

Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination into Form I – May 2006

ENGLISH

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

The board of examiners for the English Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination aimed at assessing the candidates' linguistic competence in English. The English Paper examined the candidates' ability to use English accurately in meaningful contexts, to read and understand the language presented in written texts and to produce creative writing that is precise, logical, cohesive and sequential.

The Specification Grid stipulated specific aspects of language learning which are reflected in the objectives and standards set by the syllabus.

The examination paper's overall distribution of questions in Section I, where language accuracy was targeted, carried 40% of the marks. Section II, which carried 30% of the marks, focused on comprehension.

SECTION	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY		
	Low	Medium	High
I Language Use	10%	21%	9%
II Comprehension	4%	20%	6%

Section III, which carried the remaining 30% of the marks, had varied composition tasks within the candidates' experience of writing and creative potential. The level attained in this section depended on the individual candidate's ability in carrying out the task.

Markers commented positively on the examination paper asserting that it was pupil friendly and set at the right level. The paper was well balanced, catering for the different abilities and candidates who could use the language confidently did well. The average candidates attained a pass mark. The weaker candidates, although working all or most of the paper failed to make the grade.

Section I Language Use

The table below gives an overall view of this section of the paper.

Numbers 1 to 10	<p>The text was about aspects of the history and technology of aeroplanes linked to a project a boy and a girl carried out following a visit to the annual air show.</p> <p>This multiple-choice exercise tested the candidate's ability to understand the linguistic use of various parts of speech within a given context and to analyse and reason logically to get to the right conclusion.</p> <p>It was a well graded exercise with three items at a low level of difficulty, five items at a medium level and two items targeting the high ability candidate.</p> <p>It was a valid task and most of the questions were within the candidates' capabilities. Many candidates who did not know the meaning of <i>to take off</i> failed to get question 7 correct.</p>
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Numbers 11 to 15	<p>This exercise tested the candidate's ability to use <i>relative pronouns</i>. Candidates had to complete sentences with the given words.</p> <p>The exercise was valid for the age group. Three items were set at a low level of difficulty and two at a medium level of difficulty. Most of the candidates did quite well in this exercise.</p> <p>A number of candidates failed to make the distinction between <i>who</i> and <i>which</i> and/or <i>whom</i> and <i>whose</i> and/or <i>who</i> and <i>whom</i>. The very weak candidates failed to benefit from this exercise.</p>
Numbers 16 to 20	<p>This exercise tested the candidate's ability to use linking words in a given context. The candidates had to choose the five correct <i>conjunctions</i> from the eight given words.</p> <p>It was a suitable exercise for the age group. Three items were set at a medium level of difficulty and two at a high level of difficulty.</p> <p>Candidates who read with understanding did well in this exercise.</p>
Numbers 21 to 30	<p>This exercise tested the candidate's ability to write accurately the correct form of the verb within a given letter. There were three items at a high level of difficulty, six items at a medium level and only one item targeting the low ability candidate.</p> <p>The exercise was valid for the age group as it showed the candidate's ability in handling language. Items 22, 23 and 27 proved to be stumbling blocks for many, the use of the <i>present perfect</i> posing the greatest difficulty to the candidates.</p> <p>The majority of candidates found this exercise challenging. Many candidates did not use their knowledge of tenses appropriately in the given context and few obtained full marks.</p>
Numbers 44 to 53	<p>The 'cloze' exercise tested the candidate's ability at logical sequencing and identifying specific vocabulary items linked to the overall context of the dialogue. Reading and understanding played an appropriate part as well as transcribing items correctly.</p> <p>The level of difficulty was well balanced, having three items at a low level, five items at a medium level and two items at a high level.</p> <p>Although valid for the age group, this exercise proved to be difficult for many candidates who failed to understand and use the context when completing the dialogue with their own words. Spelling and punctuation errors as well as use of incorrect idiom were evident. Numbers 49, 50 and 52 created some difficulty.</p>

Section II Comprehension

The illustrated comprehension, set on a loose-leaf for easy access by the candidate, presented candidates with an adapted version of an adventure story called *The Discovery* written by Grace Nichols. The passage was presented in three sections to help candidates focus on particular parts of the story when answering specific questions. The reading text was interesting and suitable for the age group and it targeted a wide range of candidates.

