copied 'control' without further explanation, such as 'controlled skilfully'.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates offered two impressions in their own words, such as 'there were a lot of kites and it was intense'.

Limited responses

- Some responses provided narrative details that the kites were going to be cut or they were fighting. These responses needed to evidence understanding of the effect of language.

(c) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates offered two clear effects, such as the kites were colourful and fell quickly.

Limited responses

- Some responses focused on the whole of the extract rather than on the specified phrase.
- Some responses identified the image as a 'simile'. This is not relevant; they needed to explain the effect.

(d) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates recognised that the structure of the sentence (ellipses and exclamation) made the reader feel suspense or excitement.

Limited responses

- Some candidates described the narrative events that the writer was close to winning.

(e) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates selected one well-chosen example.
- Candidates explained the associations and suggestions of the word(s) selected, such as 'erupted suggests an explosion of loud noise'.

Limited responses

- Some candidates selected 'Sensing the end was near' which did not evidence effective use of language.
- Some candidates repeated the words in the extract, such as 'the kite fell speedily'.
- Some candidates provided a general paraphrase of the whole extract without focusing on the effect of language.

Question 3

(a) Reading

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates provided a wide range of ideas relevant to the question.

Limited responses

- Summaries made reference to just a few ideas.
- Some candidates included irrelevant material, such as the problems caused by smartphones.
- Some candidates included lengthy introductions, repeated ideas or wrote at length about one idea.

(b) Writing

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates presented ideas concisely and did not exceed 150 words.
- Candidates used their own words.
- Summaries were clear, fluent and accurately written, with varied, often complex, sentence structures.
- Content was well-organised with selective use of linking devices, such as 'Moreover', to create cohesion.
- Candidates wrote in a suitably formal register.
- Vocabulary was appropriate and wide-ranging, such as 'obsession', 'invest', 'eliminate'.

Limited responses

- Some candidates copied sections of the text or made minimal changes.
- Errors impeded communication at times. Candidates needed to check their writing carefully, paying attention to subject-verb agreement and sentence construction.
- Some summaries needed better organisation. There was either an overuse of linking devices or linking devices were absent or inaccurate.

(c) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates provided relevant details from the text, such as 'my smartphone has GPS'.
- These details were developed with sensible and thoughtful inference, such as 'this makes me feel safe in an unfamiliar place'.

Limited responses

- Responses were mostly text details, including sections of copied text.
- Developments were simple, such as 'GPS makes it easy'. Candidates needed to develop the ideas in the text in greater detail rather than stating the obvious.
- Some candidates did not maintain a consistent perspective and also included the disadvantages of a smartphone.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21 Writing

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates engaged well with the topic of computer gaming and the **Section A** texts.
- Candidates followed instructions carefully, such as adhering to suggested word counts.
- Candidates produced directed responses to **Question 1** that showed awareness of form, purpose and audience.
- Candidates identified several relevant ideas from each of the given texts for **Section A**.
- Candidates used descriptive or narrative features, as appropriate, to produce engaging responses to **Section B**.
- Candidates wrote clear, well-structured responses to each question that were easy to follow.
- Candidates demonstrated an overall secure grasp of technical accuracy, particularly in spelling and punctuation.

What candidates needed to improve

- In **Section A** candidates needed to use their own words more consistently, rather than copying whole sentences from the text.
- Candidates needed to demonstrate evaluation of ideas from each of the **Section A** texts in **Question 1**.
- Candidates needed greater accuracy in the use of grammatical structures such as tenses and articles.
- Candidates needed to proofread their work for meaning and accuracy.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Comprehensive responses (Reading)

- Addressed several ideas from each text in detail.
- Developed some of these ideas with original content from their own experience, such as by identifying computer games that helped with learning in schools.
- Evaluated some of the ideas they had selected, such as by prioritising which ideas were most important, explaining why they agreed or disagreed with an idea, or by comparing the ideas from each text.
- Often examined contrasting ideas from the texts side by side, providing an opportunity for evaluation.
- Showed a clear focus on the task and the texts throughout.

Limited responses (Reading)

- Copied out large sections of the text without adding development or evaluation.
- Used their own ideas, rather than referring to those in the text.
- Wrote extensively about one idea from one or both texts rather than considering a range of ideas.
- Referenced several ideas from the text but did not evaluate these.
- Made reference to ideas from the texts that were too imprecise to be rewarded, such as writing that children need to rest after school, whereas the text refers to resting the brain.

Comprehensive responses (Writing)

- Were well organised including a focused introduction and conclusion.
- Produced relevant content that was developed and effective.
- Used an appropriate tone and register for a school magazine article.
- Made accurate use of a range of sentence structures including complex sentences.
- Utilised a wide range of vocabulary to support the points made.

- Used paragraphing appropriately to provide a clear structure to the article.
- Made accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar to support their responses.

Limited responses (Writing)

- Over-relied on material from the text showing little development of ideas.
- Used simple vocabulary, relying mainly on words from the texts.
- Did not include article features such as a heading and were sometimes written as speeches or letters.
- Made frequent errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, such as using incorrect tenses and articles, inaccurate sentence separation and confusion with homophones.

Question 2

Comprehensive responses

- Were fully focused on description throughout, successfully bringing the described scene to life.
- Created a detailed picture of the event, including effective use of sensory detail such as what could be seen, heard and felt.
- Used interesting descriptive features such as carefully chosen adjectives, striking imagery and language features such as metaphors, onomatopoeia and personification.
- Used a range of sentence structures, including complex sentences, to add interest.

Limited responses

- Were based more on narrative than description, telling a story that happened to take place at a festival.
- Recounted events that took place at a festival rather than describing the scene.
- Sometimes did not establish what the festival was or where it was taking place.
- Responses used simple vocabulary and sentence structures.

