



RADLEY

Common Entrance 2023

(A series of detailed reports to provide feedback for Preparatory Schools)



Subject reports

ENGLISH

Writing

The general standard of written papers this year was encouraging, with very few candidates writing without some measure of control or adherence to the task. In terms of variety, candidates would be, in almost all cases, better off showing a variety of skills by answering one imaginative and one 'transactional' task. Where students answered two similar tasks, they were not always able to display a range of written expression and skill.

Those candidates who were less successful in the descriptive tasks tended towards an overly narrative approach. While some of these responses also incorporated varied descriptive language, the majority lent too heavily on action and often spent too long on dialogue. In the speech and article tasks, a significant minority lapsed too far into involved personal anecdote, losing sight of their audience and purpose. Those candidates who struggled to access Band 4 of the mark scheme often lacked a sense of structure, either at sentence level, or in their paragraphing. In the few cases where sentences consistently lacked control, candidates were not able to communicate their ideas with sufficient clarity to score in Band 3. Comma splices, fused sentences and fragments remain fairly persistent offenders.

The very best responses to the prompts managed to establish form swiftly, through effective openings, and then sustained a characterful and seemingly spontaneous response. There was a sense that, for the imaginative tasks, some of this material was pre-prepared to some extent. That is likely a fault of the questions, but candidates should try to write in direct engagement with the

Introduction



I write to thank all schools and their teaching teams for having prepared boys for Common Entrance again this year. We do hope that you find these reports useful: they are certainly intended to provide you with timely advice on how better to prepare candidates. Equally certainly, they are never intended to sound judgemental or superior! We are acutely aware of the pressures which prep schools feel in terms of equipping young people for secondary education. It is very good to continue to have warm and active links with so many schools which send boys to Radley. We do hope we can build upon those in future.

This is my last year here, and I would just like to thank all of you for having made this aspect of the job so easy. Please continue to send all feedback - good or bad! - to the Admissions Department. It will always be carefully absorbed and conveyed to the right people.

With all good wishes,

Stephen Rathbone
Academic Director MA, MA



prompts, rather than relying on forms and ideas used previously. Strong answers usually reflected a few minutes of structural planning, which helped to guide the writing towards a purpose.

A very large number of scripts were entertaining, thoughtful, and precise.

Reading

The overall performance of candidates showed sound comprehension skills and reasonable awareness of how the playwright used language and stagecraft to create atmosphere, convey character and generate a range of audience emotions and reactions.

The Section A multiple-choice questions and short answers were pleasing with most candidates answering accurately. Section B focused on a series of reading and inference-based questions. On the whole, answers in this section were sound with good detail and relevant points. The middle level scores tended to be largely explanatory without offering interesting insights as to specific literary techniques. Where candidates did even better was if they explored language techniques to show effects. The best candidates were able to answer precisely and were able to integrate quotation to support points. There was a tendency throughout to over quote and/or to use overly long quotations. This meant that candidates ran out of time to devote to the more challenging Section C question. This question was a higher order skill which required analysis of a range of stagecraft techniques. Weakest was the bullet point on narration and dialogue which led many candidates astray: they frequently retold the story or events of the extract rather than identifying key technical aspects such as dialogue, soliloquy, rhythm and timing of conversation for effect and so on.

MATHS

In the new exam, the core papers seemed a bit easy and the additional paper too hard. For many candidates the core paper wasn't enough and the additional paper was a step too far.

On the core papers the grade boundaries were: A – 80 or more; B 70 – 79; C 60 – 69; D 50 – 59; E 49 or less.

Unsure about the additional paper, and so as not to discourage candidates who had tried hard, we decided on: A – 70 or more; B 50 – 69; C 30 – 49; D 20 – 29; E 19 or less.

Out of 88 candidates, 68 submitted their scripts for us to mark, and 20 marked them at Prep School and gave them to us to check. (Ideally, we would prefer to mark all the papers.)

