



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit  
State Examinations Commission**

**JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2008**

**FRENCH**

**ORDINARY LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT  
HIGHER LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT**

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## 1. General Introduction

### 1.1 The Syllabus

The current syllabus for Junior Certificate French was introduced in 1993 and examined for the first time in 1995. While it is examined at two levels, Higher and Ordinary, the syllabus is common to both. It is a communicative syllabus, organised around the needs, expectations and interests which pupils bring to the foreign language classroom. Tasks assessed involve both productive use of the language (oral and written skills) as well as receptive use (reading and listening comprehension).

### 1.2 The Examination

The Junior Certificate Examination in French, at both levels, comprises four components: an aural test, a written paper containing both reading comprehension material and a written production section, and an optional oral examination. The marks allocated are as follows:

	Higher Level	Ordinary Level
Part I – Listening Comprehension	140 marks	140 marks
Part II – Reading Comprehension	100 marks	120 marks
Part III – Written Expression	80 marks	60 marks
Total:	320 marks	320 marks
Oral Examination (Optional)	80 marks	80 marks
Total:	400 marks	400 marks

The vast majority of students sit the written paper only. Candidates who do not choose to sit the optional Oral Examination are marked out of a total of 320 marks.

#### 1.2.1 Oral Examination

This examination is optional and school based, in that it is administered and assessed by the candidate's teacher. The test lasts between five and ten minutes and teachers may choose to use their own format or to use the format suggested by the SEC. This comprises two parts:

- (a) General Questions      32 marks (8 x 4 marks)
- (b) Role Plays              48 marks (2 x 24 marks)

Where a teacher chooses to use his / her own format, a copy of this and the marking scheme are forwarded to the State Examinations Commission. Candidates are recorded, and the recordings are retained in the schools or may be forwarded to the Commission, as requested.

## 1.2.2 Written Examination

This examination lasts two and a half hours for both Higher and Ordinary Level candidates. The paper comprises three sections, as follows:

**Section I - Listening Comprehension:** In this section, normally divided into five sub-sections, candidates are required to listen to a number of announcements, news bulletins, conversations or telephone messages in French and to answer the accompanying questions in Irish or English. They are assessed on their ability to comprehend the material.

**Section II - Reading Comprehension:** This section comprises a number and variety of reading comprehension exercises. Material may include warning and information signs and notices, menus, advertisements, short newspaper or magazine reports, letters, forms and transcriptions of conversations. Candidates are assessed on their ability to understand the main elements.

**Section III - Written Production:** This section tests written productive skills. Candidates are required to answer two questions. One question requires them to write a letter in French, based on a number of stimuli. This may be a short personal letter or a more formal letter, where the candidate is writing for information or making a booking. The second question requires the candidate to write a postcard or a note, again based on stimuli provided. Candidates are assessed on their ability to respond appropriately and accurately in French.

## 1.3 Candidature

56,792 candidates sat the Junior Certificate examination in 2008. 34,147 candidates presented for French which represents 64.6% of the total Junior Certificate candidature. 976 candidates were awarded a bonus for answering through Irish. The breakdown between Higher and Ordinary Level candidates in 2008 was broadly similar to that of previous years, as the following table indicates.

Year	Total French candidature	Higher Level	% of JC French candidature	Ordinary Level	% of JC French candidature
2006	35,701	23,939	67.1%	11,762	32.9%
2007	35,039	24,007	68.5%	11,032	31.5%
<b>2008</b>	<b>34,147</b>	<b>23,585</b>	<b>69.1%</b>	<b>10,562</b>	<b>30.9%</b>

Table 1: Junior Certificate French participation rates 2006-2008.

### 1.3.1 Numbers taking the optional Oral examination

The number of candidates taking the optional Oral examination rose in 2008, with a total number of 874 students (2.6%) choosing this option, compared with 783 candidates (2.2%) in 2007 and 505 candidates (1.4%) in 2006.

### 1.3.2 Ordinary Level optional Oral candidates

215 candidates sat the optional oral examination at Ordinary Level in 2008, a slight increase over the previous year. The number of candidates and results achieved are set out in the table below.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
2006	95	2.1	32.6	33.7	30.5	1.1	0.0
2007	190	1.1	26.8	33.2	26.3	12.1	0.5
<b>2008</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>40.5</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.5</b>

Table 2: Percentage results for Ordinary Level candidates taking the Optional Oral, 2006-2008.  
(Grade data represent percentages.)

### 1.3.3 Higher Level optional Oral candidates

659 candidates sat the optional oral examination at Higher Level in 2008, with the number increasing each year since 2006. The 2008 results were broadly in line with those of the two previous years.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
2006	410	16.6	30.0	33.9	16.8	2.7	0.0
2007	593	19.1	30.5	32.9	16.2	1.2	0.2
<b>2008</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Table 3: Percentage results for Higher Level candidates taking the Optional Oral, 2006-2008.  
(Grade data represent percentages.)

