

**GCSE (9-1)**

**English Language**

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J351**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2017**

## About this Examiner Report to Centres

This report on the 2017 Summer assessments aims to highlight:

- areas where students were more successful
- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection
- points of advice for future examinations.

It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

The report also includes:

- **Guidance on how to put your results in context** – using the outcomes of Cambridge Assessment’s research that indicates that volatility in schools’ GCSE exam results is normal, quantifiable and predictable
- Links to important documents such as **grade boundaries**
- A reminder of our **post-results services** including Enquiries About Results
- **Further support that you can expect from OCR**, such as our Active Results service and CPD programme
- A link to our handy Teacher Guide on **Supporting the move to linear assessment** to support you with the ongoing transition.

## Putting your results in context

If you’ve had results this year that you weren’t expecting then the latest research from Cambridge Assessment may help to explain why. You may be surprised to learn that volatility in schools’ GCSE exam results is normal, quantifiable and predictable.

Researchers from Cambridge Assessment argue in a report, *Volatility happens: Understanding variation in schools’ GCSE results* (April 2017), that fluctuations are to be expected and can be largely explained by a change in the students or even just simple chance. They say that although it might be seen as obvious, in some years pupils will perform better than expected, while in other years pupils will perform worse.

The study will enable you to manage expectations and have conversations with your heads and governors so that they can interpret changes in expected results appropriately. The research builds on an earlier study that ruled out exam grade boundaries and marking as major components of volatility. The current research adds an understanding of just how much volatility can be accounted for by the routine changes in students between years and normal variations in individual students’ performance in a particular exam.

Be prepared for conversations about what’s normal in terms of outcomes by reading our [press release](#), researcher [blog](#) and by downloading this handy GCSE English and Maths fluctuation [infographic](#).

Ofqual has also published a [report](#) looking at patterns of variability in outcomes of schools and colleges for particular GCSE subjects as one way of understanding the extent of volatility in the system.

## Grade boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other assessments, can be found on [Interchange](#). For more information on the publication of grade boundaries please see the [OCR website](#).

## Enquiry About Results

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our Enquiry About Results services. For full information about the options available visit the [OCR website](#).

## Supporting the move to linear assessment

This was the first year that students were assessed in a linear structure. To help you navigate the changes and to support you with areas of difficulty, download our helpful Teacher guide: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/341817-moving-from-modular-to-linear-qualifications-teachers-guide.pdf>.

## Further support from OCR

### activeresults

Active Results offers a unique perspective on results data and greater opportunities to understand students' performance.

It allows you to:

- Review reports on the **performance of individual candidates**, cohorts of students and whole centres
- **Analyse results** at question and/or topic level
- **Compare your centre** with OCR national averages or similar OCR centres.
- Identify areas of the curriculum where students excel or struggle and help **pinpoint strengths and weaknesses** of students and teaching departments.

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## General Certificate of Secondary Education

### English Language (J351)

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## J351/01 Communicating information and ideas

### General Comments:

Faced with significant changes to GCSE, centres are to be congratulated on their careful preparation of candidates for this examination. Examiners noted that almost all candidates made some attempt to write a relevant response to every question on the paper. Although most candidates had clearly been appraised of the specific requirements of each task, some candidates misunderstood what they were required to do. This was often simply the result of not reading the question carefully enough.

The texts used on this paper proved effective and elicited positive responses from candidates. Although Hazlitt's piece was written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost all candidates were able to respond with at least some understanding to what he was discussing. Clarkson was a more familiar figure to many candidates and many candidates appreciated the way he couched his concerns about the countryside in an amusing and engaging tone.

The number of tasks that candidates need to complete in this two-hour examination is demanding. Most candidates, however, used their time effectively so that they could spend more time on the later questions which are worth more marks. The excessive length of their response to the writing task does suggest, however, that some candidates may have rushed through the reading section. Centres would be well advised to support their candidates in more effective use of time so that candidates put most work into the most valuable tasks.

It was good to see that almost all candidates followed the order of the questions on the paper. The questions in the reading section are designed to build on one another and provide a solid foundation for the critical evaluation and comparison of the texts in Question 4. The reading tasks also lead naturally into the themes of the writing tasks; the subject matter of the reading extracts and the style in which they were written equip the candidate to write a better response than if they were to tackle the writing task first.

Too many candidates wrote too much in response to tasks. Unless a candidate has particularly large handwriting, responses to Question 2 which go on to additional pages are likely to be spending too much time on a task that is only worth six marks. In a similar way, responses to the writing section that go onto additional pages often indicate a response that lacks a clear, well-organised structure and may be self-penalising.

It was good to see that most candidates took time to plan their responses to the writing section. As mentioned above, this should lead to well-organised responses that follow a logical order and are introduced and concluded successfully. Paying similar attention to planning would also help candidates achieve more success on Question 4; too many answers to this question lacked focus and repeated similar points at excessive length without getting to grips with the question.