On the core paper we awarded 32 As, 29 Bs, 22 Cs and 5 Ds, ie 36.4% (A), 33% (B), 25% (C), 5.7% (D). On the additional paper there were 40 candidates and we awarded no As, 10 Bs, 28 Cs, 1D and 1E, ie 0% (A), 25% (B), 70% (C), 2.5% (D), 2.5% (E). Mean marks were as follows:

Core non calc	Core calc	Mental test (ex40)	Additional
73.8	72.9	30.9	43.3



PHYSICS

The paper was generally well answered. However, with only 90 candidates (out of around 150 Shell entrants) the information gained is much less useful than if sat by the whole cohort.

The marks yielded a median score of 70%. A score of 77% or over was required for a candidate to be placed in the top 25%. A score of 60% or below placed a candidate in the bottom 25%.

Success relied heavily on recall of factual knowledge (definitions of words; the symbol for an LED). Only a small proportion of marks were awarded for Physics skills: problem-solving, manipulating ideas, estimating, computing, converting. There were quite a few 'explain' questions this year, and we found boys were generally too eager to trot out 'rote learned' answers. (Whilst we gave answers in line with the CE mark scheme full credit, we were disappointed to see many candidates suggest that the Sun can be regenerated on the timescale of a human lifetime, which is obviously untrue.) We were pleased, though, to see some examples of real evidence that boys were thinking for themselves in response to these, and not relying on remembered explanations.

The students with strong familiarity with the technical content of the ISEB Science Specification did well. Some able Physicists with less familiarity with the ISEB content may have found the paper frustrating. They shouldn't be put off!

CHEMISTRY

Q1 The multiple-choice section was generally answered well.

Q2 While most candidates answered the first part of this question well and many identified either copper sulfate or cobalt chloride as the chemical test for water (with mostly correct results), a few offered to measure the boiling point. Not as many candidates realised that soot is formed in an oxygen deprived atmosphere (incomplete combustion).

Q3 A significant number of boys struggled with this question. The terms solute, solvents etc and the workings of a condenser were often not understood sufficiently well. A good number of boys also thought that the remaining ink solution would become lighter in colour. For Q3f) it was not enough to say that water had evaporated (which of course it does during a distillation).

Q4 This question was mainly answered satisfactorily although a good number of candidates struggled to interpret the chromatogram and failed to realise the natural colour D is not present in the sample.

Q5 A few boys struggled to identify and translate the diagram of carbonic acid correctly. A majority of boys were less familiar with acid base properties of compounds and the reaction of acids. Boys were not familiar with the environmental effects of the formation of acidic oxides and the subsequent formation of acid rain in Q5c). More non-scientific/colloquial answers to the tune of 'acidic tap water is unhealthy' were given for Q5di).

Q6 Most but not all boys rightly defined the term element correctly. A significant number of boys could not recall that metals conduct electricity which is often used as a test for metals. Candidates



found the separation of lead from iodine a challenge and there was little reference to the information given in the table in their answers. Q6b) stated the use of ethanol; this was very often ignored and candidates simply heated the mixture. Q6c) was likewise not coherently answered. Candidates did not appreciate that separation depends on the strength of bonds between the particles: strong bonds in compounds and weak bonds in mixtures.

Q7 Boys generally offered some good examples of controlled variables and also solved the mathematical question well. The second half of this question was probably the hardest and only very few boys were able to explain the relationship between surface area and rate of dissolution in terms of particles.

In summary, the exam seemed fair and tested the basics of Chemistry that can be expected at this level.

BIOLOGY

Q1 Generally good factual recall by most students. Q1b) Common misunderstanding between the difference between continuous and discontinuous characteristics. Eye colour was only correctly identified in around 50% of responses. Q1g) Many students knew stamen would be outside the flower in wind pollinated plants but not that the petals would be small (and dull colours). Q1h) Many students showed confusion between the two different types of carbohydrates and the respective food tests. Many students fell into the trap of thinking potato contains glucose directly rather than starch (iodine test). The correct answer of pineapple juice was selected less than 50% of the time.

Q2 Generally answered well. Occasionally students lost marks for ignoring instructions (drawing a second set of lines to match pictures to characteristics) rather than lack of knowledge. Common misconception was between fungi and bacteria characteristics.

