Cambridge IGCSE

Cambridge International Examinations
Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/32**

Paper 3 Directed Writing and Composition **February/March 2016**

READING BOOKLET INSERT

2 hours

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Reading Booklet Insert contains the reading passage for use with **Section 1**, **Question 1** on the Question Paper.

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Read the passage carefully, and then answer **Section 1**, **Question 1** on the Question Paper.

The passage below is a speech on the topic of homework, made by a Headteacher to parents of students beginning their IGCSE courses.

Good evening, everyone. As parents of students about to begin their IGCSE studies, I'm sure you are anxious that your child should do well. The time will pass very quickly and I cannot emphasise enough that we all – teachers, parents and students – have a part to play in ensuring that our young people achieve their dreams. With this partnership in mind, I'm proposing some radical changes in the balance between school work and homework during the next two years of your child's education.

Homework is a very contentious subject in this school as in many others. Pupils progress at different rates and have varying abilities and aptitudes in the range of subjects they study. Add to that the very wide differences in their home circumstances and you have the potential for curriculum chaos: some pupils go home to a peaceful, quiet and supportive environment, some to responsibilities for siblings or after-school jobs to help support their families. How can teachers assess the work done – or not done, very often! – at home when there is such disparity between students' circumstances? How can they plan the progress of the whole class when not all students have completed the homework set? Some pupils become demoralised and disaffected because they can't keep up with the demands homework makes on their time, or they need their teachers' support to complete the work. Others become automatons who spend their evenings and weekends completing homework but have no time for outside interests or family. It's time for us all to be more realistic in our expectations and treat homework differently.

My proposal puts the student at the centre of his or her own homework planning. They will choose, on a daily basis, whether to commit to completing homework, in which subjects and how much time it should take. They will also set their own deadlines. Research shows that students who take responsibility for their own learning have more investment in it and learn important skills such as goal-setting and time-management. These are skills every student needs, whatever their ability. Initially, teachers will guide pupils to make sensible choices, but it will be unacceptable for students simply to opt out of homework altogether. Once they've chosen a homework task, students will be held accountable and there will be strict penalties for those who fail to complete the tasks they themselves have chosen by the deadlines they themselves have set. That's real life, after all, isn't it? The balance of subjects in which homework is undertaken will be the student's responsibility too, although teachers and parents will need to keep a close eye on children's choices to ensure that there's adequate coverage of those subjects they find more difficult.

There are clear academic benefits to this approach. However, as you would expect, we'll be monitoring how well the students perform in their IGCSE studies. Teachers will also have to undergo retraining to challenge their attitudes to homework, what it's for and how to use it. An essential element of the proposal is that different levels of homework will be set by each teacher. Some tasks will be simple and less time-consuming and some more complex. Pupils can choose, for example, simply to complete a piece of classwork at home or a much more complex task to develop the skills taught in the classroom – a piece of extended descriptive writing, perhaps, after working on an opening paragraph in class. Although this approach will increase the teacher's workload at the beginning, I'm confident that there will be real benefits from a planned approach to homework-setting. Teachers will also need to prepare homework tasks which will appeal to students.

Parents will need to play their part by ensuring that pupils have peace and quiet at home and sufficient time, free from family responsibilities, to complete their homework. There are advantages for families, however. In one school with an enviable academic record where these changes were adopted, parents told me that high-achieving students had more leisure time and could pursue other interests outside school and spend time with their families. There is also evidence that poorly motivated students who might otherwise have completed very little homework, and only then after taxing their parents' patience, begin to undertake more as the course progresses. Your children will be the first pioneers of a new approach which could transform your family life as well as their own futures.

I would welcome your observations on this proposal. Please write to me with your views on what I've outlined this evening, and thank you for your attention.

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