Illegible handwriting was only occasionally a problem. Candidates would be well advised, however, to assist the examiner who is assessing their work by signposting their answers clearly. They should indicate clearly which of the writing tasks they have undertaken by writing the number of the question in the margin. If candidates need to use additional pages, they should use the ones provided at the back of the answer booklet rather than using an additional booklet. It is unwise to write parts of their response sideways in the margin as this is not always picked up clearly when the examination papers are scanned.

## Section A: Reading

### Question 1

The first question is broken down into several steps. This task tests candidates' ability to select relevant details from the text and interpret them. Question 1a simply requires candidates to copy out two relevant quotations but marks can only be awarded if a candidate selects the most relevant part of a sentence. Many candidates correctly copied out the phrase 'nature is company enough for me' and were awarded a mark but some copied out the whole sentence in which this phrase is only a small element and were not awarded a mark because the majority of their response was not relevant.

Questions 1b and 1c both required the candidates to interpret the text. Such tasks are introduced by 'why' or 'explain' to indicate that an explanation is required. It was pleasing to see that most candidates responded to this successfully but some still tried to answer by copying out a quotation without an explanation. Even a simple change from the first person 'I' to the third person 'he' would have been enough to gain a mark on these questions.

### Question 2

This question builds on the skills tested in the first task by asking candidates not only to select information from the two texts but also to synthesise it by finding connections between the texts. On this particular paper, candidates were asked to find 'similarities' between the two texts but many chose to write about differences instead. This task is designed to lay a foundation for Question 4 but usually has a different emphasis; in this case there is an opportunity to explore the differences between the texts in Question 4 so Question 2 focuses on the 'similarities'.

Candidates of all abilities made some kind of successful response to this task. Most discussed the writers' appreciation of the beauty of the countryside and the sense of freedom it gave them. Some went on to explain how they were both escaping from something; Hazlitt from the 'encumbrances' of city life and Clarkson from the demands of family life. There was some misreading, however, of Clarkson 'gladly' enjoying a walk by those who missed the crucial condition that he would do so only 'when the car breaks down'. Candidates must ensure they read the whole text carefully to avoid similar misunderstandings in future.

The task instructs candidates to 'draw on evidence from the text' to support the similarities they have identified. Some quotations are self-explanatory but others do require some kind of comment from the candidate. For example, Clarkson's explicit reference to 'England's achingly beautiful green heart' needs no further comment but Hazlitt's description of the 'blue sky' and the 'green turf' would need its relevance to the connection explained briefly. The comments should focus on what the writer is saying, however, and should not include language analysis for which, in this task, there is no reward.

Most candidates were able to identify one connection and provide some relevant support from each text. It is important, however, that the connection is actually a connection and that the quotations from the two texts do link to each other. Better candidates identified at least two connections and quoted relevant support with some comment where necessary. The best candidates identified three or more connections, usually of a more abstract nature such as the desire to escape, and used embedded quotations and detailed reference in support.

### Question 3

The analysis of language is familiar to most centres and candidates generally performed well on this task. The requirement to focus on structure as well as language was less well addressed, however, and centres should provide clearer guidance to their candidates about how to respond to this challenge. To their credit, most candidates attempted to engage with the structure of the

text but many simply made general reference to short and long sentences and attributed a wider range of powerful but implausible effects to this grammatical feature.

The most significant structural feature of the text was the contrast between Clarkson's description of the 'free-for-all' he enjoyed in his childhood in paragraph 3 and the 'dictatorship' he experienced in paragraph 4. This is exemplified by the contrast in paragraph three between the 'simple' set of rules of his childhood and the 'long' instruction manual the Countryside Code now resembles. Candidates who were able to discuss this simple contrast often achieved the highest marks by explaining how the contrast was constructed by, for example, the use of the connective 'however' in paragraph 3.

Further work on the use of terminology such as 'connective' should be undertaken by centres as a surprising number of candidates made little or no use of subject terminology despite the explicit instruction to do so in the task. Most of those who did so used a limited range of terminology such as noun, verb and alliteration and many were unsure about the difference between a metaphor and a simile. The very best candidates were able to use a range of terminology to support their discussion of how the text worked to convey Clarkson's feelings and to influence the reader. It is not necessary or advisable, however, to import the kind of linguistic analysis more appropriate for A Level English Language into this discussion as it can lead to an obsession with naming of parts rather than understanding meaning.

A significant number of candidates ignored the instruction to refer to lines 11-21 only and used material from elsewhere in the text. It was frustrating to see good candidates writing an effective analysis of sections of the text for which they could not be rewarded. The line restriction is designed to help candidates use their time effectively by focusing their attention on a section of the text rich in linguistic and structural devices. In preparation for future sessions centres should remind candidates that this restriction is likely to feature in the paper.