Q3a) and Q3b) Many students just stated 'Breathing', some students used inappropriate terms 'aerobic' and 'anaerobic'. Q3c) Confusion about making 'energy' rather than sugar/food/starch; needed to be clearer as to how producers store energy that is passed to organisms in food chains.

Q4c) Marks not awarded for 'thin slices of potato' taken, methylene blue confused with iodine, needed to say crush/scrape some of the potato AND add to the microscope slide for one mark, term 'cover slip' not used enough.

Q5 Unclear photographs indicating colonies on 'masked' petri dishes – therefore alternative answers accepted for Q5d). Q5b) Poor understanding of 'fair test' by many students – students referred incorrectly to repeating and calculating an average. Q5c) Not enough reference made to 'bacterial colonies' visible in comparing modes of bacterial spread.

Q8a) Only five answered incorrectly (adaptation) - everyone else correct. 'Theory of Evolution' is a widely known term. Q8bi) Marked firmly; eg hard shell (bird) versus soft shell (reptile) differentiation required, not just 'lay eggs'. Q8bii) Comparative answer required - question asks for a DIFFERENCE ie birds are ... whereas/but reptiles are ... Weak across all candidates and something to focus on next year. Q8ci) Calculating % increase was found to be difficult by the candidates. A



handful got this right (122%). Most common wrong answers were 55% or 222%, or a decimal place added when the question states to the nearest whole number (which was worth a mark independently of the number given). Q8cii) The question provided a number of statements about activities on the islands - students needed to take these and DISCUSS how they might have advantages or disadvantages for the marine iguanas. Very few went beyond restating the statements when a discussion of consequences was expected. For example, 'oil pollution from tourist boats affects the habitat' gains no credit as a disadvantage because this statement is given in the question, whereas 'oil pollution from tourist boats may kill/poison marine iguanas or their food stocks' gains credit for discussing how the issue affects the marine iguanas.

FRENCH

The four components of the examination yielded a wide range of results. The Listening produced good results from many students, with a large number of entrants obtaining over 80%. Speaking was usually successful as well and students came across as well prepared. The Reading produced a wider range of results, and students found Sections 4 and 5 more difficult. The Writing is the component that candidates found more challenging. For Section 1, the Translation element, many students were not able to conjugate the provided verbs or agree the adjectives or plural nouns. Solid knowledge of prepositions and conjugation paradigms helped those who obtained better marks in that section. The Directed Writing task was found to be more straightforward. Often, lower performing scripts are those where students did not attempt tense variation (as per the mark scheme), or wrote without using the prompts provided.

SPANISH

The papers showed a smooth progression in terms of complexity. The last reading exercise had very challenging vocabulary but was supported well with a small glossary and questions in English. The candidate found more obscure questions challenging, as expected, but overall showed a very good understanding of basic vocabulary.

The first writing exercise was good to ascertain the candidate's knowledge of basic grammar. The long essay would be good for differentiation if there were more than one candidate. The candidate had a decent lexical range and good strategies for paragraph development but struggled to complete tasks to a high standard due to issues with basic verb usage.

HISTORY

The structure of the paper allowed candidates to demonstrate their critical thinking skills as well as their knowledge. In Section 1 most candidates were able to make a good go at all three questions and both sources. Many candidates lost an easy mark on Q1 by limiting their response to one aspect, merely quoting phrases rather than explaining what can be inferred about success, or ignoring the limitations to success raised in Source 1. On the second question it was often difficult to award more than half marks given the clear requirement in the mark scheme for an overall



conclusion based on several factors. Candidates should be encouraged to interrogate the sources and not limit themselves to a single point of support and/or challenge. On the third question the best candidates considered both content and reliability in reaching a judgement about utility. Some answers were limited by stereotypical comments about the provenance without any adaptation to the specific sources. This was to be expected and helped to differentiate.

In Section 2 most candidates were able to tackle all three questions. Occasionally, however, candidates did suffer from having spent too long on Section 1. On Part A, many candidates lost marks due to only considering one aspect, rather than two, and by failing to fully explain the point that they were making and linking it back to the specific demands of the questions. On Part B, it was often not possible to award marks in the top bracket due to failure to consider other factors before arriving at a reasoned judgment. Candidates should also be encouraged to support their arguments on this question using precise detail. For Part C, the long essay, the best candidates employed a structure that facilitated the exploration of different sides of the argument and supported their judgments with precisely selected knowledge. Some answers were limited by a lack of analysis and evaluation, with the argument slipping into narrative description and losing sight of the question. Again, this was an area of differentiation.