Question 3

Comprehensive responses

- Had a sustained focus on description, including details such as the noise of the tills or the throng of people at busy times.
- Effectively brought out the differences between the two times of day, such as by explaining the contrast between the shopping centre being very busy in the middle of the day and deserted at the end of it.
- Responses made effective use of a wide range of appropriate vocabulary.
- Made accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Limited responses

- Told a story about a shopping trip without describing the shopping centre in detail.
- Focused on factual information about what could be bought in the shopping centre, rather than describing the scene.
- Did not cover the requirement to write about a shopping centre at two different times of day.
- Switched between past and present tenses, making the responses hard to follow.

Question 4

Comprehensive responses

- Established a solid scenario and successfully developed engaging characters.
- Included appropriate narrative features such as effective use of dialogue, characterisation and the build-up of tension.
- Offered a clear progression of events, with an unexpected twist often occurring at the end of the story.
- Made accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar, including some complex language.

Limited responses

- Sometimes focused too much on mundane events such as what the main character had for breakfast.
- Listed events rather than developing a story with believable characters.
- Attempted to include more plot detail than could be successfully covered in the time available.

Question 5

Comprehensive responses

- Established a solid scenario and successfully developed engaging characters.
- Included appropriate narrative features such as effective use of dialogue, characterisation and the build-up of tension.
- Used interesting storytelling techniques such as starting with a dramatic incident and then using a flashback to explain how this happened.
- Successfully integrated the given sentence at an appropriate part of the response.

Limited responses

- Often did not integrate the given sentence in a convincing way.
- Did not develop the characters and plot sufficiently to make the story engaging.
- Sometimes became confusing because the narrative structure was difficult to follow.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22 Writing
--

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Most candidates engaged successfully with the tasks. They showed an awareness of audience, purpose and the different writing styles required.
- In **Section A**, many candidates confidently selected a range or wide range of ideas from the stimulus texts. They demonstrated a clear understanding of the viewpoints presented.
- Candidates often recognised the contrasting perspectives within the texts. Comprehensive responses explored these in a balanced and convincing manner. Conclusions were clearly justified.
- Comprehensive responses synthesised ideas from both texts effectively. They avoided treating each text separately.
- Comprehensive responses frequently expressed ideas in the candidates' own words. This demonstrated secure understanding of the stimulus texts and avoided reliance on their wording.
- In comprehensive responses to **Question 1**, candidates developed their ideas thoughtfully. They used examples, explanation and personal insight to add depth and conviction to their arguments.
- A greater number of candidates demonstrated increasing confidence in evaluating the ideas presented in the stimulus texts. Comprehensive responses embedded evaluation throughout their writing. They considered the strengths and limitations of the ideas presented. These judgements were used to support their view about whether candidates should have to volunteer for a charity as part of the school's curriculum.
- Most candidates adopted an appropriate formal register throughout the Directed Writing task. They maintained a consistent tone suitable for the intended audience.
- Responses were usually well organised, with clear paragraphing and logical sequencing of ideas. This guided the reader effectively through the argument.
- Across both sections of the paper, many candidates used a wide range of vocabulary appropriately. This often enhanced precision and interest without appearing forced.
- Comprehensive responses combined ambitious vocabulary with a varied range of sentence structures. This created fluent and engaging writing.
- In comprehensive responses, spelling, punctuation and grammar were highly accurate. Candidates demonstrated secure technical control.
- In **Section B**, candidates engaged enthusiastically with the writing tasks. They generally demonstrated a clear understanding of the conventions of either descriptive or narrative writing.
- Comprehensive responses were carefully planned and structured. Ideas developed logically and a clear focus on the task was maintained throughout.
- Comprehensive narrative responses frequently sustained reader interest. They achieved this through effective characterisation, description and pacing.
- Comprehensive descriptive responses employed sensory writing, contrast and shifts in focus effectively. These techniques enabled the reader to visualise the setting clearly and understand its significance to the writer.
- Candidates who planned effectively often produced coherent and cohesive responses. These demonstrated both technical accuracy and creative flair.

What candidates need to improve

- The principal area for improvement continues to be the quality of evaluation in **Section A** as limited responses often remained descriptive. While most candidates selected appropriate material from both stimulus texts, limited responses explained or repeated ideas rather than evaluating them. Candidates would benefit from practising the integration of evaluation alongside the selection and development of ideas. Evaluative comments should not be reserved for the conclusion alone.
- Candidates should continue to develop confidence in expressing ideas in their own words. While wholesale copying was relatively uncommon, limited responses sometimes relied too closely on the

wording and structure of the stimulus texts. Paraphrasing was occasionally so close that there was limited evidence of independent processing of the ideas. Candidates should be encouraged to identify the key ideas before considering how to express them. They should aim to communicate these naturally and accurately using their own vocabulary.

- Limited responses would have benefited from greater selectivity when using the stimulus texts. At times, responses included excessive detail or ideas that were not closely connected to the task. Candidates should focus on ideas from the stimulus texts that support their line of argument. These should be developed and evaluated effectively. Candidates should avoid attempting to include every available idea or introducing ideas of their own that are not rooted in the texts.
- Candidates should ensure that development remains closely linked to the ideas presented in the stimulus texts. Extended discussion of personal experiences or unrelated examples should be avoided.
- Candidates should be encouraged to plan their responses carefully before writing. Limited responses would have benefited from clearer paragraphing and a more logical progression of ideas. This would enable arguments to be followed more easily.
- Candidates should be encouraged to establish a clear viewpoint early in their response. Ideas, development and evaluation should then be organised to support this viewpoint consistently throughout.
- Candidates should continue to pay careful attention to audience and register, particularly in the Directed Writing task. Lapses into conversational language, slang or overly informal expressions should be avoided as these reduced the effectiveness of some responses.
- Some candidates also attempted to achieve a more sophisticated style through ambitious vocabulary or memorised phrases. These were not always appropriate to the context. Precision and clarity remain more effective than unnecessarily complex language.
- In both sections of the paper, technical accuracy remains an area for improvement. Common issues included inconsistent tense control, subject–verb agreement and comma splicing. Inaccurate use of apostrophes and uncertainty over the use of colons and semi-colons were also evident.
- Candidates should be reminded that punctuation should be used to enhance clarity rather than simply to demonstrate variety. Accurate sentence control and secure punctuation generally have a greater impact on the overall quality of writing. Complex punctuation is less effective when it is not fully understood.
- In **Section B**, candidates would benefit from spending sufficient time planning before writing. Comprehensive narrative responses maintained a clear focus on a single central idea. They avoided attempting to include numerous events or characters. Similarly, comprehensive descriptive responses sustained description throughout rather than developing into narratives. Careful planning can help candidates maintain focus and organise ideas coherently. It can also help them remain closely aligned with the requirements of the chosen task.
- Candidates' understanding of the relationship between the Reading and Writing assessment objectives in **Section A** should continue to be developed. Comprehensive responses demonstrate a balanced combination of careful selection, thoughtful development and sustained evaluation. They also communicate ideas clearly. Candidates who understand how these elements work together are more likely to produce coherent and convincing responses. They are also more likely to meet the demands of the task fully.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 – Reading