#### Question 4

This question reflects the higher level of demand in the reading section of the paper, as reflected in the marks available, and it was pleasing to see that almost all candidates were able to make a meaningful response to the task. At its heart this task requires candidates to think independently, making judgements about both texts in the light of a debateable statement, evaluating the 'power' of the language the writers have used and comparing the way they have presented their ideas.

Part of the challenge of this task is that there are several elements to the question itself: there is the statement offered at the start; then there is the actual question about how far candidates agree with the statement; finally, there are three bullet points which are designed to support candidates in organising their answer. Centres should encourage candidates to use these three elements to help them construct a successful answer.

For this task it is imperative for candidates to plan their answer. Most candidates commented on the idea that 'the countryside should be a place where you can be free of rules and restrictions' but very few picked up on the idea that the writers 'powerfully argue' this case. 'Powerfully argue' is meant to point candidates to making some kind of judgement about how the writers have used language to argue their case and is essential for writing a level 5 'critically informed' response.

The bullet points should be used to structure a successful answer but must always do so in the light of the statement. In response to the first two bullet points many candidates discussed the general impression the writers gave of the countryside without any particular relevance to the statement. For example, many commented on how both writers appreciated the beauty of the countryside but did not make it clear that rules and restrictions are ruining the beauty of the countryside in different ways for each writer. Hazlitt, for example, finds that the requirement to comment robs the 'wild rose' of its sweetness.

Making some attempt to compare presentation is necessary to achieve above level 2 for AO3 but very few candidates remembered to do this. Some made general comments about the 'positive' tone of Hazlitt compared to the 'negative' tone of Clarkson; others described the difference more precisely by using terms like 'innocence' or 'romanticism' to describe Hazlitt and 'ironic' or 'cynical' to describe Clarkson's approach; a few commented on the ways each writer structured their text, in particular the way they both return happily to town at the end of the text. Using the whole text and, especially, commenting on how it ends was usually the mark of a higher attaining candidate.

## Section B: Writing

The writing tasks build on the themes addressed by the two extracts in the reading section. The first draws more explicitly on the writers' discussion of the pleasures of going outdoors whereas the second task moves a little further away by using candidates' experiences of school trips as its basis. For this reason, it is highly recommended that candidates should do the reading section before attempting the writing task. The first task tended to be slightly more popular but both tasks were attempted successfully by candidates across the ability range.

The tasks are also 'functional' in the sense that both specify a form, audience and purpose. The bullet points are designed to provide a scaffold to support candidates in organising their ideas and are prefaced by the modal verb 'should' because each one is an essential component of a successful response. The best candidates integrated the requirements of the three bullet points into successful responses while less successful responses approached them one by one.

Excessive length was a common feature of responses to both tasks. The additional pages at the back of the answer booklet and additional booklets were often used, the lengthier the piece the less successful it tended to be as it lost any sense of coherent development or overall shape. Candidates would be well advised to spend less time writing and more time planning and shaping their response.

### Question 5

Centres are to be congratulated for the way they have prepared candidates to use rhetorical devices when writing to argue. Almost all candidates had a clear sense of who they were supposed to be talking to and why they were giving a talk, making constant reference to both throughout their talk. Less successful responses often had some token reference to a notional audience and a literal statement of intent which was quickly forgotten as they went on to express their opinions in a straightforward manner.

Some candidates expressed their ideas in everyday English but most attempted to mix a formal style with some informal features suitable for a younger audience. The best peppered a mostly formal piece with moments which reflected the way young people speak and references to their experiences as children and students. The suggestions for enjoying time outdoors in the best responses also successfully reflected the interests of young people.

### Question 6

The generic conventions of an article for a school magazine may be broad but many candidates produced responses that echoed the appropriate style and content with which those who have read school publications would be very familiar. Weaker responses did, however, sometimes tend to become lengthy narratives with too little sense of an appropriate audience.

The better responses to this task tended to have fewer rhetorical flourishes than the responses to the first task. They earned their higher marks by using suitably formal language, precise vocabulary to describe the trip and effective replication of the style in which students and

teachers speak in the comments made in the interviews at the end of each piece. A sense of structure that was not simple narrative was a key feature of the best responses which often ended with comments about how successful the trip had been and how great the school was.

#### AO6 – Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

One very simple way to discriminate between the higher and lower attaining responses was the vocabulary used. The more precise, ambitious and imaginative the vocabulary was, the higher the mark tended to be. Spelling was generally very accurate except for the most unusual words and the usual crop of homophones.

The ability of a candidate to control sentence structure was another key discriminator. Many candidates wrote long sentences, displaying limited control and using a limited range of connectives. More successful candidates had a wider range of connectives to deploy and were able to vary the length and structure of their sentences for effect. The ability to use antithesis and other forms of contrast within sentences was an especially rare skill which candidates would do well to learn.