## 2. Ordinary Level

### 2.1 Introduction

The analysis of candidate performance and the conclusions and recommendations contained within this report are based on the detailed reports submitted by the Assistant Examiners, Advising Examiners, and the Chief Advising Examiner at Ordinary Level. It is hoped that this report will prove helpful to both teachers and students in their classroom practice, and in their preparation for future examinations.

This report should be read in conjunction with the following materials:

- The Junior Certificate French syllabus, contained in Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools
- The 2008 Junior Certificate Ordinary Level Written Paper and Listening Comprehension CD
- The 2008 Marking Scheme for the Written Paper ([www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie))
- The State Examinations Commission Circular S61/01 and *Guidelines for the Administration and Marking of the Optional School-based Oral Test*

### 2.2 Performance of Candidates

A total of 10,562 candidates sat the 2008 French examination at Ordinary Level. Of these, only 215 presented for the optional oral examination, 2% of the total candidature. The total number of candidates sitting French at this level shows a slight decrease on the 2007 figure.

Year	Total	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2006	11,762	3.0	22.6	31.6	28.4	11.6	2.7	0.1
2007	11,032	3.2	22.0	32.9	28.1	11.3	2.4	0.1
<b>2008</b>	<b>10,562</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>0.1</b>

Table 4: Performance of Ordinary Level candidates from 2006 to 2008.  
(Grade data represent percentages.)

The results for 2008 showed a slight improvement over the two previous years. The combined ABC result was 61.7%, compared with 58.1% in 2007. The combined EFNG result was 10.1%, compared with 13.8% in 2007.

## 2.3 Analysis of Candidate Performance

### 2.3.1 Section 1 – Listening Comprehension

There are five parts in this section, A, B, C, D and E, with a total of 140 marks available. Examiners generally noted that this section of the paper was very well answered this year, with most candidates attempting every question.

#### Section A – Dialogues

This section was answered well. The majority of candidates answered at least two of the three questions well. Some had a problem recognising the fruit mentioned in question 1. In question 3, some candidates had difficulty understanding the terms *porte-monnaie* and *argent*.

#### Section B – Personal Presentations

Most candidates scored at least 30 marks here. The vocabulary required was straightforward, and candidates were familiar with the core topics such as numbers, months, school subjects, and animals.

First speaker: *Frédéric*

The question on Frédéric's age was well answered. Incorrect answers were commonly 17 and 15. Most candidates also correctly answered the number of sisters. For the school subject, 'English' was the most common correct answer, with a small minority giving 'History'. 'Maths' was the most common incorrect answer, perhaps because candidates mistook the word *matière*. The question on Frédéric's future career posed a problem to many candidates, who mistakenly gave 'go to university', 'doctor' or 'teacher' as their answer. Most candidates recognised at least one of the animals mentioned, with 'dog' the most common correct answer. Very few candidates gave the second correct answer 'mouse / mice'. The word 'cat' was the most common incorrect answer.

Second speaker: *Victorine*

Many candidates had difficulty finding the two elements needed for Victorine's birthday. They either failed to recognise the month of March, confusing it with May, or else had the date wrong by one digit. Candidates also had difficulty with the word *coiffeuse*. Many simply wrote 'salon', or else gave an incorrect answer such as 'chauffeur' or 'taxi-driver'. Quite a few candidates did not understand the phrase *en voiture* and answers such as 'walks', 'cycles' or 'bus' were encountered. The type of film which Victorine liked was generally well answered, as was one detail about Kevin. The most common correct answers were 'sporty' or 'tall/big'. Very few candidates wrote that 'she met him last year' or 'he's her boyfriend'.

### **Section C – Conversations**

Q.1 Well answered.

Q.2 Many candidates had difficulty spelling the surname correctly and only a minority got all three letters correct. Candidates appeared to have difficulty distinguishing between the sounds of the letters “i” and “e” in French. Most candidates understood “h” and “u”.

Q.3 This was very well answered. The majority of candidates recognised the direction ‘take the first street on the right’.

Q.4 Many candidates had difficulty with the phone number and two correct sets of digits were rarely given. However, most managed to get one set of digits correct.

Q.5 This was well answered

### **Section D – Extended Conversation**

Q.1 Generally well answered. The most common incorrect answer was ‘in the country’.

Q.2 Candidates had some difficulty here, as most did not recognise the word *Pâques*.

Q.3 Most candidates understood the word *chocolat* here. ‘Drinking chocolate’ was sometimes incorrectly given. Some candidates knew the second correct option *vin*, but no candidate gave the more difficult third correct option of ‘scarf’.