Comprehensive Responses

- Comprehensive responses demonstrated a secure understanding of both Text 1 and Text 2. They selected a wide range of relevant ideas from the stimulus texts.
- Comprehensive responses established a clear viewpoint from the outset. They drew ideas from both texts in a balanced way and integrated these to construct a well-developed argument. They avoided discussing the ideas from each text separately.
- Development was most effective when candidates expanded ideas using their own knowledge, experience or observations. This development remained closely linked to the ideas in the stimulus texts. Rather than relying on examples provided in the texts, comprehensive responses introduced original illustrations to support their arguments. For example: *'Last year, I volunteered for an orphanage and I met people from different backgrounds and cultures.'* Another candidate wrote: *'After school, I have basketball practice and then I go home to do homework for all my main subjects.'* Examples such as these demonstrated how volunteering could develop confidence, communication skills and resilience. They also showed how existing commitments could support arguments about the pressures already placed upon candidates.

- Comprehensive responses sustained evaluation throughout their writing. They did not reserve it for the conclusion. Candidates frequently challenged or qualified ideas presented in the texts. They recognised that different viewpoints could both contain valid arguments. Some candidates considered the differing ages and circumstances of the writers. For example, they suggested that younger candidates might welcome compulsory volunteering while, in contrast, older candidates facing examination pressures and wider responsibilities might prefer volunteering to remain optional.
- Many comprehensive responses demonstrated increasingly confident evaluative language. Phrases such as *'It is undeniable that...'*, *'This claim falls short because...'*, *'However, this fails to recognise...'* and *'We cannot choose to ignore...'* were often followed by thoughtful explanation. They were not used simply as formulaic openings. Some candidates also embedded evaluation naturally through rhetorical questions and comparative language. Comments such as *'How could we not think about those in our community who rely on our support?'* or *'Although this may create challenges...'* encouraged readers to consider alternative perspectives. They also helped candidates to maintain a persuasive tone.
- Comprehensive responses also recognised that evaluation involved more than expressing a personal opinion. Candidates considered the validity of the arguments presented. They challenged assumptions and justified their conclusions. One particularly effective response questioned the argument that candidates do not have time for volunteering, suggesting that many have sufficient time for social media and other leisure activities. Another response argued convincingly that volunteering helped candidates develop qualities increasingly valued by universities and employers.
- Many comprehensive responses synthesised ideas from both texts within the same paragraph. This enabled evaluation to emerge naturally as the discussion progressed.

Limited Responses

- Limited responses generally demonstrated some understanding of the stimulus texts. They were usually able to identify some relevant ideas.
- Limited responses often reproduced ideas in the order in which they appeared in the stimulus texts. They did not always select and organise material to support a coherent argument. Centres should encourage candidates to select and group relevant ideas from across both texts according to the points they wish to make. They should avoid simply following the sequence of the source material. This will help candidates to shape the response around their own argument.
- In limited responses, development often relied too closely on examples already provided within the stimulus texts. At other times, ideas were reproduced with only minimal elaboration. Personal examples sometimes became lengthy descriptions of volunteering experiences. These did not always explain clearly how the experiences supported the argument. Some limited responses also moved away from the stimulus texts altogether. As a result, letters became increasingly general or anecdotal. Centres should encourage candidates to develop selected ideas through relevant explanation, inference or concise supporting examples. Personal material should be used purposefully to illuminate or strengthen the argument. It should not replace engagement with the texts.
- Evaluation remained the principal discriminator between responses. Limited responses often postponed evaluation until the concluding paragraph. Some candidates treated a brief statement of personal preference as evaluation rather than considering the ideas and opinions contained within the texts. Some responses consisted largely of summaries followed by comments such as *'This is why introducing volunteering to school is wrong.'* This indicated a viewpoint but did not fully explore or evaluate the ideas presented. Centres should encourage candidates to evaluate ideas throughout their response. They should consider the validity, implications and limitations of these ideas. They should also weigh competing viewpoints and explain why particular arguments are more or less convincing. Candidates should be reminded that assertions of personal agreement or disagreement alone do not constitute evaluation.
- Some limited responses confused related ideas within the texts. This was particularly evident in discussions of emotional sensitivity, emotional exhaustion and anxiety. Several distinct arguments were sometimes merged into a single general point, such as *'Emotional candidates can't handle other people.'* Centres should encourage candidates to distinguish carefully between related but separate ideas. Candidates should identify precisely what each idea suggests. They can then consider how these ideas connect, contrast or contribute to the wider argument.
- Similarly, limited responses tended to overlook less obvious ideas. These included ideas about giving back to the community and gaining similar benefits through existing school activities. Centres should encourage candidates to read both texts closely before beginning to write. They should strive to identify both the most immediately apparent ideas and those that are more subtle.
- Some limited responses depended heavily on the vocabulary and phrasing of the stimulus texts. While wholesale copying was uncommon, some responses relied on close paraphrase or extensive synonym substitution without demonstrating secure processing of the ideas. In a small number of cases, responses became collections of ideas with little evidence of independent judgement or critical

engagement. Centres should encourage candidates to process the ideas before writing. Candidates should express their understanding in their own language. They should select, combine and evaluate material to construct an independent response. The stimulus texts should provide evidence for this response rather than determine its wording or structure.