Punctuation remains the most significant weakness. Most candidates used full stops between sentences fairly successfully but few did so consistently. Within the sentence, however, there were also very few candidates who demonstrated an understanding of how to use commas, colons or semi-colons accurately. Centres could usefully spend some time developing such skills as it would help candidates to make more complex sentences easier to understand and more effective.

## J351/02 Exploring effects and impact

### General Comments:

This was the first series of the new GCSE 9-1 specification, eagerly awaited by teachers and candidates.

The essential features of component 02 are:

- Two reading passages, both of which should be read before starting to answer the questions that follow, and a choice of one of two essay writing options.
- A new style retrieval and re-organisation question assessing AO1.
- Two questions assessing AO2 language and structure with Question 3 on the second reading passage double weighted.
- Both AO3 and AO4 tested together in Question 4 with tariffs of 6 and 12 marks respectively.
- The mark scheme recognises six levels of achievement for each of the reading tasks with tariffs of 1 or 2 for each level cumulatively to the highest level 6.
- For Writing, there are six levels for AO5 (organisation, structure and coherence) and four levels for AO6 (vocabulary, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling).

Centres will realise that the effects of an untiered paper are that the range of achievement will be broad and that the distinctions between the levels will, despite the proximity of the marks, become quickly and readily discernible. Indeed, the range of achievement stretched from candidates who gave superb answers to all the questions and whose mark across the paper was 'max plus', to candidates who failed to attempt any of the questions or ignored most of the reading and wrote an essay of sorts.

As expected, most responses were clustered around mark scheme levels 3 and 4 and some fine distinctions were needed by examiners here, as elsewhere, to award marks that were in exact accordance with the relevant level descriptor statement.

Both reading passages proved popular with candidates and served as effective discriminators of the four skill ranges tested. There was a clear distinction between candidates who had read the passages thoroughly – and to the end – and were therefore able to take an informed overview of what they were about, how the writers had developed specific effects, and the impact they had, and those candidates who had simply looked at the detail without seeing the bigger picture that it contributed to.

One of the headlines must be the extent to which far too many candidates still relied on device spotting as a means of structuring their responses to questions 2 and 3 on language and structure. Simply to say that a writer uses a metaphor which makes the passage memorable is insufficient for a mark. Often hunting down similes, metaphors, 'asindertic listing' (sic) etc. takes a candidate away from the task and text, not further into it. Having said that, there were many candidates who possessed and deployed an extraordinarily rich critical vocabulary to dissect the passages to superbly insightful effect.

Some candidates (either consciously or not) spent too little time on the reading tasks to do themselves justice and went on rapidly to their choice of writing task. This is not a helpful

strategy: most candidates can show their writing competencies in less than an hour. Few can do so on the reading. It is very unlikely that a piece of writing however well-wrought within the candidate's competencies will make up for a poor mark on reading. Indeed, some candidates who took this approach then went on to write at far too great a length; candidates should be reminded that the quality of their writing is all important.

### Key Messages

- Candidates should be able to **differentiate in Question 1**, even at a basic level, **between phrases and sentences**, as well as **select appropriate material** as opposed to wholesale copying from the reading passage.
- Candidates should be prepared to **explain the effects** of selected language and structure points in Questions 2 and 3.
- Candidates should write a **personal comparative response** to Question 4 which is **firmly grounded in the two reading passages** rather than based on personal experience and anecdotal opinion. The rubric prompts are there to help structure their responses.
- Candidates should **focus on writing creative responses** to the given topics which are **controlled, organised, and appropriate in terms of purpose and audience**, rather than lengthy pieces which lack clarity, accuracy, and impact. Again, the rubric prompts are provided to help structure their writing.
- Overall the reading passages were accessible and generally understood. Candidates had generally been well prepared this component and the vast majority of candidates attempted all questions, many writing at length.

### General

- The paper was deemed effective in discriminating across all abilities.
- The paper was a fair test of candidates' achievements and ability.
- Candidates found the paper accessible and in many cases, it would seem, enjoyable.
- There was better performance generally in writing than in the reading tasks,
- Some candidates were ill-prepared for Question 1.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

#### Question 1

Most candidates gained 4/4: full marks. Where examiners were unable to award marks here was where the response simply retrieved information from the passage that did not fit the question, mainly because what was quoted was too long or could not possibly be construed as a phrase, for example where whole sentences or more were copied verbatim from the passage.

The mark scheme was extended to allow 'jigsaws of frost' to count as both inside and outside the house for those who recalled a time before double glazing and 'wrapped in all they had' counted both for 1a and 1c.

All in all, there was an extensive range of options for candidates to choose from to get the marks here and, as importantly, to form a basis of the passage for questions 2 and 4 following.

Question 1(a): The most common correct answer to this question was the reference to 'green polar glow' followed closely by 'the steam in the kitchen' phrase. Very few candidates identified the other options given in the mark scheme. Quite a number of candidates failed to gain a mark because of wholesale lifting from the text, particularly in relation to steam in the kitchen where everything including the kettles and pans as well as 'billowing' was included. Very few candidates selected a phrase which related to being outside the house.