GEOGRAPHY

The performance of students varied significantly with marks ranging from 26% to 85%. Overall, students did best in the OS map skills and the human/environmental geography section.

In the OS map skills section, students generally demonstrated a strong ability to interpret and analyse geographical information. They effectively utilised key map-reading skills such as scale, symbols and grid references to answer questions accurately. This section proved to be a strong area for most candidates.

Similarly, the human/environmental geography section showcased the students' knowledge and understanding of the interplay between humans and their surroundings. Students were able to interpret sources well but at times could have given clearer reasons for some of the explain questions.

The location knowledge section varied in the quality of responses with some students scoring nearly full marks and others struggling with the entire section. Regular low-stake testing of this material might lead to better consistency in this area.

The highest achieving students stood out for their skill in developing coherent arguments using a PEEL structure (Point, Evidence, Explanation and Link). These students were able to articulate their ideas clearly, support them with relevant evidence and provide detailed explanations.

To improve their performance most students should strive for a clearer understanding of command words and their implications. Many candidates provided one-word answers for an explain question or misinterpreted the command words, resulting in a loss of marks. This issue was particularly evident in the last question where some students merely listed facts without providing a proper explanation. Developing a thorough understanding of command words will help students to address questions appropriately and demonstrate their knowledge effectively.



Overall, it was pleasing to see some excellent geography at points in the paper. The utilisation of a PEEL structure in arguments and improving comprehension of command words are key areas where most students can make significant progress.

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY and RELIGION

The paper was taken by 35 candidates, most of whom secured an A grade or higher.

The descriptive question a) generally scored in either Level 5 or 6, demonstrating detailed knowledge of key information.

The analytical question b), however, was answered less successfully with candidates often defaulting to a description of the issue(s) rather than an appreciation of the wider significance.

Q1 On the Feeding of the Five Thousand: Most answers explained that the feeding demonstrates Jesus's kindness and generosity; few appreciated the fact that a miraculous feeding is taken as a proof of divinity. Even fewer understood that the miracle parallels the manna in the wilderness, affirming again Jesus's divinity and suggesting a continuity between his salvific work and the Israelites' exodus.

Those who scored highly on c) did so because they offered a balanced argument: often these essays were weighed heavily, albeit with considered detail, to one side but to the neglect of the other, which was given only perfunctory consideration.

Across all question types, sometimes the questions needed to have been read more carefully to avoid generic answers. On Q23a), for example, answers almost entirely described the importance of prayer generally rather than the particular role of it in Roman devotion: eg the rosary as a Marian devotion.

LATIN

This year we received 41 papers for Level 2, 20 for Level 1 and 11 for Level 3 (for which at least three candidates would have been better placed in Level 2). We based the grades around the Level 2 percentages, allowing higher grades for Level 3 and capping Level 1 at a B, to reflect the greater accessibility of the paper.

The cohort as a whole provided data that suggested many Prep Schools find it difficult to prioritise Latin, and we imagine there must be a challenge in smaller schools in teaching groups of disparate ability. There were a few pleasing exceptions but most candidates struggled for accuracy in the unseen section of all levels, and the grammar questions often revealed a serious lack of understanding of terminology and the grammatical significance of many words. Through knowledge of vocabulary, marks were picked up across the papers, and often to a surprising degree in the English to Latin sentences, but in most cases there was little precision related to actual word endings, and many words were missed out from longer sentences.



Candidates were not helped by some awkwardly worded questions, eg Level 3 Q1bii), and the Level 1 derivation question from 'male' barely registered a mark across the cohort, which was a shame.

GREEK

We are always pleased to see boys sitting Greek. We received seven papers, four of which were very pleasing and three of which suggested the boys had perhaps been pushed for time in their coverage of the syllabus. We tried to award grades positively.

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

We received four papers. They all showed good subject knowledge and contained decent or good written ability and were awarded good grades.