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FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

It was very encouraging to see that overall understanding of the three texts was high for almost all of the candidates. Most responded very positively to the themes of the first two texts: school, integration in a different culture and parental support. They could relate to these topics and the majority displayed some degree of enthusiasm in their replies. The third text presented no difficulty either, as smoking and cancer are topics that affect everyone.

Only a handful of candidates did not complete the paper. The reason appeared to be that they were unaware of the presence of the third text and final question on the back page. Time did not seem to be an issue and many candidates had time to write a plan or a rough draft – indicating that they had been well prepared in the techniques of summary or letter writing.

The quality and accuracy of the language used in the answers varied greatly, from examples of error-free scripts to others which displayed an abundance of basic errors, such as repeated confusion between *se* and *ce*, *ces/ses/c'est*, *leurs* and *leur* and a worrying lack of knowledge of genders, plurals and adjectival agreements. Such errors are extremely regrettable in a First Language French script and their elimination should constitute a focus when preparing future candidates for this examination.

Many candidates wrote very lengthy replies for **Question 1** and did not respect the word count recommendation. Although they were not penalised for exceeding the word count, it is important that candidates understand that they must write a summary, not rephrase the whole article in their own words.

Examiners would like to stress the need for candidates to read the questions more carefully and to ensure that their answers relate to the questions as they appear on the question paper. Many candidates “re-defined” the questions before answering them and lost content marks as a consequence. One technique that might enable candidates to avoid irrelevance would be for them to pause about half way through their answer, re-read the brief and ask themselves “am I really answering this question?”.

The general neatness of the answers and the quality of the handwriting was quite high, and it was pleasing to see that many candidates had taken pride in their work during the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Content

Generally, the question was well answered. Most candidates spotted that there should be two parts to the answer: the positive and the negative elements which contribute to success/failure of integration within the French school system. The majority had a clear understanding of the role of parents and the efforts the school should make. Better candidates tended to divide their answer into two paragraphs along the lines of positive/negative points and then “picked” arguments from both texts accordingly. Ten different points (out of a possible twenty-two) had to be made in order to gain full content marks. Candidates should be reminded of the need to cover a variety of different points and to avoid commenting at length on just one or two points. Some candidates misunderstood the request to write a summary and either compared the form and composition of the two texts or did not base their answers on the texts provided, but instead wrote about their own ideas on how best to integrate foreign children in schools. Both of these approaches resulted in answers which were partly or totally *hors-sujet*.

Focus, own words and expression

Most candidates knew how to write a short introductory phrase, structure their summary as described above and end with a brief conclusion. Examiners were also looking for expressions indicating the candidates' knowledge of argumentative techniques, such as *par contre*, *ce qui peut faciliter/ralentir une bonne intégration*, etc. Candidates should be reminded that it is essential they use their own words when writing summaries and to avoid "lifting" entire phrases from the original texts, which happened occasionally in this examination.

Language

There was much evidence of the candidates' command of French in this question, and good candidates were often very successful in re-wording the ideas from the texts. There were many opportunities to build in relative clauses (*il est évident que les parents doivent assister aux réunions...*), use of subjunctives (*bien que les enfants fassent des efforts pour...*) and to show a broader range of tenses (*il faudrait que...; l'école avait organisé...*). It was disappointing, however, that some candidates were unable to copy accurately words which appeared on the actual question paper. The most common mistake was misuse of the capital letter in *Africain* (noun) and *africain* (adjective).

Question 2*Content*

It was most encouraging to see that the great majority of candidates started and ended their letter in a suitable manner, indicating they had been well prepared for this examination. The most successful candidates had read the question carefully, entered into the role (a caring teacher who aims to twin his/her school) and went on to address all the required points in their answers with great enthusiasm and convincing arguments. They began by explaining the reason for a twinning and the need for some financial help. They also put forward two or three advantages for the pupils and for the French and African communities.

Candidates who received poor content marks either concentrated on a single point, which they re-phrased in several ways, or included vague phrases, such as *il y a des avantages pour nos élèves* without going on to specify what these advantages might be.

Language

The nature of this question provided an excellent opportunity to show use of the conditional tense, particularly of the modal verbs *pouvoir* and *devoir*. This was achieved with various levels of success.

Generally, candidates repeated the mistakes they made in the summary.

Question 3*Content*

With regard to content, this question was the most disappointing, with many candidates misreading or misunderstanding the question. However, those candidates who answered the question correctly produced some very clear and convincing arguments, for which they received good content marks. The best candidates wrote a short introduction (*j'ai lu/vu une pub etc. qui m'a choqué*) explaining the reason for their letter. They then asked the question *la pub, a-t-elle le droit de choquer...?* and went on to present their arguments in a "for and against" manner, drawing examples from the text and/or from their personal experience. Examiners were looking for a good balance of arguments with a selection of examples/illustrations. Many candidates ended their letter with a short conclusion which summarised their viewpoint. It was very pleasing to see some candidates enter so thoroughly into the role that they ended their letter with *j'espère que vous publierez ma lettre dans votre prochain journal* as if they were addressing *le courrier des lecteurs*.

Weaker answers often debated cancer and smoking, but made no mention of advertising, with many candidates failing even to include the word *publicité*. These candidates seemed to have read the article and written their answers without reading the actual question. Some candidates failed to note that answers needed to be presented in the form of a letter.

Language

Control of the language often suffered on this last question, either because of time pressure, or because candidates were becoming tired. Many were not familiar with the conventions for addressing a newspaper: *Cher Journal* or *Cher Le Monde* were often used and only a handful of candidates used *Monsieur l'Editeur* or *Monsieur le Directeur*. Generally, however, lexical terms relating to social problems such as smoking, drugs or drinking were very familiar to candidates.

Paper 0501/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

All candidates seemed to find a title which appealed to them from the wide range available and most were able to write relevant, often interesting, essays. However, as in previous years the quality of the language was very varied.

The better scripts were written in generally accurate French with only occasional minor errors, and were well structured. The vocabulary used was wide enough to convey intended shades of meaning.

Average scripts showed more frequent grammatical and spelling errors. Mainly simple vocabulary was used. The essay was usually structured in paragraphs, although links were sometimes absent or inappropriate.

Weaker scripts showed many serious mistakes of various kinds – in some cases hardly any accurate sentences or even phrases were present. They were often not structured in paragraphs. Vocabulary was sometimes imprecise or inappropriate.