Question 1(b): The most popular correct answers were 'a strange hard silence' and 'the outside pump was stolen', with occasional references to 'the village had to be rediscovered' and 'the girls tore icicles from the roofs for water'. Some candidates identified 'the strange hard silence', 'a metallic creaking', and a faint throbbing of wires' as a single point. A few candidates thought that 'The day came suddenly when all details were different' was a valid point, presumably because of the reference to details being 'different' which of course is merely repeating part of the question.

Question 1(c): Candidates were able to identify a wider spread of answers to this question and quite a number gained two marks. 'It's wicked' and 'The poor, poor birds' were the most common correct answers offered although 'poor little Phyllis sat rocking in her chair holding her sore feet like a handful of bees' was a popular choice and was accepted because it is not actually a complete sentence in the passage. Although paraphrases of the text for this question were generally accepted, answers such as, for example, 'poor Phyllis' were not because quite clearly there is no context to indicate why she does not like the winter's day, and the adjective 'poor' could relate to lack of money and so on.

## Question 2

Following on from the comments above centres and candidates are reminded of the sequence of statements of AO2:-

- *Explain/comment on/analyse*: here is the hierarchy of skill sets we expected to see, and indeed did see here and in question 3.  
Explain is to paraphrase, describe, talk generally about the passage;  
Comment on is to start to explore and investigate the writer's methods and intentions in producing impact and effects;  
Analyse is to take the building blocks of the passage apart and reassemble them synthesising detail and overview.
- *Language and structure*: as a general rule of thumb language is what is below sentence level and structure above it: but it also includes an overview of the passage as a whole. For example: here the clear division of the passage into indoors and outdoors, exactly as prompted by the first question.
- Using relevant subject terminology to support views: this is based on candidates' ability to explain/comment on/analyse. So essentially this comes last, so as to link the response or segments of the response to each other and back to the task.

Lists of literary terms which are given without any or with only tenuous references to textual detail are not rewardable.

What is the passage doing? How does it do it? Are the essential questions.

In the passage from '*Cider with Rosie*' the point to establish first is that these are the observations of a young child still at least partly suffused in a childhood world which is partly opaque and highly imaginative. The structure of the passage emphasises the differences

between the irritated, frustrated but also humane response of the adult (or more controversially the females) and the richly imaginative response of the children. Many commented that it 'was like Narnia' and although such a comment doesn't get a mark *per se* we know what you mean: it often framed an accurate and detailed response. It is all done, of course by a master of description, whose intense use of figurative language better candidates were able to tease out in impressive detail. Especially strong responses saw both the supernatural vein of the piece, its timelessness and quasi-religious intensity.

Many candidates were able to select appropriate references from the text and identify them using relevant subject terminology. However, there was some confusion between similes and metaphors, and with parts of speech such as verbs being identified as nouns and so on. It is clear, however, that candidates generally had been well prepared regarding selecting references and identifying relevant parts of speech in order to answer this question. The problem for candidates when answering this question often arose from being too concerned with 'what' in the passage made Lee's description of winter so memorable rather than 'how' his use of language and structure helped achieve this. Often candidates did little more than select a reference and then either assert that it was memorable or make a comment which was merely descriptive of the selected reference. Such attempted 'explanations' were usually vague or circular in nature. Candidates who made implicit relevant comments on why Lee's description was so memorable were rewarded but the highest attainers were those who were able to develop explanations explicitly focused on Lee's use of language and structure by commenting on the imagery employed and its impact on the reader.

As regards structure points, there were different definitions from candidates as to what constitutes 'structure' in the text. For some, structure comprised repetition of words in a sentence whereas for others, it comprised variety of sentence structure or sequencing of events or material. Those candidates who identified structure points relating to punctuation such as 'there are many commas' often failed to make convincing points about how this had helped make the description of winter so memorable in the passage. A number of candidates made no attempt to comment on structure whatsoever, and many who did, quite acceptably, commented on their chosen language points at first followed by a briefer comment on structure at the end in a separate paragraph.

It was clear that candidates generally devoted an appropriate amount of time to this question in relation to its tariff of six marks but candidates should always note the scope of the question. Some candidates responded to this (and to Question 3) using material outside of lines 25 – 38. The fact that many candidates believed Lee to be a woman obviously had no bearing on the mark awarded.

Some candidates started by giving their own opinions but no marks were awarded for this introduction. Others struggled to compare the two texts and it seemed to happen almost by accident while others really focused on the comparison at the expense of focusing on the statement in the question. As noted above many candidates did realise they could use parts of their previous answers here and that seemed to give many the confidence to give substantial answers.