Q.4 Although section (i) was generally well-answered, some candidates were confused about the correct day of the week. ‘Tuesdays’ and ‘Saturdays’ were the most common incorrect answer. Candidates had difficulty also with section (ii) and the most common incorrect answer was ‘do the washing up’.

### **Section E – News Items**

Q.1 This was well answered in general, but quite a few candidates appeared to have difficulty with the higher numbers.

Q.2 This was also well answered. Candidates grasped the idea of ‘school’, which was well conveyed by words like *collège*, *élèves*, *cour* and *récréation*.

Q.3 Well answered. The correct country, *Portugal*, caused little difficulty.

Q.4 Generally well answered. Candidates generally understood the reference to *jardinage*.

Q.5 Very few candidates got both pieces of weather correct. The main difficulty was with 'windy' as *vent* was not recognized. Most candidates got 'sunny'. There were some cases where candidates had answers in the wrong place or in the wrong order.

### 2.3.2 Section II - Reading Comprehension

This section was generally well answered. The majority of candidates attempted all questions. However, some candidates did not attempt all the questions in 6, 7 and 8.

Q.1 Very well answered. Candidates rarely got less than eight of the ten sections right, and most got full marks. There was some confusion with the numbers 10 and 8. The vocabulary of *consigne automatique*, *escalier* and *salle d'informatique* proved challenging.

Q.2 Generally well answered. Some candidates gave both the opening and closing times of the castle. The cost of entry did not pose problems for candidates. The most common incorrect answers for the day of the week were 'Tuesday' and 'Friday'. *Équitation* was understood by many candidates.

Q.3 The recipe was very well answered. Candidates rarely ticked more than the four ingredients required. 'Salt' was the word with which they had most difficulty. Frequent incorrect answers were 'cherries', 'water' and 'lemon'.

Q.4 Generally well answered, displaying the candidates' ability to understand school-related matters. *Nolwenn* and *Benoît* were the most challenging, due to misunderstanding of the vocabulary *emploi du temps* and *ordinateur*.

Q.5 Most candidates answered at least three of the four questions correctly. The recognition of key words such as *chapeau*, *médecin*, *crème solaire*, *douche* and *montagne* posed few problems. Section 5 was sometimes wrongly given for answer (b) as some candidates confused the word *soleil* with *lunettes de soleil*.

Q.6 The three sections in this question proved more challenging. Candidates had difficulty here with the parts of the body. 'Leg' was the most frequent correct answer while 'back' was rarely given. The most frequent incorrect answer was 'arm'. There was evidence of guesswork in many answers. The question on the *Concours de la BD* was not well answered. It was felt that many candidates looked at the illustration for their answer rather than reading the text, and therefore incorrectly chose 'a deck of cards'. The question on text messages proved problematic as many candidates did not realise that the answer should be in English and wrote down the words *Joyeux Noël*. The text spelling was not as challenging, although some candidates wrote 'kaz pour maison' rather than the word 'kaz' on its own.

Q.7 Few candidates got full marks in this question, as many had difficulty with the word *gourmand* and often gave an incorrect answer. Candidates generally understood that Clément lived with his parents, but sometimes incorrectly added an extra element, such as 'with his sister'. The article of clothing was the least well answered question on

the reading comprehension and the correct answer 'socks' was rarely given. The most frequent incorrect answers were 'shoes', 'rugby gear' and 'springboks'.

Q.8 Many candidates got the correct answer 'primary teacher'. The most frequent incorrect answer was 'nurse'. The question on colour was well answered, with 'white' being given more often than 'yellow'. The incorrect word 'black' was sometimes given. The words *appareil photo* posed some difficulty for candidates. Many answered 'photo' or 'picture'. Most candidates recognised the phrase *les grandes villes* and answered the final question correctly.

### 2.3.3 Section III – Written Expression

#### Q.1 – Letter

Format: very few candidates scored the full 8 marks for format. Some used an Irish style address and many lost marks because of incorrect accents and agreements. In some cases, the format was the only part of the letter attempted.

Communicative Tasks / Accuracy of Expression: Most candidates attempted at least three of the four points required. Many attempted five or six, with a few rare candidates attempting all nine points.

P.1 A popular choice and generally well answered. There was some difficulty with the spelling of the word *lettre* and with the agreement of *dernière*, with many candidates simply omitting the translation of 'last'.

P.2 This point was not a popular option, and was rarely successfully attempted. Candidates generally knew the word *anniversaire* but had difficulty in formulating the question.

P.3 This point was rarely attempted, and proved challenging. Candidates did not appear to be familiar with the word *argent (de poche)* or with the use of the verb *recevoir*. Candidates attempted to get round this difficulty by using *j'ai* or *je suis* with a figure and a euro symbol.

