Cambridge IGCSE

Cambridge International Examinations
Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/33**

Paper 3 Directed Writing and Composition **October/November 2015**

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.

You may annotate this Insert and use the blank spaces for planning.
This Reading Booklet Insert is **not** assessed by the Examiner.

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

The magazine article below is about virtual schooling and is by Petur Sorensen.

A twenty-first century education?

Like any young person opening that fateful envelope on results day, Katherine Weitz looks anxious. The offer of a university place hangs in the balance, after all, as years of hard work and commitment come down to this. Her parents are concerned too. They're wondering whether they made the right decision some years ago when Katherine left her local school and enrolled in Futures Academy, a virtual school providing an education based entirely on learning online.

Katherine's mother, Aditi, says there's no such person as a 'typical' virtual school student but that an increasing number of children find that ordinary schools just don't work for them. When chronic illness struck her daughter at the age of 15, Aditi knew that Katherine's school wouldn't be able to cope with a poor attender who was also bright and ambitious. 'Then I remembered that my own mother studied accountancy by correspondence course many years ago while bringing up small children. Surely with all the resources of twenty-first century technology, new life could be breathed into an old idea?'

Aditi discovered that all over the world, virtual schools are indeed reinventing ways to bring education to students in different, innovative and exciting ways. Rather than narrowing Katherine's experience, as people often imagine happens when students don't attend a traditional school, Aditi is convinced that her daughter's social interaction is broader, even though it's not face-to-face: 'Katherine's online classmates talk regularly in the school's chatrooms and she's formed strong friendships with disabled students, young people with caring responsibilities at home, teenage mothers or students who live in far-flung places many kilometres from a 'real' school. She's met a wider range of people and most young people socialise more online than face-to-face in any case these days, don't they?' Aditi says.

There is clearly a demand for this kind of education. The number of students learning exclusively online has increased rapidly since 2000 and virtual schools are beginning to appear in many different countries. Although often parents have to pay quite high fees to educate their children this way, in some places public funds are used because virtual schools are seen as a viable alternative to spending on school buildings. Whether such schools will ever educate the poor, those who would benefit most from a decent education, remains to be seen.

Even before the illness, Katherine's father, Carl, had been unimpressed by his daughter's more conventional education. Her progress, he felt, was only as fast as the slowest student in a class of over 30, and Katherine was losing interest in the subjects she used to love. 'It's not cool to be clever in many ordinary schools,' he said, 'and such attitudes, especially when expressed violently by school bullies in the playground, can be a powerful influence in young people's lives.'

For the last two years, Katherine has made rapid progress. It hasn't always been easy though. She says there were times when her motivation flagged and she missed the 'buzz' of the classroom, even though she had well-qualified tutors with time to devote to each individual student. Although she never considered giving up, many virtual school students do. The quality of the teaching on offer can vary considerably and sometimes tutors are responsible for too many students and don't mind when some of them don't bother to do much work. On the other hand, Katherine says she'll never forget the encouragement and support of her online tutors and considers them 'special teachers' who focus on exactly what each student needs in order to do well.

When she opens her envelope, Katherine's broad smile is soon mirrored by those on the faces of her relieved mum and dad. University beckons – but Katherine has yet to decide whether that'll be a 'real' or a virtual one!

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