### **Specific Summative Comment on Question 2**

- Most candidates were able to respond clearly in terms of language features.
- Despite being reminded in the question to use subject terminology a significant number of candidates did not do so.
- Weaker responses involved device-spotting with generic explanation of effects.

- Many candidates failed to identify any structural features.
- Many candidates regarded structural features as simply the use of paragraphing and punctuation – even very able candidates did not have the knowledge base to discuss literary structure.
- The passage itself was effective at securing engagement.
- There were very few 6/6 responses; those which achieved this, combined subject terminology with insightful and original interpretations of effects.

### Question 3

The quality of responses here was frequently demarcated by whether the candidates took a literal response to the cat hunting or went further and saw that it was all a gloriously imaginative childish fancy which is intense and fleeting in inverse proportion. This depended in large measure on the thoroughness with which the final sections of the passage had been read and understood. 'Better than all the cats in Wales....' The moment passes when something bigger and distracting happens. What is potentially very serious is treated with a hilarity that is quite the reverse of the mock intensity of the 'lynx eyed hunters'.

Some candidates worked very hard here on spotting and listing similes, metaphors 'pollysyndertons' (sic) and many more, without seeing the effects and impact Thomas was working for. Such responses are rewarded as generously as possible but cannot break through into the higher levels of achievement without a simple solid sense of what is going on.

Potential complainants to the RSPCA should be reassured that 'the wise cats' never appear.

The tariff for this question is 12 marks compared to the 6 marks for Question 2. Much of the comment above on Question 2 is of course relevant in principle to Question 3 in spite of the different contexts involved. Again the focus is on how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, with candidates being expected to use relevant subject terminology to support their views. The wording of the question, unlike that of Question 2, allowed more scope for personal interpretation by asking candidates to explore Thomas's presentation of the boys' game of hunting cats. The vast majority of candidates selected their material from lines 1-17 and were able to support their respective interpretations quite effectively. Often, candidates, had failed to understand the childlike imagination which had turned a simple game into a serious pursuit, as well as failing to register that the cats, themselves, in their wisdom, never actually appeared before the boys. Better answers focused on the over exaggerated images of both the boys and the cats and the rather misguided but amusing reaction from the engrossed boys to the more serious matter of the fire and the adult responses to it. A few candidates misread parts of the text such as 'patient, cold and callous' as describing the cats instead of the boys, as well as believing 'lynx-eyed hunters' described the cats as opposed to the boys.

As noted above, some candidates failed to grasp the imaginative nature of the game and commented that the cats were actually vicious and the writer had used imagery to show them this way and that the boys actually thought they were really professional hunters and took their game very seriously. Of course, again, as noted above, there were also plenty of candidates who were very sympathetic to the cats and deplored the boys' intentions. Many candidates, though, mistakenly wrote as if the boys actually did throw snowballs at the cats. Better candidates noted the imaginative nature of the game and noted that the boys were only too ready to be distracted into another game when the fire started.

### Specific Summative Comment on Question 3

- Comments on candidates' response to language and structure, including use of subject terminology for Question 2, are relevant for Question 3.
- Weaker candidates saw the Prothero fire as a catastrophe rather than a source of humour.
- Stronger candidates identified the endemic irony and humour within the passage.

### Question 4

This is the most demanding reading question and correspondingly attracts the highest tariff.

However, as the work produced for the specimen assessment materials showed, it was handled with confidence by most candidates who found a variety of ways to compare the passages and the ways in which the writers had worked to produce effects and impact. Almost all were clearly conscious, too, that this is a task driven exercise in which there needs to be a 'yes/but' approach to 'how far do you agree?'

Even candidates who started their answer with 'I agree completely' or, more dangerously with 'I disagree completely' soon changed their minds to a more balanced approach as they developed their thoughts.

The level descriptor hierarchy was very clear, making AO3 straightforward to assess. Did answers compare throughout, showing a clear understanding of how the passages work? Did they make some attempts to compare and support them? Or did they simply write rather randomly about one passage and then the other? Or, at the bottom end, write about one but not the other?

No particular approach necessarily guaranteed a higher or lower mark here because that was dependent on the quality of what was said, but generally the greater the interwoven comparison the better the analysis. Many rightly and successfully re-cycled and reorganised material from earlier answers: that is exactly the point of the structure of the paper. Others ploughed new furrows of each text with great success.

In strong responses, there was much fruitful comparison of the themes and evocation of childhood with contrasting comments about the child/adult inside/outside inversions. Others made vivid comparisons of the number and intensity of similar and contrasting rhetorical devices *and their effects*. Calmness and violent activity framed more perceptive comments and analysis.

Less effective answers tended to rely on description, paraphrase and assertion.