- Some limited responses attempted to use sophisticated evaluative phrases without developing the ideas that followed them. Centres should encourage candidates to view expressions such as 'It is undeniable that...' or 'It is certainly incontrovertible that...' as introductions to evaluation. These should be followed by further explanation, judgement or supporting development.

Question 1 – Writing

Comprehensive Responses

- Comprehensive responses demonstrated a clear awareness of audience, purpose and text type. They adopted an appropriately formal register throughout. The tone was respectful and persuasive, as appropriate for a letter to the Principal.
- Comprehensive responses established a clear viewpoint from the outset. This was sustained consistently throughout the response. The resulting writing was coherent, convincing and well organised.
- In comprehensive responses, paragraphs were carefully sequenced. Ideas developed logically and supported the overall argument.
- Organisation was frequently a strength of comprehensive responses. A range of cohesive devices was used naturally and effectively. These guided the reader through the argument without excessive reliance on repetitive discourse markers.
- In comprehensive responses, letters were generally formatted correctly. Appropriate openings and conclusions were used.
- Comprehensive responses used the given salutation of 'Dear Principal,'. They ended with appropriate valedictions such as *Yours sincerely* or *Yours faithfully*.
- Vocabulary was often varied and precise in comprehensive responses. Language was appropriate to both the audience and the purpose of the task. Comprehensive responses used subject-specific vocabulary connected with volunteering and education.
- Comprehensive responses frequently included more ambitious vocabulary such as *mandatory*, *perspective*, *discipline*, *paramount*, *vulnerable*, *comfort zone* and *willingness*. These words were used naturally within the context of the argument rather than simply to demonstrate range.
- Comprehensive responses also demonstrated secure control of sentence construction. Candidates used a variety of sentence lengths and structures to shape their arguments effectively. Clarity was maintained throughout.
- More sophisticated punctuation, including colons and semi-colons, was generally used purposefully in comprehensive responses.
- Grammar was usually accurate in comprehensive responses. Candidates demonstrated consistent control of tense, subject–verb agreement and sentence boundaries. This allowed ideas to flow fluently.

Limited Responses

- Limited responses generally demonstrated an awareness of the required text type and audience. This awareness was not always sustained consistently. Centres should encourage candidates to keep the purpose, audience and conventions of the specified text type in mind throughout. Choices of tone, vocabulary and formality should remain appropriate from beginning to end.
- Most responses adopted an appropriately polite tone. In some limited responses, openings became unnecessarily elaborate or over-formal. For example, one response began: '*I am so grateful to be allowed to have this opportunity to write my opinions on this subject – you are indeed the most important person at the school and, to be able to communicate my thoughts and feelings with you, I am honoured.*' While extended introductions of this nature were respectful, they often delayed engagement with the task and reduced opportunities to develop the main argument. Candidates should be encouraged to establish an appropriate relationship with the given audience briefly and naturally. They should then move directly to the purpose of the response and the ideas they wish to communicate.
- Vocabulary occasionally became over-ambitious in limited responses. Sophisticated words were sometimes selected without being fully understood or appropriate to the context. In some cases, this reduced clarity rather than enhancing it. Memorised phrases and elevated vocabulary also sometimes appeared formulaic or awkward. This was particularly evident when they were not integrated naturally. Centres should encourage candidates to prioritise precise, natural and contextually appropriate vocabulary. Candidates should be reminded that effective writing depends on selecting the most suitable word rather than the most sophisticated one.

- Sentence control remained the principal area for improvement in limited responses. Long, loosely constructed sentences frequently relied on multiple conjunctions or comma splicing. This made arguments difficult to follow. Attempts to increase complexity sometimes resulted in insecure grammar, inaccurate punctuation or unclear syntax. Many limited responses attempted to use colons and semi-colons. These were often inserted without a clear understanding of their purpose and were used inaccurately. As a result, they did not improve the clarity of the writing. Centres should encourage candidates to prioritise clear and securely constructed sentences. Sentence structures should be varied purposefully. More complex punctuation should only be used when candidates understand how it contributes to organisation and clarity.
- Limited responses also demonstrated less secure grammatical control. Common features included inconsistent tense and subject–verb disagreement. There was also uncertainty over singular and plural forms. Errors involving common homophones included *there/their/they're*, *your/you're*, *passed/past* and *here/hear*. Some candidates misspelled words that appeared in the examination paper, including *Principal* and *curriculum*. More careful proofreading would benefit these responses.
- While vocabulary was often ambitious in limited responses, precision was not always maintained. Candidates occasionally relied on awkward synonym substitution to avoid repeating vocabulary from the stimulus texts. This sometimes produced phrasing that sounded unnatural or obscured meaning. In other cases, colloquial expressions such as *gonna*, *wanna*, *kinda* and *'cause* appeared within otherwise formal responses. This reduced the effectiveness of the register. Centres should encourage candidates to select vocabulary that is natural, precise and consistently formal for the intended audience.
- Some limited responses also showed uncertainty when constructing accurate opening sentences. The phrase *'making volunteering for a charity part of the curriculum'* was occasionally misunderstood grammatically. This led to awkward sentence construction and affected clarity from the outset. Centres may wish to encourage candidates to read the task wording carefully before beginning to write. Candidates should also spend time planning clear opening and concluding paragraphs. These can influence the overall fluency and effectiveness of the response.

