



EUNOIA JUNIOR COLLEGE  
JC2 Preliminary Examination 2023  
General Certificate of Education Advanced Level  
Higher 1

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## **GENERAL PAPER**

**8807/02**

Paper 2

**28 August 2023**

INSERT

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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### **READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

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**Passage 1.** *Charlie Bing argues that we must strive for excellence.*

1 China's young people are lying to themselves. The viral phenomenon of 'tangping' or lying flat, mirrored in international workplaces by the aptly named 'Great Resignation', has swept the nation's youth. They position it as a rejection of societal pressures to overwork and overachieve, and this act – of doing nothing! – has been lauded by others for taking a stand against the perceived injustice of societal expectations to constantly better themselves and choosing instead to languish in what they believe to be good enough. Another name for what these people call 'good enough'? Mediocrity. There are few images more suited for our acceptance of mediocrity than the passivity of lying flat. In such a position, one has given in to gravity. There is no intention of resisting the pull of stagnation, no potential energy for forward movement, no potential.

2 Their rejection of excellence is no more than an act of cowardice. Those who don't dare to pursue excellence endure mediocre performances because they want to keep the status quo. Mediocrity is their comfort zone, and excellence is alien to their system. When we don't choose excellence, we are choosing mediocrity because we do not care. What is worse is that what we tolerate perpetuates. When we allow mediocre performances to

continue, we signal that  
fester in mediocrity is okay.

- 3 And yet, our societies cannot afford to simply be okay. We need exceptionally smart and talented people. They are the ones who push civilisation forward: they cure diseases, they make discoveries and they compose brilliant music and artwork that move millions of people. Nothing of any real significance happens to people who linger in the status quo. If we fall for the complacency of 'good enough', we lose out on innumerable opportunities to better our lives. All our social institutions thrive on the spark that comes from the pursuit of excellence. Our schools and workplaces must embolden us to aspire to greater heights. Our leaders should be expected to chart a grand course for our societies, and then actually live up to their promises. The way forward has always been clear – excel, or be left behind.

- 4 Besides, mediocrity is a privilege. Minority artists, for example, carry a burden of representation that renders their individual failures representative of the group. Mediocrity, the freedom to make average or worse material and continue to enjoy opportunities, is reserved for the few who have the license to fail without fear. When so many rise to the daily struggle of seeking excellence so as not to let down their communities, merely settling for mediocrity is downright disrespectful. Pursuing excellence allows us to live up to the precious potential gifted to us by human biology and history. With such advantages, how dare we not

be great? Settling for mediocrity is abdicating our responsibility to be better. The world is already filled with mediocrity, and we should not settle for adding more white noise.

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Sure, pursuing excellence does have its costs, usually in the form of sacrifices and foregoing short-term gratification. Despite this, the pursuit of excellence is an attitude that cultivates a fertile field for success. It presupposes an openness to feedback, as we open ourselves to evaluation and hence improvement. Many years ago, while American car manufacturers avoided mistakes on their assembly lines by slowing down and introducing slack, the Japanese manufacturers sought breakdowns by putting the line to its paces and pushing its boundaries, receiving feedback by studying the breakdowns, taking corrective action, and then pushing boundaries again. Today, the rigour of the production process has translated into the excellence of the product, and Japanese vehicles are renowned for their reliability. Pursuing excellence also staves off the temptations of procrastination and distraction, reducing stress in our lives when we finish what needs to be done, and leaves no reason to doubt its quality.

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Lapsing into mediocrity stems from a self-defeating fear of failure. To the souls resigned to kidding themselves about the bravery of their (lack of) movement, I say, stand up. Stand against the irony of being so paralysed by the desire to not fall short of one's own

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expectations that we lower our expectations to the ground.

**Passage 2.** *André Spicer argues that we should embrace being good enough.*

- 1 We live in a society obsessed with being exceptional. Whether it is as workers, parents, or students, we are expected to be outstanding. We must strive to be the best employee, craft an outstanding body, have an amazing relationship, all while being exceptionally happy. Even the most ordinary institutions also are expected to be nothing less than excellent. Companies want to be “world class” and schools have become “academies of excellence”. Being good enough is seen as simply not good enough. 5
- 2 Our quest to be excellent has many positive consequences, but it also can be damaging. Lionising excellence can create huge inequalities. When high performers are showered with rewards, the great mass of us who are average miss out. This can spark resentment in those who feel that they do not measure up. But the obsession with being exceptional does not just harm the great mass of average people. It can also do damage to people at the top as well. Recent research on “insecure overachievers” has found that a burning drive to always be outstanding often leaves even the most exceptional performers feeling like they are not good enough. This can create severe damaging physical and mental health problems. Ultimately, the quest to be outstanding means all of us feel like we will never measure up. 10 15
- 3 We should give up our obsession with greatness and instead try to build a good enough life that means being willing and able to respond to others’ demands, but also being willing to recognise our own limitations and to say no once in a while. We are being good enough to our bodies when we eat well and exercise regularly, but also recognise that there is more to life than the gym and diet smoothies. We are good-enough citizens if we are willing to do our duties like voting and paying taxes, but we are also willing to push back if we do not agree with our government. 20
- 4 Being good enough does not just apply to our individual lives. It also can inform how we think about our institutions. Instead of hoping that our workplaces, schools, or governments are all outstanding, perhaps we should try to make them good enough. Good-enough workplaces would give employees a decent wage and opportunities to develop. But they would not make outlandish promises about being everything for staff, nor would they make outlandish demands on them. Good-enough schools provide a safe and stimulating environment for students to learn in, but they would not do the learning for them. Good-enough healthcare would provide the support we need when we are ill, but it does not constantly intrude into people’s lives to ensure they are well. 25 30
- 5 Living a good-enough life may not sound as inspiring as striving for excellence. But embracing the frustrations that come along with just being good enough is a vital part of living a life in which we feel safe but are also able to become absorbed in projects that mean something to us. In that way, being good enough is better than trying to be extraordinary. 35