The questions were set as planned in the Specification Grid. Direct and inferential questions assessed the candidate's reading comprehension skills. Questions with a low level of difficulty carried 4 marks; questions with a medium level of difficulty carried 20 marks; questions with a high level of difficulty carried 6 marks. The relevant information to answer all questions was available in the text.

In this section, as in the previous year, only incomplete sentences and syntactical errors in the answers were penalised. Emphasis was on rewarding comprehension rather than accuracy in grammar and spelling (which were examined in the other sections of the paper).

The markers commented that the story appealed to the age group and most of the candidates understood the passage. Markers also remarked that it was a good idea to divide the passage into three sections since it helped the candidates to follow the development of the storyline more easily.

The majority of markers stated that the questions, which assessed candidates on all levels of comprehension, were well structured, well graded and suitable for such an examination. Moreover, the distribution of marks was deemed very just. Some markers pointed out the lack of confidence in sentence structures and irrelevant copying from the text in responses.

The table below gives an overall view of Section II.

Numbers 31 to 33	Questions 31, 32 and 33 were multiple choice questions demanding inferential and direct information with low to medium level of difficulty. Most of the candidates answered correctly.
Number 34 a) – h)	Question 34 presented candidates with True or False statements. Candidates had to elicit direct and inferential information to answer correctly. The level of difficulty was low to medium. Most of the candidates answered correctly.
Number 35 a) – e)	This was a vocabulary related question with a medium to high level of difficulty. A limited number of candidates managed to identify all the words. Many left out the preposition and failed to give complete phrases in a) in front of – <i>ahead of</i> and b) pulled at – <i>tugged at</i> . Items d) and e) created some difficulty.
Number 36	This question required an understanding of the referring word 'It' and was set at a medium level of difficulty. Most failed to make the connection.
Number 37 a) – c)	This was a fill in exercise with a low, medium and high level of difficulty. It tested the candidate's ability to locate specific information. Most of the candidates answered a) and b) correctly. The majority of candidates did not connect <i>got used to</i> and <i>grew accustomed to</i> and failed to locate <i>gradually</i> to complete Item c).

Number 38	Question 38 was of a medium level of difficulty and candidates had to locate specific information. A good number of candidates answered fairly correctly although some used incorrect sentence structures in their answers.
Number 39	Question 39 was of a medium level of difficulty and candidates had to use connecting devices to give the full reason for Kano's reaction. Most of the candidates gave half the answer.
Number 40	Question 40 was open-ended asking for specific and inferential information with a medium level of difficulty. Quite a number of candidates answered the question. Some lifted sentences from the text, using improper sentence structures, and / or irrelevant information. Others, having failed to understand the set question properly, wrote how the children felt before they had actually discovered the drawings and paintings.
Number 41 a) – b)	Question a) was of a medium level of difficulty and b) of a high level of difficulty. Candidates had to give specific and inferential information. Quite a good number of candidates attempted the questions, but irrelevant information was the stumbling block in a number of answers.
Number 42	Question 42 was of a high level of difficulty. Many candidates found the question challenging and were unable to infer from context or connect to the title – <i>The Hidden Cave</i> .
Number 43	This question was set at a medium level of difficulty. A large number of candidates used connective devices effectively and answered correctly by referring to <i>the lateness of the hour</i> as the reason for <i>Tanya's anxiety</i> . Many tended to copy straight from the text and did not get full marks because the question was not fully answered.

Section III Composition

The titles set targeted a wide range of candidates and varied from low, to medium and to high levels of difficulty – depending on the candidate's ability. The candidates had a wide variety of choice which catered for all interests. Compositions with help prompts encouraged the candidates to focus on the title, whilst allowing for creative self expression.

Although there was evidence of outstanding performance in some of the writings, markers stated that the majority of writings fell between the Very Good and Weak band, with Pass being the main mode. There was also evidence of poor levels in the basic use of language in its written form. Spelling errors, incorrect tense usage, lack of idiom, limited vocabulary and inaccurate sentence structures brought about loss of marks.

Markers noted an overall marked improvement in planning, paragraphing and presentation. However, inaccuracy prevailed especially when candidates wrote at length and failed to revise and edit their writing. Some candidates wrote very long compositions (exceeding 200 words) and their writing was characterised by an increase in the amount of errors in idiom and grammar. Other candidates did not focus on the set title and prompts (case in point titles 54 and 57); they followed a rehearsed

basic pattern or transposed parts of prepared compositions and deviated from the subject of the set titles.