Question 2

Comprehensive Responses

- Comprehensive responses demonstrated a secure understanding of the descriptive demands of the task. They maintained a sustained focus on creating atmosphere rather than recounting events. These responses established a clear contrast between the two locations. One location was associated with companionship and activity, while the other was presented as a place of peace, solitude or reflection. This contrast often formed the structural foundation of the response, enabling candidates to develop distinct moods for each setting.
- Comprehensive responses created vivid settings through carefully selected sensory detail. They did not rely solely on visual description. These responses frequently combined sight, sound, smell, touch and movement to immerse the reader in each location. One particularly effective description of a fairground captured both excitement and atmosphere: *'We huddle together, necks craned and eyes wide, watching the monstrous rollercoaster crawl and creak its way to the top. The brave participants' arms are held high as they fidget in their seats, knowing the next few minutes of their lives will be wild. The smell of roasting meat mingles with the smell of fear and sweat...'*
- Similarly, comprehensive responses often created memorable descriptions through carefully observed details, such as *'The huge willow tree, in all its glory, stands tall and proud in the centre, its canopy spread out, providing shelter like a knight born to protect people from the sun's glare.'* to describe a significant landmark in a peaceful park.
- Comprehensive responses also focused on individual figures within the landscape. One candidate described: *'An elderly couple on a bench, shoulder to shoulder, the old man – eyes old with wisdom – glistening like tinted glass, and his wife with her chic white bob, nodding along to what he was proposing.'* Describing figures within the scene helped to create a focal point, often enhancing mood and meaning.
- Comprehensive responses demonstrated confident control of figurative language. Simile, metaphor and personification were used to enrich rather than dominate the writing. Images such as *'The sunlight danced across the floor, painting golden patterns on the walls.'*, *'The old oak stretched its limbs across the lawn, sheltering secrets in its shade.'* and *'The air was heavy with the perfume of orange blossoms and the distant hum of bees.'* created vivid impressions. These remained closely connected to the overall atmosphere of the piece.
- Comprehensive responses demonstrated mature control of style and technical accuracy. Vocabulary was often ambitious without appearing forced. Examples included *ominous*, *gargantuan*, *petrichor*, *engraved*, *ornate* and *merciless*. When integrated naturally, such vocabulary helped to create a convincing atmosphere.

- Sentence structures were varied and purposeful in comprehensive responses. Shorter sentences were used to emphasise significant details, while more extended sentences were used to sustain atmosphere.
- In comprehensive responses, punctuation generally supported the flow of the writing. More sophisticated features, such as semi-colons and dashes, were used accurately and sparingly.
- Many comprehensive responses also demonstrated effective structural control. Candidates often zoomed in and out between panoramic descriptions and carefully observed details. This guided the reader naturally through the setting. Some comprehensive responses enhanced contrast by describing the same location under different conditions. For example: *'By night, the market turned from a cheerful maze to a shadowy labyrinth.'*
- Other comprehensive responses successfully located both parts of the task within different areas of the same setting. For example, some described the lively attractions of a park alongside a secluded bench used for quiet reflection. This maintained cohesion while still fulfilling the requirements of the task.
- Perhaps the most notable characteristic of comprehensive responses was their ability to sustain description throughout. Movement and activity were sometimes included. These remained rooted in atmosphere and observation rather than developing into narratives. Readers were left with a strong impression of each location and also gained an understanding of why each place held significance for the writer.

Limited Responses

- While limited responses generally demonstrated an awareness of the two-part structure of the task, one location was often treated in considerably greater detail than the other. The second setting, particularly the place chosen for solitude, was occasionally addressed only briefly. This resulted in an unbalanced response. Greater balance between the two locations would have enabled these responses to sustain focus more effectively. Centres should encourage candidates to plan both parts before beginning to write. Sufficient time and descriptive detail should be allocated to each location. This will allow both settings to be developed fully and with appropriate balance.
- The most common feature of limited responses was a tendency to drift into narrative. Rather than describing the setting itself, these responses frequently recounted a sequence of events. The place then acted merely as a backdrop. Typical limited responses included comments such as *'My friends and I spend time together in the park. After school has finished we take the bus... sit on our favourite bench and munch our way through a plethora of snacks...'* or *'We went to the mall, then we went shopping, and then we ate food.'* While these responses addressed the topic, their focus was more on what happened than on creating atmosphere or enabling the reader to experience the setting through descriptive detail. Centres should encourage candidates to establish each setting quickly and then remain within the moment. Actions or figures can be used to reveal aspects of the place and its atmosphere. Descriptive responses should not develop into a sequence of events.
- Limited responses also tended to list features rather than select and develop significant details. While descriptions such as *'There were trees. There was a bench. I saw a dog.'* or *'The grass was green, the sun was shining in the blue sky, there were birds in the trees.'* provided some visual information, there was relatively little sense of mood or atmosphere. Sensory detail, carefully chosen vocabulary and figurative language could have created a more vivid impression of the setting. Centres should encourage candidates to select a smaller number of significant details and develop these precisely. Candidates should consider how sensory description, vocabulary and imagery can convey what the setting looks like. They should also consider the impression or atmosphere these choices create.
- Some limited responses required greater originality in their selection of imagery. More distinctive choices would have enabled candidates to create memorable descriptions. Beaches at sunset, glittering seas, rhythmic waves and bustling cafés appeared frequently. These images were often appropriate, although they were not always developed beyond straightforward description. Some limited responses also included long lists of adjectives without creating a coherent or memorable impression of place. Centres should encourage candidates to observe specific details closely. Fresh comparisons and precise descriptions should arise naturally from the particular setting chosen.
- A small number of limited responses moved away from the focus of the question. Some described holiday destinations, travel arrangements or extended interactions with friends rather than the locations themselves. Other responses concentrated almost entirely on the writer's companions. This left the setting largely undescribed. Centres should encourage candidates to remember that people can contribute to atmosphere. The primary focus of descriptive writing remains the place itself and the impressions it creates. Candidates should refer back to the wording of the task during planning and writing. Details about people, actions or experiences should be included only where they contribute directly to the description and atmosphere of the chosen locations.
- Limited responses often demonstrated enthusiasm for ambitious vocabulary. This was not always matched by secure control of grammar or sentence construction. Common features included comma

splicing, inconsistent tense and inaccurate subject–verb agreement. Overlong multi-clause sentences also reduced clarity. Some limited responses relied heavily on lists of adjectives or figurative expressions rather than developing coherent description. Others attempted sophisticated punctuation such as colons, semi-colons and dashes without using them accurately. Vocabulary was occasionally selected because it appeared impressive rather than because it suited the context. This reduced the effectiveness of the overall description. Centres should encourage candidates to prioritise accuracy, clarity and precision. Candidates should select vocabulary and sentence structures they can control securely. More ambitious language or punctuation should only be used where it contributes naturally and effectively to the description.