P.4 It was rare to get the verb *acheter* in any form and certainly not in the correct tense. Most attempts were limited to mentioning something bought.

P.5 This was a very popular choice. Most candidates used *j'adore / j'aime* followed by the name of a television programme. Few were able to say *mon émission préférée* or to actually give information about the programme. Common errors were the use of the words 'tv' and 'programme'.

P.6 Candidates who attempted this point often lacked the basic vocabulary. The word *vaisselle* was spelled incorrectly, and Irish words like 'seomra' or 'chistin' were sometimes used. Many candidates also had difficulty with the verb, writing *je faire* or omitting the *je*.

P.7 This was a popular point, and many candidates did well. Some displayed knowledge of the future tense, e.g. *je vais aller* and used *en été*, *en août* or *pour les grandes vacances* to good effect. Many candidates were capable of saying where they were going with their family or that they would be working in the *supermarché*.

P.8 This was another popular point. Candidates generally used *j'adore* / *j'aime* with a school subject. There were difficulties with the idea of 'favourite' and problems arose when candidates tried to develop the point. Many candidates borrowed from Q.4 of the Reading Comprehension, but were unable to manipulate the material correctly.

P.9 Few candidates attempted this point, suggesting that they lacked the relevant clothing vocabulary. It was rare to get any form of the verb *porter*. Where this question was attempted, there was generally a list of varied items of clothing and colours, with spelling and agreements incorrect. The final "e" was frequently omitted from *uniforme*.

## **Q.2 (a) Postcard**

This was the more popular of the two options, although it appeared that a greater number of candidates than usual attempted the note this year.

P.A Very few candidates attempted this point, and those who did had difficulty with the words *vacances* or *séjour*.

P.1 Very few candidates seemed to know the phrase *faire du camping*. Most used *je suis* instead of *je fais*. There was confusion between *camping* and *campagne*. The words *je camping* / *me camping* were often used.

P.2 This point was generally well answered. Although the word *soleil*, when used, was often spelt wrongly, most candidates were capable of expressing *il fait beau*, with many developing the point nicely.

P.3 A significant number of candidates attempted this point, borrowing vocabulary from Q.3 of the Reading Comprehension. Few candidates were able to use *du* / *de la*, etc. after the verb *manger*.

P.4 Candidates had some difficulty with this point. Those who attempted it generally mentioned an activity but rarely mentioned *après-midi*. Many also used the passé composé instead of the present tense.

## **Q.2 (b) Note**

This was less popular than the postcard.

P.A. This was not attempted.

P.1 Generally well attempted. Candidates had some difficulty with the verb *aller*. There were also problems with the gender and spelling of *cinéma* and with the preposition *au*.

P.2 Well communicated, and generally rendered simply with *avec* connected to the sentence in point 1. The Irish word “le” was sometimes used instead of *avec*. Many candidates had difficulty with the word *ami/e/s*.

P.3 Most candidates had some difficulty here. They managed to give a method of transport but many did not have an appropriate verb or seem to know expressions such as *je prends le bus*. Many used the word *travailler* to suggest travel, e.g. *je travaïled en voiture*.

P.4 This point was the least well attempted. Candidates had difficulty expressing the future, although there were rare cases of *je serai de retour*. Few candidates managed *à la maison / chez moi* and many made errors expressing the time, e.g. *a 7 pm*.

## 2.4 Conclusions

- The overall performance of candidates in the 2008 examination was in line with that of previous years and there was an improvement in the EFNG rate from 13.8% in 2007 to 10.1% in 2008.
- Examiners reported that candidates engaged well with the 2008 examination and it was apparent that topics such as school, holidays, text messaging, sports heroes and film actresses appealed to the majority of candidates.
- Candidates coped well with the Listening Comprehension passages this year, with most attempting to answer every question.
- Candidates also coped well with the greater part of the Reading Comprehension section, although questions on numbers, clothing and parts of the body caused some problems for a number of candidates.
- Some sections of the Written Expression proved challenging for some candidates. This was particularly evident in the letter, but candidates who had learned the correct format, and who attempted at least four of the required points had ample opportunity to do well.
- Although spelling and grammatical accuracy can be a problem at this level, candidates who kept their answers simple and had a knowledge of basic vocabulary gained marks for written production.