It's important that candidates understand the requirements of this question in terms of comparison and evaluation. Several candidates simply produced responses which analysed language and structure with some comment on effect but ignored the statement being considered; others simply recounted incidents from their own respective childhoods, with very little focus on the texts; and others rather impetuously made their decision about the 'enjoyable' aspect of both texts in the opening line of the response, thereby making it difficult to undertake a reasoned evaluation of both texts and whether indeed winter was presented as enjoyable. The best answers were truly evaluative and usually were constructed by following the guidelines given in the rubric and many answers, quite acceptably, 'recycled' material and personal comment used in questions 2 and 3. These answers usually picked up on the vivid imagination of the boys in Text 2 as well as the clear distinction between the children's collective reaction to winter with all its nuances, including Phyllis and the 'suffering' of adults such as Mother and Mr.

Prothero. The difference in adult/child perspectives was rarely focused on and comparatively few responses really discussed the unpleasant aspects of winter demonstrated in both passages. Many candidates, however, noted that Lee shows enjoyment in the beauty of the landscape whilst Thomas' children enjoy the opportunities for fun offered by the snow.

#### **Specific Summative Comment on Question 4**

- Most candidates were equally successful in relation to achievement against AO3 and AO4.
- Most candidates responded well on a purely personal level, often preferring the second passage on account of the fun involved.
- The best responses were along the lines of "I agree to some extent" or similar; this involved them in developing their thoughts and writing honestly rather than being restricted by agreeing or disagreeing.
- Better responses distinguished clearly between children's/adult's perceived enjoyment
- Weaker candidates often simply stated a preference and went on to describe their own winter experiences.
- Some candidates tended to use the Q2/3 response format rather than focusing on enjoyment or the lack of it.
- Some candidates took "enjoyable" to mean enjoyable for the reader and wrote nostalgic reminiscences even though the phraseology of the question was quite clear.

#### **Questions 5 & 6**

Question 5 was much the more popular of the two, although some of the very best essays were on Question 6 where real and/or imaginative experiences were deployed to tense, engaging and powerful effect.

Some candidates attempted to re-work, re-cycle or simply lift and copy extracts from the two reading passages to flesh out otherwise sparse writing. This rarely worked well and usually failed to show the candidates at their best.

As identified above, some candidates simply wrote far too much and as a result, continuity, relevance and sometimes complete coherence were lost. The best work rarely exceeded three sides and was engaging, intense and absorbing for the reader. Strong responses often took a literal thread as the basis of the narrative/description and added impressive non-literal superstructures of personal grief, loss, anxiety and many more.

For Question 5 the most enjoyable and successful accounts were often written from personal experience. There were also some very impressive pieces of descriptive writing both within and without narrative accounts, and the choice of vocabulary, stylistic control, and overall structure was often either sustained or sophisticated. The use of the 'The Winter's Day' as a backdrop to some tragedy or unpleasant occurrence was also quite common and effectively done. Quite a number of candidates drew some inspiration from the two reading texts and adapted some of the imagery therein. Very, very few candidates wrote paraphrases of the texts or lifted from them disproportionately. Some examiners felt that Question 5 was better answered in general by candidates of all abilities whereas Question 6 often had more Level 5 and 6 responses.

Question 6, as noted above, often gave rise to some sophisticated responses about weather making an important difference to individuals' lives. Sometimes it was clear that responses had been based on personal experience and others were simply stories. Anyone reading these responses cannot help but be impressed by the imaginative ability of 15/16 year olds while under the intense pressure of examination conditions with all its constraints of time and expectation, irrespective of their writing skills.

Overall, candidates performed better in writing than language analysis. For quite a few candidates, run-on sentences and comma splices limited the overall mark (for AO6) for strong pieces of writing that scored highly for AO5. There was quite a lot of confusion over the past tense; a lot of candidates did not use the simple past and incorrectly used the past perfect tense (had been). American phrases and spellings were common e.g. color, meter, laying instead of lying, gotten, and, cotton candy. Also, quite a few candidates replaced 'l' with 'a'. There were a number of apostrophe errors.

### **Specific Summative Comment on Questions 5 and 6**

- There was evidence that some candidates began with the writing question rather than answering questions in the reading section. It is suggested that centres recommend linear order when answering questions.
- Lack of punctuation – in particular, comma-splicing – was a real issue. Some sentences were a paragraph long.
- There was an increasing number of largely illegible scripts compared with previous years.
- The titles were stimulating and entirely appropriate.
- A number of candidates approached Question 5 with responses where the weather was incidental and thus wrote about an event that just happened to occur on a winter's day.

## J351/03/04 Spoken Language

### General Comments:

In this first series of the new GCSE English Language specification, the majority of centres had embraced the opportunities offered by the new Spoken Language endorsement which requires candidates to prepare and present a presentation on a topic of their choice followed by a series of relevant questions led by the teacher. Monitors reported seeing some excellent work in centres of all sizes with the full range of ability able to access and pass the assessment.