Question 3

Comprehensive responses

- While **Question 3** was less frequently chosen than some of the other **Section B** options, it still produced many highly accomplished responses. Comprehensive responses demonstrated a secure understanding of the descriptive demands of the task. They focused on creating a vivid sense of place through carefully selected sensory detail, controlled structure and sustained atmosphere. These responses generally selected locations the writer knew well or could imagine convincingly. This enabled candidates to present authentic and engaging descriptions.
- Comprehensive responses often established the setting immediately. They then gradually drew the reader into increasingly detailed observations. These responses demonstrated effective structural control. They moved between panoramic description and carefully observed details. Some traced the changing atmosphere of the location as the day progressed. Other descriptions slowed naturally towards the conclusion as activity diminished, which created a satisfying sense of closure.
- Comprehensive responses created atmosphere through rich sensory imagery and did not rely solely on visual description. These responses frequently incorporated sound, smell, touch and movement to immerse the reader in the setting. One particularly effective response described a bustling railway station and market: *'The moment you step off the train, it is like being transformed into another world! Tastebuds spring to life at the same time as auntie's bell rings, letting everyone know that the beef buns are ready... Like awakening clouds, groups of people drift towards the sound of the bell in an orderly way...'* Detailed observations also frequently transformed ordinary scenes into memorable descriptions. One response effectively portrayed a market stall with its *'...pyramids of ripe fruit gleamed under the sun's rays, oranges captured like blazing life; bananas covered in soft yellow arcs; pomegranates split open to reveal jewelled interiors...'* Another created atmosphere through carefully selected figurative language: *'The sun spilled like golden honey over the themed buildings.'* Another observed: *'Seeing the joy of people made happiness bloom like flowers in my chest.'*
- Comprehensive responses frequently selected ambitious vocabulary with precision. Words such as *illuminated, daunting, euphoria, tranquil, prospects, zenith, ubiquitous* and *harmonious* enriched the descriptions. A consistent tone was maintained.
- Sentence structures were carefully varied to control pace in comprehensive responses. Punctuation generally enhanced the reader's experience rather than interrupting it.
- Direct speech was sometimes included in comprehensive responses. It was used sparingly and accurately. This ensured that the emphasis remained firmly on creating atmosphere.
- Many comprehensive responses used personification, metaphor and simile naturally and purposefully. Descriptions such as *'Standing beneath the towering spires, I felt history whispering through every stone.'* and *'From the observation deck, the city stretched out in a patchwork of red roofs and restless traffic, the river glinting like a silver thread.'* enabled readers to visualise the scene clearly while also conveying the writer's personal response to the location.
- Comprehensive responses selected specific details rather than attempting to describe everything the writer could see. Candidates often zoomed in on individual people, objects or moments. They then broadened the focus again. This produced writing that felt carefully crafted. Responses described a range of locations, including busy bazaars, famous landmarks, places of worship and city centres. They sustained atmosphere throughout and remained firmly descriptive rather than narrative.

Limited Responses

- Limited responses tended to recount a visit to a location rather than describe the place itself. Extended explanations sometimes focused on how the writer arrived, who accompanied them or what happened during the visit. This reduced opportunities to create atmosphere through observation and sensory detail. Centres should encourage candidates to focus on observing and describing the location. They should avoid recounting the events which led to or occurred during the visit.
- Some limited responses selected locations that were too broad or insufficiently familiar. This resulted in descriptions that were vague or generic. Examples included *'It was a very nice place.'*, *'There were lots*

of buildings and people. and *'The famous tower was tall and big.'* Greater attention to carefully selected detail and sensory description would have conveyed the unique character of the location more effectively. It would also have created a stronger sense of the experience of being there. Centres should encourage candidates to select a manageable and sufficiently familiar location. They should identify precise visual and sensory details that distinguish it from other places.

- Limited responses also tended to present a series of disconnected observations rather than develop a coherent atmosphere. Long lists of sights, sounds and smells were sometimes included without a clear structural focus. This made the writing resemble a catalogue of details rather than a carefully organised description. Centres should encourage candidates to organise selected details around a clear atmosphere or impression. They should also consider the focus of each paragraph carefully. This can help to create purposeful movement through the scene.
- Limited responses sometimes moved away from the requirements of the task by introducing extended narrative episodes or personal anecdotes. While these showed enthusiasm, they also reduced opportunities to demonstrate descriptive writing. Some responses devoted considerable attention to quieter moments before or after the busy period identified in the question. This limited the sense of activity and atmosphere that the task invited candidates to explore. Centres should encourage candidates to remain closely focused on the particular moment and circumstances specified in the task. While people and actions within the scene can be used to enhance the description, they should not be allowed to develop into an extended narrative.
- Limited responses frequently demonstrated less secure sentence control. Centres should encourage candidates to prioritise clarity and control. A deliberate range of sentence structures can be used to contribute effectively to the description.
- Spelling was generally accurate in limited responses. Weaknesses in punctuation and grammatical consistency sometimes interrupted otherwise effective description. Common errors included tense shifts, repetitive sentence openings and comma splicing. Long strings of minor sentences or non-finite clauses also produced lists of observations rather than coherent description. Centres should encourage candidates to proofread specifically for consistency of tense, sentence boundaries and punctuation. Candidates should also vary sentence openings and structures purposefully. Repeated or fragmented constructions should be avoided.
- Some limited responses relied on familiar idioms or ambitious vocabulary that did not sit comfortably within the overall tone of the writing. Centres should encourage candidates to prioritise precise, natural and contextually appropriate vocabulary. Carefully chosen familiar words are often more effective than forced expressions or unnecessarily ambitious alternatives.