## 2.5 Recommendations to Teachers and Students

Examiners noted a good standard of answering by the 2008 Ordinary Level candidates. This was reflected in improved examination outcomes. The following suggestions may be of value for the future:

### 2.5.1 Recommendations to Teachers

- Encourage students to use French as the means of communication in French class. This will help to improve their knowledge of everyday vocabulary.
- Encourage the students to practise basic core vocabulary, i.e. numbers, the alphabet, parts of the body, clothes, school subjects, family, house, pets, etc.
- Provide plenty of practice in formulating questions. This should assist in improving examination performance.
- Continue to focus on the key verbs of *faire*, *aller*, *avoir* and *être*.
- For the Reading Comprehension section, try to expose students to a wide range of student-centered texts with core vocabulary related to all the themes of the syllabus.
- Ensure that students are familiar with the examination paper and marking scheme, e.g. that marks are not awarded when more than one multiple choice answer is given.
- Encourage students to attempt all questions on the examination paper.
- Encourage students to prepare common phrases for the letter, postcard and note. Stress the importance of the marks for format, and the importance of attempting the written section.
- Remind students to read over their work in the examination and encourage self-correction.
- Refer to the marking schemes on the SEC website [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie).

### 2.5.2 Recommendations to Students

- Ensure that you learn the basic words including, for example, days of the week, dates, numbers, colours, hobbies, family members, clothes, directions, weather forecast, etc.

- Get a vocabulary notebook and write down the vocabulary related to the different topics. Learn, revise and test yourself on this vocabulary regularly.
- Listen to your tapes / CDs often and try to imitate the people speaking. This can be fun and will help you in the examination.
- Pay attention to accuracy of spelling and grammar.
- In the examination, read all the instructions carefully.
- Attempt every question on the paper as, even if you are not completely sure, you have a reasonable chance of gaining marks.
- Read over the Listening Comprehension questions before the recording begins. It will then be easier to select the correct word or phrase once you hear the conversation.
- When answering multiple choice questions in both the Listening and Reading Comprehension sections make sure that whichever letter you write down (*a, b c* or *d*) can be clearly read by the Examiner.
- You don't have to understand every word in the Reading passages as you will normally need to identify only a particular word or phrase. Take the time to read through the texts carefully and always try to make some response.
- Make an attempt at *both* parts of the Written Production, the postcard / message as well as the letter. Short, simple sentences are fine.
- Learn how to set out the letter using the correct convention for opening and signing-off.
- Try out some of the activities on [www.french.ie](http://www.french.ie). Do your best and enjoy the language.

### 3. Higher Level

#### 3.1 Introduction

The analysis of candidate performance and the conclusions and recommendations contained within this report are based on the detailed reports submitted by the Assistant Examiners, Advising Examiners, and the Chief Advising Examiner at Higher Level. It is hoped that this report will prove helpful to both teachers and students in their classroom practice and in their preparation for future examinations.

This report should be read in conjunction with the following materials:

- The Junior Certificate French syllabus, contained in *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*
- The Junior Certificate Higher Level 2008 Written Paper and Listening Comprehension CD
- The Marking Scheme for the Written Paper ([www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie))
- State Examinations Commission Circular S61/01 and *Guidelines for the Administration and Marking of the Optional School-based Oral Test*,

#### 3.2 Performance of Candidates

A total of 23,585 candidates sat the 2008 French examination at Higher Level. Of these, only 659 presented for the optional Oral examination, which represents 2.8% of the total Higher Level candidature. The total number of candidates sitting French at this level shows a slight decrease on the 2007 figure.

The results for 2008 are broadly in line with those of previous years. The combined ABC result was 68.6%, while the combined EFNG result was 5.9%.

Year	Total	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2006	23,939	10.6	26.5	33.0	24.4	4.9	0.6	0.0
2007	24,007	10.1	26.3	32.0	24.7	5.8	1.0	0.0
<b>2008</b>	<b>23,585</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Table 5: Performance of Higher Level candidates from 2006 to 2008.  
(Grade data represent percentages.)

### 3.3 Analysis of Candidate Performance

#### 3.3.1 Section 1 – Listening Comprehension

There are five parts in this section, A, B, C, D and E, with a total of 140 marks available. Answering was very good in Sections A and B. Candidates performed reasonably well in Sections C and D, although there were some recurring difficulties which are detailed below. Candidates handled Section E better in 2008 than in previous years.

##### Section A - Dialogues

The majority of candidates scored full marks in this section.

##### Section B – Personal Presentations

Candidates tended to obtain quite high marks in this section. The vocabulary relating to numbers, school subjects and jobs was well known by most candidates. However, there were some questions which proved challenging for a number of candidates.

First speaker: *Frédéric*

The question on Frédéric's age was generally well answered, but not universally correct, reflecting a continuing problem with numbers for some candidates. 'Seventeen' was a common error. The apartment floor was well answered by most, although 'fourteen' was occasionally given instead of 'four'. There was some difficulty recognising *mois*, with 'every two weeks' commonly given as an incorrect answer. The two school subjects were correctly identified by most candidates, as was Frédéric's future career. Not many, however, could give the reason why the speaker didn't have a dog, indicating a lack of knowledge of the word *interdit*. While most candidates identified *souris*, there was some evidence of guessing here, with 'bird', 'fish', 'cat' and 'dog' being the most popular responses.

