Cambridge International Examinations
Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/33**

Paper 3 Directed Writing and Composition **May/June 2016**

2 hours

READING BOOKLET INSERT

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

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

You may annotate this Reading Booklet Insert and use the blank spaces for planning.
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Read the passage carefully, and then answer **Section 1**, **Question 1** on the Question Paper.

In the following newspaper report, the writer explains how students of different ages in a local high school are taught in classes together.

Big Changes in Local High School

Just three years ago, a local secondary school, Green College, was under threat of closure. Student numbers had fallen drastically and the school was judged to be 'no longer viable'. As a last ditch attempt to keep it open, the Principal adopted some radical changes to the structure of classes.

Mrs Perez, the Principal, explains how she transformed the school's fortunes. 'I'd heard about vertical grouping, where different age groups are taught in classes together,' she says. 'It's sometimes called family grouping and there are plenty of good models in primary school systems all over the world.' It's not uncommon, either, for very small schools in remote areas to have different age groups taught in the same class. For these villages that may be the only education on offer, but Mrs Perez and others promote the idea more positively. They claim many educational and social benefits, including better behaviour and higher academic achievement.

To make the new system work, Mrs Perez chose only her best, most flexible staff to teach reorganised classes in which children from 11 to 16 were taught together. She had to reassure parents that teachers would be retrained to ensure that they adapted their lessons for different ages. This created some resentment amongst highly experienced staff who had to 'unlearn' many of their methods and ideas about teaching. 'There were teething problems,' she admits. Parents were afraid that their children would not be able to follow demanding courses and would not achieve the grades needed for university places. Older students felt that younger children would demand more of the teacher's attention and Mrs Perez had to answer some difficult questions in the meetings she held to explain the idea. Although she remains enthusiastic about family grouping, the age range in each class has narrowed a little, now that the threat of closure has passed, so perhaps there are limits to its benefits.

A proud Mrs Perez introduces Emilia, a student at Green College who has recently secured a place at her chosen university to study engineering. Her parents took the risk of moving her to the college, concerned that at her previous school she had felt bullied and not adequately challenged academically. 'I was very small and shy for my age and the older kids intimidated me. My classmates were all the same age but that's all I had in common with many of them,' she says. 'Here, we all know each other, whatever age we are, and we feel protective of the younger ones. They look up to us as role models – a nice feeling for us! – but they're not scared of us and we learn a lot about responsibility and tolerance.' She recalls one project which involved all the students in her class, from 11 year olds to 16 year olds. 'We planted a woodland garden in the school grounds over a number of weeks. I worked with a really smart 11-year-old boy, researching which trees would suit the soil type and the position, how tall they would grow and in which sequence to plant them to allow woodland flowers to develop beneath the canopy. My friend Ahmed opted to help the younger kids to plant flower seeds and learned a lot about children as well as plants. He's just applied to a teacher training college.'

Emilia is obviously an articulate and bright student who may well have succeeded at any school, but she says exams and academic standards are taken very seriously at Green. 'We don't take risks with children's futures,' Mrs Perez adds. 'Exam students are given extra tuition separately and throughout the school the teachers tailor each child's learning to suit their ability as well as their age.'

The college is now looking to admit a small number of carefully selected adult learners who can join classes for a year or so to inspire and encourage them to continue their education. In some countries the system of teaching children of different ages together is known as 'family grouping', but surely children learning alongside adults the same age as their parents or even grandparents is a step too far? Mrs Perez adamantly disagrees. 'Some adults who under-achieved in conventional schools have shown a keen interest in how we work here. Systems which break down barriers between children and adults are good for the whole of the community, not just schools. Our students are all learners, after all, whatever their age.'

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