The table below gives an overall view of this section of the paper.

Number 54	This was the most popular title. The majority showed an inability to develop valid material about the subject matter, referring to the rainy day only in the introduction. Few wrote descriptive compositions. Some of the candidates wrote interesting compositions that were, however, partially out of point. Many did not use the correct tense.
Number 55	This was a less popular title. Most of the candidates who chose this title were highly competent and produced narrative-descriptive and imaginative writing that was interesting to read. Their writing demonstrated competence in the use of language. Some candidates misinterpreted ' <i>invention</i> ' and wrote irrelevant compositions.
Number 56	Many candidates who chose this title gave good descriptions of pets and their habits. A good number of candidates ignored the prompts given and brought in irrelevant material. Some did not use the correct informal letter format. Others wrote very short compositions (less than 100 words).
Number 57	This was another popular title. Many candidates wrote interesting narratives with appropriate descriptions. Some candidates wrote less creative and imaginative writing.
Number 58	Candidates who chose the picture composition had to follow the sentence and picture prompts. There were a number of good compositions with interesting and original sequences. In some cases, candidates ignored the prompts and wrote about personal experiences. The majority of candidates, who failed in this composition, had limited vocabulary and were unable to develop a good sequenced description of how the narrative ended.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

The English examination assessed pupils who sat for this examination in both reading and writing skills. Analysis of the examination results shows that 65 % of the pupils achieved a pass in English. Consequently, the majority of candidates attained level 4 or higher on the scale of Level Descriptors in reading and writing. These candidates used their linguistic abilities to follow written instructions and respond accurately in targeted language tasks, interacted with different types of text and wrote competently for a specific purpose and audience.

The rest of the pupils performed badly and did not reach the standard required. These candidates demonstrated an inability in all or most of the following: understanding rubrics; understanding a question or text; the use of relevant detail; understanding beyond surface meaning; the use of appropriate vocabulary; consistent tense usage; correct spelling; proper use of punctuation; producing grammatically correct

sentences; handling syntax properly; good expression of ideas and production of sustained accurate writing.

Teachers should seek to promote meaningful communication, encourage learners to use appropriate language for different purposes in order to help them master linguistic competence (vocabulary and grammatical structures) and interact effectively using English. Moreover, they should prepare activities that encourage pupils to become investigative and constructivist learners by making use of printed and electronic text and plan tasks that help to develop pupils' creative and imaginative skills.

The integration of receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills when planning and delivering an English lesson is essential for language development. Accordingly, teachers should reflect on their classroom practice and endeavour to:

- promote enjoyment, interest and attentiveness during listening activities in order to help pupils understand spoken English and engage in language interactive conversations (discussion on read-aloud texts, explanation of procedures, communication of instructions, role play, participation in dialogues...) to help pupils acquire the skill to speak confidently and use appropriate and grammatically correct language to communicate meaningfully and purposefully.
- promote reading as a process of understanding and interacting with 'real' texts by leading pupils to integrate and adapt their reading strategies when reading difficult or unfamiliar text and teaching the use of a wide range of monitoring and adjusting strategies to aid comprehension (skimming, scanning, reading between the lines, discuss figurative language, reading beyond the lines...)
- promote writing as a process of creating and communicating ideas by helping pupils assume the role of authors – planning, drafting, revising, redrafting, editing and publishing – writing with a voice, a purpose and for an audience, bringing to their writing personal experiences, knowledge from reading and researching and communicating ideas accurately and with the appropriate style to fit the genres.

It is the responsibility of teachers to provide a language-rich environment for their pupils, while at the same time adapting their approach to reflect the actual interests and needs of the Primary English Learner. English language should not be taught in isolation in an artificially pre-determined sequence of grammatical structures or functions, but through exposure to English through meaningful and understandable contexts and activities that are an integral part of the learning taking place in the provision of a holistic education that links language development to the overall educational development of the child. Furthermore, assessment as a tool for identifying pupil needs and as a guide for the teaching-learning experience is indispensable in language learning where each child is encouraged to acquire language skills at his or her own pace and manner.