Question 4

Comprehensive Responses

- While **Question 4** was not as popular as **Question 5**, it still produced a wide range of imaginative responses. Comprehensive responses demonstrated a clear understanding of this narrative task. They placed the lost key at the centre of the story and ensured that it remained integral to the development of the plot and the eventual happy ending. The key was often treated as more than a simple object; it frequently became a catalyst for discovery, reconciliation or personal growth.
- Comprehensive responses were carefully planned and followed a coherent narrative structure. They established an engaging opening before gradually building tension through believable events. This led to a satisfying climax and a well-considered resolution. While most narratives were chronological, some responses also employed flashbacks or non-linear structures effectively. These techniques were used to reveal character motivation or provide background information.
- In comprehensive responses, atmosphere was frequently established from the opening paragraphs. Examples such as *'Rain started without any warning, thin at first as it whispered along the pavement until it changed into a steady drumbeat.'* immediately created mood and anticipation. They also drew the reader into the narrative. Comprehensive responses often sustained this level of control throughout. Action was balanced with carefully selected descriptive detail.
- Comprehensive responses frequently centred on relatively ordinary situations. These became emotionally engaging through believable characterisation. One memorable response described a family moving into a new house: *'Every room had its own secret. They reached the attic. There was a key resting on the table... moonlight spilled through the cracked window.'* In this narrative, the key eventually unlocked a box containing messages and life lessons left by a previous owner. This allowed the protagonist to reflect upon family, happiness and the importance of memories. Other comprehensive responses used the key to unlock family heirlooms, forgotten photographs or letters. These created narratives that focused effectively on relationships.
- Comprehensive responses also often used symbolism. The key frequently represented memory, trust, identity or new beginnings rather than functioning solely as a plot device. Examples such as *'The cold*

metal key pressed into my palm felt heavier than any secret I had ever kept. and *'With a trembling hand, I turned the key, unlocking not just the door, but a chapter of my life.'* used physical objects effectively to convey emotional significance. This skilfully engaged the reader.

- Comprehensive responses demonstrated secure technical control throughout the narrative. Vocabulary was frequently ambitious and well judged. It created convincing characterisation and atmosphere without distracting from the story.
- Comprehensive responses often varied sentence lengths to control narrative pace. Key moments were slowed through descriptive detail. Momentum increased during moments of tension.
- Dialogue was generally punctuated accurately in comprehensive responses. It was used purposefully to reveal character or advance the narrative.
- Comprehensive responses also showed effective control of pacing. Narrative tension developed gradually through carefully selected events. Responses avoided relying on a succession of dramatic occurrences.
- Comprehensive responses often concluded by returning to an earlier image or idea. This created a satisfying sense of completeness and reinforced the central message of the narrative.

Limited Responses

- Limited responses generally addressed the task appropriately. Storylines often drew on familiar or predictable scenarios. Lost keys frequently led to hidden treasure, mysterious portals, forgotten boxes or wealthy benefactors. Events sometimes developed through a series of convenient coincidences rather than believable cause and consequence. These stories fulfilled the basic requirements of the task. Greater attention to characterisation and emotional development would have enabled candidates to create more convincing and engaging narratives.
- In many limited responses, the lost key appeared only briefly or was introduced late in the narrative, often following a lengthy introduction. Some stories developed substantial plots before mentioning the key almost as an afterthought, which limited its significance within the overall narrative. In other responses, the key served only as a mechanical device to unlock a final surprise and did not shape the story throughout. Centres should encourage candidates to establish any given object as a significant element early in the narrative. They should consider how its loss, absence or recovery might influence the characters and events. The object should contribute purposefully to the development of the story.
- Limited responses would have benefited from more careful planning. Some narratives became increasingly complicated as new characters, locations or subplots were introduced unnecessarily. Long descriptions of everyday routines also delayed the development of the central conflict. The same was true of extended travel sequences or unrelated events. Narratives sometimes began with detailed accounts of waking up, getting dressed or travelling to the location. These frequently lost momentum before the narrative had properly begun. Centres should encourage candidates to plan a manageable narrative centred on a clear conflict or problem. They should begin at a significant moment. Characters, events and details should be selected because they contribute purposefully to the development of the narrative.
- Limited responses also found endings difficult to manage. Some conclusions were abrupt and resolved the central problem within a few lines. This provided insufficient opportunity for reflection or emotional consequence. Other endings appeared rushed, suggesting that time had not been managed effectively. A small number ended simply with statements such as *'And then I woke up.'* Others concluded immediately after the key had been found. These responses did not consider how the experience had affected the characters. Centres should encourage candidates to plan their endings alongside the rest of the narrative. Sufficient time should be allowed to resolve the central conflict convincingly. Candidates should also consider the consequences of events for their characters rather than relying on an abrupt conclusion.
- Some limited responses attempted sophisticated structural techniques, including flashbacks and shifts in time, without fully controlling them. Candidates should be encouraged to use these transitions with clear purpose and organisation, so the chronology of their narrative remains coherent and the narrative flows naturally.
- Extended dialogue also occasionally resembled a dramatic script rather than supporting the development of the narrative in limited responses. Centres should encourage candidates to integrate dialogue with description, action and narrative detail so it contributes to character development or advances the story.
- Limited responses also found it more difficult to sustain technical accuracy as narratives became increasingly ambitious. Frequent issues included inconsistent tense, insecure dialogue punctuation and comma splicing. Abrupt sentence boundaries were also evident. Some limited responses relied on multiple exclamation marks or ellipses to create drama. Others attempted ambitious vocabulary that was not always appropriate to the context. Longer narratives occasionally lost grammatical control towards the conclusion. Centres should encourage candidates to prioritise secure and controlled

expression over unnecessary complexity. Vocabulary, punctuation and sentence structures should be used purposefully. Candidates should also reserve sufficient time to check tense consistency, sentence boundaries, dialogue punctuation and grammatical accuracy.