This was the first time that centres were required to submit recorded evidence of the assessments, sending up to 30 recordings to the monitor to allow the centre's grading to be monitored. Recordings of assessments on all three grades, distinction, merit and pass, were required where appropriate. Some centres chose to upload their recordings onto the OCR repository, other sent their recordings to the monitor on USB sticks or DVDs.

Monitors reported that the vast majority of centres submitted their recordings by the deadline and the USB sticks/DVDs were clearly and helpfully labelled with candidate numbers, names and the grade awarded. A small number of centres did not label them fully and had to be contacted to provide more details, usually the grade awarded to individual candidates. The filming was mostly very helpful, although some centres did not provide a recording of the whole assessment, including the questions. Centres are reminded that the whole assessment must be filmed with the candidate clearly in view. There is no need to film the person asking the questions or to scan the audience. At times the sound quality on the recording was poor, sometimes due to extraneous noise in the background or the camera being positioned too far from the candidate where projection was poor and could not be picked up fully by the camera's microphone. It is crucial that monitors can hear every word of a presentation and the questions for effective monitoring to take place. It is also fairer to candidates if background noise and disturbances are kept to a minimum during these assessments. Some films were difficult to access where they were too large for monitors to upload or saved in an unusual format. Centres should check their submissions carefully to ensure that they can be accessed easily.

As the marking criteria for the Spoken Language component is competency-based, candidates must fulfil all the criteria in the appropriate grade descriptor to achieve that grade. There was some evidence in a few centres that a 'best-fit' approach was being taken and candidates awarded a higher grade based on fulfilling one of the descriptors in the grade above. Centres are reminded that this is not appropriate in this assessment and that internal moderation must take place within the centre to ensure that the marking criteria are applied consistently and fairly.

The presentations and questions should last 8 – 10 minutes. Monitors reported seeing a number of presentations that were very short – between 1 and 2 minutes at times. Some of these presentations had been awarded distinctions and merits. Although at times the questions allowed candidates to expand their talk through extended answers enabling a higher grade, this was not always the case. Centres are reminded that candidates aiming for higher grades should present an extended talk on their topic, allowing them to fulfil all the criteria for these grades. Conversely, some presentations were far too long and some monitors reported seeing individual presentations and questions lasting up to 40 minutes. This is not helpful for either the candidate or the monitoring process and centres are reminded that 10 minutes is the maximum time recommended. Teachers should work closely with candidates to ensure that their presentations are an appropriate length. The questions asked should enable candidates to extend their talk rather than repeat information. Monitors reported seeing some excellent examples of pertinent questions which enabled candidates to achieve a higher grade in many cases; these questions tended to probe and challenge using precise language. Other questions were less helpful and sometimes far too long, sometimes leaving the candidates with little to add, or closed questions

which invited very perfunctory responses. It is essential that the questions are teacher-led rather than allowing other students to freely ask questions, as often student-led questions were far less helpful to the candidates.

The topics chosen varied widely and it was clear in the majority of centres that students had made choices which were judiciously guided by the teacher, allowing for personal engagement with the subject-matter as well as an appropriate level of complexity for the grade awarded. In a few centres monitors reported seeing topics which were too heavily based on literature texts, where candidates had clearly not had much choice in their subject-matter. The standard of these presentations was often lower as a result. Centres are reminded that candidates should choose a topic where they can speak passionately to engage the audience and that they should have some control over their choice of subject-matter. For any candidates aiming for merit or distinction grades the topics need to have a level of complexity and interpretation. Less complex topics, such as work experience or my favourite football club/sport/hobby should be reserved for candidates aiming for a pass grade.

Monitors reported seeing a great deal of good practice, where candidates had planned their presentation carefully and used a wide variety of presentational skills and rhetorical devices to engage their audience, judiciously using a PowerPoint or short notes to assist them. Unfortunately, there was far too much reliance on whole scripts in some centres where candidates were simply reading a pre-prepared script, sometimes with very little emphasis and far too quickly. Often these candidates had been given higher grades which could not be justified as the requirement to engage the audience had not been met. Other candidates used PowerPoint slides which contained far too much information and were read aloud by the candidate. Reading aloud (from a script or a PowerPoint) is not a skill that can be assessed as a spoken language presentation as it does not meet the needs of the audience. Centres are reminded that candidates should not have full scripts in front of them when doing these assessments; short notes or concise PowerPoint slides lead to a much higher standard of work and develop the skills being assessed in this component much more effectively. Working on oracy skills throughout the course to enable candidates to develop effective strategies for this final assessment is essential, as it was clear that many candidates were not aware of the need to engage with their audience using gesture, eye-contact and body language.

Where centres had enthusiastically embraced the demands and challenges of this new Spoken Language endorsement, candidates had produced some outstanding work. Monitors reported seeing a great many excellent presentations where the candidates were enthusiastic about their subject and fully engaged the audience. It is hoped that as centres get used to the requirements of this component, all candidates will be given opportunities across the course to develop a range of oracy skills in preparation for this final assessment.

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