Second speaker: *Victorine*

Candidates generally found it more difficult to answer the questions relating to the second speaker than the first. Victorine's birthday month was sometimes written in French. Many candidates answered 'only child' for the family detail, with very few identifying the word *fille* or *je m'entends bien avec*. Many candidates failed to correctly answer 'hairdresser'. 'Salon' was a common wrong answer. A common incorrect reason for why Victorine liked her job was that 'it's interesting', rather than the more specific reason required. There were no problems giving one type of film she liked as *comédie* was easily identified, but *films d'aventure* proved more problematic. 'Romantic' or 'drama' were often given. Most candidates understood where Victorine met her boyfriend, with many candidates correctly writing 'last year while on her holidays'.

### Section 3 – Conversations

Q.1 Whereas most candidates got 1 mark for answering ‘she was sick’, not many achieved the full 3 marks because they did not know *grippe*. Some candidates understood *rester* as ‘to rest’, and *venir te voir* to mean ‘bring the homework’. However, part (b) was well answered by many candidates.

Q.2 Most candidates correctly identified the date. Examiners commented on how well the surname MICHAUD was spelt, indicating a clear improvement in this question over recent years. Difficulties with spelling tended to centre on the vowels, especially the letter “i”.

Q.3 Most candidates got part of the direction correct, i.e. ‘take the first right’, but the majority did not include ‘opposite the butcher’s’ or gave an incorrect detail. ‘Baker’s’ was a common incorrect answer. The obvious confusion between *boucherie* and *boulangerie*, allied to the fact that very few candidates correctly identified *patinoire* in part (a), would indicate a lack of familiarity among some candidates with names of places.

Q.4 Only a very small number of candidates gave the correct answer for *manteau*. The phone number was poorly attempted by many candidates. Candidates were generally able to identify some digits, but not all. *Quatre-vingt-douze* caused the most problems, with ‘82’ sometimes being given.

Q.5 Part (a) was generally correct. In part (b), the 24 hour clock caused some confusion, with ‘9.20’, ‘8.20’ or ‘8.40’ commonly given.

### Section D – Extended Conversation

Q.1 Both parts of the question were generally well answered

Q.2 In part (a), the majority of candidates failed to understand *Pâques*. In part (b), common incorrect answers were ‘gentle’ and ‘kind’. The correct answers of ‘nice’ and ‘shy’ were less in evidence.

Q.3 The majority of candidates failed to understand *imperméable*, and very few gave ‘raincoat’. The most common answer was ‘gifts for the family’. However, most candidates were able to name at least one of the presents Aliette would bring to Ireland. ‘Wine’ and ‘chocolate’ were the most common answers, and ‘scarf’ was given infrequently.

Q.4 Overall, both parts of this question were quite well answered. A common wrong answer for part (b) was ‘she has to pack’.

## Section E – News Items

Q.1 Part (a) of this question proved challenging for many candidates, indicating a lack of knowledge of the higher numbers. The most common error was ‘94’. The country in part (b) was generally correctly given.

Q.2 Part (a) was mostly well answered, with the most common error being ‘during lunch break’. In part (b), very few candidates could identify who captured the snake. The word *pompier*s was problematic for many, and ‘the principal’ and ‘a teacher’ were often incorrectly given.

Q.3 Both parts of this question were very well answered.

Q.4 In part (a), candidates did not have problems with *mardi*. Most candidates choose ‘gardening’ as the answer for part (b).

Q.5 The weather vocabulary proved challenging for many candidates. Most got at least one part of this question right, but *du vent* was often incorrectly translated. Some candidates gave a number of words for the answer, despite the clear instruction to select only one word from the list given.

### 3.3.2 Section II – Reading Comprehension

Q.1 Parts (a) and (b) were generally well answered by all candidates.

Q.2 This question was generally well answered. Most candidates answered (a) correctly, but (b) proved a little more difficult, with candidates occasionally answering ‘help you’. Part (c) was often correct but some candidates missed out one element, e.g. the word *couper* or *légumes*.

Q.3 Parts (a) and (b) were well answered although many candidates did not indicate that the eleven year old boy was the *driver*. In part (c), the verb *aller chercher* appeared to be unfamiliar to many, and was commonly mistaken for ‘to look for’.

Q.4 This type of question is now very familiar to candidates. Most candidates scored full marks here.