Question 5

Comprehensive Responses

- **Question 5** was the most popular choice in **Section B**. It produced a wide range of engaging and imaginative narratives. Comprehensive responses demonstrated a secure understanding of the task. They built the narrative around the given sentence rather than inserting it ineffectively into an existing storyline. Comprehensive responses treated the sentence as a pivotal moment within the narrative. It shaped the character's motivations, the development of the plot and the eventual resolution.
- Comprehensive responses were carefully planned and well paced. They frequently established the central conflict early and developed tension gradually. Endings were clearly signalled and controlled. Many comprehensive responses centred on recognisable situations. These included job interviews, sporting competitions, weddings, important examinations or reunions with family members. Convincing characterisation and thoughtful exploration of the protagonist's emotions made these responses engaging and effective.
- Comprehensive responses often established atmosphere effectively from the opening paragraphs. One particularly effective opening observed, '*The sun beamed directly on the field, leaving everyone lounging and dancing outdoors. Sunkissed tunes hummed and filled the area. It was like a slice of paradise. Despite this seemingly joyful setting, tension crackled beneath the light and laughter.*' using descriptive detail purposefully to foreshadow later events.
- Comprehensive responses integrated the given sentence naturally into the narrative and it did not interrupt the flow of the story. Instead, it frequently marked an emotional or structural turning point. In one example, the sentence emerged naturally from the context and reinforced the protagonist's determination: '*He wiped his palms on his trousers and looked up at the crowd. It was the most important day of his life, and he was determined to do well.*'
- Many comprehensive responses demonstrated confident control of narrative voice and pacing. Dialogue was generally concise and purposeful. It revealed character or advanced the plot rather than dominating the story.
- Structural devices such as flashbacks, circular endings and carefully managed shifts in pace were used effectively in comprehensive responses. These contributed purposefully to the development and structure of the narrative.
- Some comprehensive responses created memorable moments through thoughtful imagery such as, '*Time, which was usually a slow crawl, had become a thief stealing his day.*'
- Comprehensive responses selected vocabulary with confidence and precision. Ambitious lexical choices included *quixotic*, *iridescent*, *gravitas*, *incandescent*, *paramount*, *judiciously* and *ephemeral*. These choices were effective when they enhanced meaning naturally.
- Sentence structures were also varied to reflect changes in pace and emotion. Shorter sentences increased dramatic impact. Longer, carefully controlled sentences supported moments of reflection. Spelling, punctuation and grammar were generally secure. This allowed readers to focus on the development of character and narrative.

Limited Responses

- In limited responses, the given sentence was not always integrated naturally into the storyline. Centres should encourage candidates to plan the narrative around the given sentence. They should consider its significance and where it will appear. They should also consider how the events before and after it will make the sentence an integral part of the story.
- Limited responses were often written almost entirely in the first person before inserting the given sentence unchanged in the third person. For example: '*I woke up feeling nervous about my exam... I packed my bag and walked downstairs... It was the most important day of his life and he was determined to do well.*' This created an abrupt and distracting shift in perspective. Such changes interrupted the narrative voice and reduced the overall coherence of the response. Centres should encourage candidates to identify the narrative perspective established by the given sentence before beginning to write. This perspective should then be sustained consistently throughout the response.
- Some limited responses appeared to adapt pre-prepared narratives to fit the task. This approach sometimes resulted in obvious insertions where the given sentence felt disconnected from the surrounding events. Similar plots appeared repeatedly including volcano science projects, sporting finals and elaborate adventure stories. This suggested that some responses relied on memorised material rather than responding directly and effectively to the question. Centres should encourage candidates to develop narratives in direct response to the specific wording and possibilities of the task.

Planning time should be used to generate an appropriate storyline as attempting to adapt memorised or pre-prepared material can lead to less effective responses.

- As with **Question 4**, limited responses to **Question 5** were often not effectively planned. Some narratives devoted considerable space to backstory, morning routines or lengthy introductions before reaching the central event. Others introduced numerous characters, subplots or dramatic incidents. These distracted from the main narrative and limited opportunities for meaningful character development. Some limited responses became sequences of events rather than coherent narratives. For example: *'I had a shower then I had breakfast. Then I started studying for my exam...'* Such responses did not establish why the day was significant or how events affected the protagonist emotionally. Centres should encourage candidates to begin close to a significant moment. They should construct a manageable plot around a small number of purposeful events. Sufficient space should be given to developing the protagonist's thoughts, feelings and responses as the narrative progresses.
- As with **Question 4**, limited responses to **Question 5** frequently struggled to sustain convincing endings. Some concluded abruptly once the main event had occurred. Others added unnecessary final paragraphs, moral statements or twists. These sometimes weakened conclusions that had already reached a satisfying resolution. A number of limited responses also relied on increasingly improbable coincidences or melodramatic events to resolve the story. This prevented the ending from emerging naturally from the characters' decisions and experiences. Centres should encourage candidates to plan a plausible resolution that grows naturally from the preceding events and characters' choices. Candidates should recognise when the central conflict has been satisfactorily resolved. Unnecessary twists, explanations or additional conclusions should be avoided.
- Some limited responses attempted ambitious structural techniques, including flashbacks, flashforwards and cliffhanger endings. These were not always supported by sufficient control of chronology or perspective. When such devices lacked a clear purpose, the narrative became less coherent and engaging. Dialogue also occasionally occupied large sections of the response without contributing significantly to characterisation or the progression of the plot. Centres should encourage candidates to use structural devices and dialogue selectively. Each should have a clear purpose in developing character, shaping the reader's experience or advancing the narrative. A coherent chronology and consistent perspective should also be maintained.
- Limited responses often demonstrated weaker technical control as the narrative progressed. Many candidates attempted ambitious vocabulary. Some choices were inappropriate or selected without sufficient regard for context. Common weaknesses included tense switching, inaccurate sentence separation and insecure punctuation of direct speech. Inconsistent pronoun control was also evident. Some responses used overlong multi-clause sentences joined only by commas or simple conjunctions. Several limited responses also overused text-style punctuation. This included repeated exclamation marks, question marks and ellipses. Such features reduced the effectiveness of otherwise engaging narratives. Centres should continue to encourage candidates to prioritise clarity and precision over unnecessary complexity. Candidates should also reserve sufficient time for careful proofreading.