Cambridge Assessment International Education

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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/21**

Paper 2 Directed Writing and Composition **May/June 2025**

INSERT **2 hours**

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INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading texts.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.

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Read **both** texts, and then answer **Question 1** on the question paper.

Text A

The following is a blog post from a headteacher about voluntary work for older students.

I'm in my sixties now, but when I was in my last two years of schooling, still in my teens, my school had a programme of voluntary work to be undertaken by older students. We were assigned placements where we attended an afternoon each week, making ourselves useful for a few hours in elderly people's homes or local charities such as foodbanks, activity centres for disabled people or programmes for disadvantaged children. It wasn't popular among students and there was much absenteeism, but the core values behind it were sound. I want to establish a similar scheme, though organised and run with more rigour and commitment, in my own school.

Young people aren't all entitled and technology-obsessed, but there's a lot missing in their lives these days. Their education is also viewed by some as narrow and focused on grades and competition. There's no room to teach compassion, an awareness of less fortunate people and an ethos of service rather than self-fulfilment. I'm sure we can come up with a range of potential placements here in our town where students can learn the value of other attributes and while it's not the main reason I want to introduce the scheme, these are skills which will help to prepare them for the future.

Of course, there will have to be careful vetting of charities or organisations to make sure they can provide valuable experiences for young volunteers, but it's also essential that our students learn to navigate their own way through without close supervision by teachers. Teachers have enough work and responsibilities, after all! And while we'll try to offer some choice in the settings where students can volunteer, they won't be able to avoid it. They can't choose not to do maths and as another, equally important part of the school curriculum, they won't be able to opt out of volunteering.

My intention is that students should dedicate themselves to helping other human beings, not undertake basic administration to save the organisation time or sit in an office on-screen all afternoon on fund-raising promotions. There will have to be some adjustments to the academic timetable of the school to accommodate this new initiative, but I'm sure students will relish the opportunity to get out from behind their desks. It's a chance to discover aspects of their community that many of them know nothing about and develop skills we can't teach them in the classroom.

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Text B

The following is a reply to the headteacher from a parent.

Volunteering is a good thing. That's obvious and many adults in our community volunteer in a whole range of settings here in our town, deriving much satisfaction from helping others and making a genuine difference in people's lives. It's different from working a regular job. It's not about making a living or building a successful career: it's about freely giving something which money can't buy: your time. Most of us don't volunteer in a formal way, however. We shop for elderly neighbours, visit relatives in hospital or clear the snow from the steps of our neighbours' houses. We see a need and we use our time to help.

Many young people learn from their families about serving others. I'm sceptical about whether volunteer schemes for school students really capture that spirit of freely giving your time to help others. Resentful students worrying about how they're going to complete academic studies before their exams while they 'volunteer', or just missing out on sport, probably don't make good charity workers. When adults volunteer, they match their skills and available time with the need they see. If we're not comfortable working with young children, we help in other ways. If we find some settings just too distressing, we can use our talents on vital campaigning and fund-raising.

Of course it's good for young people to be nudged out of their comfort zones and learn new skills. Many charities pay workers these days because working with people in difficult circumstances involves training, aptitude and an understanding of good practice, as well as a caring nature. I'm not sure that adding a self-conscious, inexperienced teenager to their responsibilities will help them or the vulnerable people they look after.

Maybe the school should just give them an afternoon off; they can help their own hard-pressed families with household chores, looking after siblings or cooking a meal. After all, charity starts at home, doesn't it?

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