Q.5 A common error for part (a) was to incorrectly answer ‘to text’. In part (b) most candidates answered simply ‘to call his mother and did not elaborate further or mention the cancelled class. Most answered ‘she replies’ in part (c). Few candidates appeared to be familiar with the word *dépenser* in part (d), but were able to refer to money or cost.

Q.6 Most candidates understood ‘July and August’ but very few recognised *entre*. In part (b), the most common incorrect answers included ‘people on holidays’ and ‘people who live there’. Part (c) was not handled well by many candidates as they did not recognise the phrase *à côté*. Some translated *je travaille à côté* as ‘I work on the coast’. Part (d) posed no problems for candidates.

Q.7 This was the most difficult question, with only a small minority of candidates scoring full marks. Some word-specific answers proved challenging. Many candidates were unfamiliar with *mari, directeur d'école, la guerre, les journaux, la lune* and *faire des bêtises*.

Q.8 This set of questions was reasonably well answered and overall part (a) posed no problems for the majority of candidates. Vocabulary of colours and clothes seemed well known. Part (c) was also straightforward. However parts (b) and (d) were more difficult for a small number of candidates, and in part (e), few candidates answered the phrase *homme d'affaires* correctly. A common incorrect answer for part (f) was 'on the 15<sup>th</sup> August', with some candidates not translating the word *après*.

Q.9 Despite the relatively straightforward vocabulary in the text, this question caused difficulty for some candidates. In part (a), many seemed to assume that a number of years was required when, in fact, the answer was 'seven days'. Part (b) was well answered but part (c) proved difficult. While candidates tended to grasp the fact that Maud's worst memory was weather-related, many failed to translate *orage* as 'storm'. In part (d), most candidates were able to correctly answer at least one item, with the most common answers being 'rationing water' and 'solitude'. Parts (e), (f) and (g) were quite well answered, although many candidates wrote 'travelling' for *travaille*.

### 3.3.3 Section III – Written Expression

The standard of written French produced by candidates in this section of the examination varied. A very small number of candidates did not attempt this section at all. In some cases, Examiners noted some candidates would have been better advised to take the Ordinary Level paper. However, Examiners also noted that many candidates wrote accurately and with flair.

#### (a) Note

The vocabulary needed for this note was straightforward. However, while most candidates attempted to convey the three points, the note presented a challenge to many candidates. Examiners reported a lack of basic vocabulary on the part of some students, e.g. 'too warm in the house' was rarely communicated properly because candidates did not know the word *trop*. However, despite these shortcomings, Examiners noted some good use of tenses and of idiomatic French, e.g. *je suis sortie avec les enfants, je serai de retour*, etc.

Point 1: A large number of candidates used a stock opening phrase, e.g. *juste un petit mot pour te dire que...* but were unable to reproduce it correctly, or used the incorrect register, addressing Madame Béranger in the familiar form. As well as difficulty in expressing the idea of *trop*, the gender and spelling of *la maison* was often incorrect, while some candidates had difficulties with the use of *chez*.

Point 2: The passé composé tense of *aller* was frequently incorrect, with either the incorrect auxiliary or agreement. *Parc* was sometimes incorrectly spelt, with few

candidates managing the preposition *au*. Some candidates were unable to say 'children', using names or *élèves* or *jeunes* instead, often with the wrong article or possessive.

Point 3: *Retourner* was the most popular verb used, although there were often difficulties with the spelling and the tense. Expressing time correctly proved problematic for many, with frequent errors in the spelling and agreement of the words *heures* and *demie* in evidence.

## **(b) Letter**

Candidates' performance varied significantly in this question. Many candidates demonstrated a broad store of vocabulary, knowledge of the basic rules of French grammar, accurate spelling and an admirable mastery of the language in communicating their ideas clearly and accurately. There were some outstanding examples of clear, concise letters, scoring close to full marks for communication and language. On the other hand, examiners noted a tendency among some candidates to write letters that were too long. This often worked to their disadvantage, as errors accumulated. Other letters were too short, with little expansion of the points. Some candidates used material which appeared to have been learnt off, or transcribed from the comprehension passages, but they were not always able to adapt it to the requirements of the question. A small number of candidates included prepared material, even when it had no relevance to the tasks required.

Format: A number of candidates failed to get the five marks on offer for having the correct format, particularly as this is a requirement every year. Some used an Irish place-name, misspelt the month or wrote it with a capital letter, or had mistakes in the accents on *Amitiés* and *Chère*.

Point 1: In general, this was not well answered by most candidates. Many lacked basic travel vocabulary, e.g. they used *journée* instead of *voyage*, which impeded comprehension of the entire point, or did not know the word *avion*. For example, many candidates said that the journey was good or bad but never mentioned the method of transport they used, the date on which they travelled or their points of departure/arrival.

Point 2: Most candidates engaged well with the theme and were able to develop this point well and refer to the parents' careers, the personalities of the children, etc. However, there were also examples of basic mistakes such as using *être* for age, non-agreement of adjectives, and a lack of basic vocabulary for jobs and family members. Examiners also noted that some candidates had problems distinguishing between the definite and indefinite articles. There were also some indications of a lack of cultural awareness of France and French society. For example, many gave distinctly Irish (or Anglo-American) first names and even surnames to the French family.

Point 3: This point about the French school was handled well by many candidates, and afforded them plenty of opportunity to show their writing competency. Many referred to their favourite subjects, to not wearing a uniform, and even *le Brevet*. There were also references to homework and teachers. Some candidates referred to the length of the

school day, and the fact that there was a canteen in the school but, in general, only a minority of candidates displayed a knowledge of the differences between school in Ireland and school in France. Sometimes Irish was included in the list of school subjects studied in France. Very few candidates used pertinent vocabulary such as *lycée*, *cours*, *cantine*, etc. In some instances, the letter consisted of a list of school subjects or a description of the candidate's own school.

Point 4: This was problematic for many candidates. Many candidates were unable to formulate a question. Instead of *Qu'est-ce que tu fais...* there were instances of *Est tu fais...*, *Que tu fais...*, etc. Other candidates wrote a long paragraph about their own plans for the weekend, and simply added the words *Et toi?* However, Examiners noted that most candidates used *le weekend prochain*.

Point 5: This point did not require any great development and most candidates coped well, having learned off the set phrase *Dis bonjour...* However, the phrase was sometimes marred by not referring directly to the parents as required, or by incorrect prepositions. *Mon regards* was used by many candidates.

### 3.4 Conclusions

- The overall performance of candidates in the 2008 examination was in line with that of previous years.
- Candidates coped well with the Listening Comprehension section this year, and with the news items in Section E in particular.
- Higher numerals caused problems for some candidates, as did items of clothing and names of shops / places.
- Candidates generally coped well with the early passages of the Reading Comprehension section, but questions 7 and 9 proved challenging for some.
- There was variety in the standard of written French. While many candidates showed a high level of competence and accuracy, some candidates had difficulties with vocabulary, spelling and tenses.
- Many candidates were unable to deal with the format of the pen-pal letter, despite this being a requirement in the examination every year.
- There was evidence of a need for increased emphasis on cultural awareness among some candidates.

### **3.5 Recommendations to Teachers and Students**

The standard of answering by the 2008 Higher Level candidates is a tribute to the hard work put in by these candidates and to the comprehensive preparation carried out by their teachers in the classroom. It may be of value to some teachers and to future candidates, to consider the observations below, which are based on the experience of the examiners in 2008.

#### **3.5.1 Recommendations to Teachers**

- Encourage students to use French in the classroom as much as possible.
- Encourage the study of French culture and society. Students should know some basic details about geography, current affairs in France and about its main cultural institutions.
- Ensure an appropriate balance in the practice of all the language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Ensure that students are familiar with the key vocabulary for everyday topics such as numbers, hobbies, food, school, family, weather, travel, clothes, places, etc.
- Encourage the correct use of accents and correct spelling in general.
- Ensure that students are familiar with the present, past and future tenses, and with the basic grammatical elements, i.e. articles, plurals, agreement of adjectives, negation, etc.
- Practise examination technique with Third Year students, basing this on previous years' examination papers. A number of candidates misread questions, answer in the wrong language, lose marks unnecessarily in the letter format, and leave blank spaces rather than attempting questions.
- Encourage students to write more succinctly. Simple, grammatically accurate written work is appropriate at this level.

#### **3.5.2 Recommendations to Students**

- Get a vocabulary notebook and write down the vocabulary related to the different topics. Learn, revise and test yourself on this vocabulary regularly.
- Be aware of common French words that are similar to English words, such as *journée*, *travailler*, *attendre*, *rester*.
- Try to find out as much as you can about France and other French-speaking countries. Get some French magazines aimed at teenagers, look up French sites

on the Internet and watch French TV programmes if you can. This will increase your vocabulary and you will become accustomed to French sounds and accents.

- In the examination itself, always take time to read the questions carefully. Students sometimes answer questions that are not asked (e.g. they answer a “where” question as if it were “when”), or fail to notice important details in the question cues.
- Never leave a question unanswered. Even if your answer is not correct, you do not lose any marks.
- Your written work in Section III does not need to be very long. You should have enough room on the examination paper to fit in your postcard/note and your letter. Aim for quality rather than quantity.
- Know how to lay out a letter correctly and practise writing the opening and closing formulas.
- Remember that for the letter and postcard/note a direct, literal translation is not required. The important thing is to communicate the point, even in simple language.