When studying Gerard Manley Hopkins’ work, it is essential to consider the poet’s themes and demonstrate an awareness of his characteristic language use. The underlying nature of the examination question is the ‘invitation to the candidates to engage with the poems themselves’.

‘Hopkins’ unique poetic style illustrates his conflict with what he regards as basic truths.’
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the above statement?
Support your answer with reference to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins on your course.

Marking Scheme Guidelines
Reward responses that show clear evidence of engagement with ‘unique poetic style’ and ‘basic truths’ (though not necessarily equally) in Hopkins’ poetry. Allow that ‘illustrate his conflict’ may be addressed explicitly or implicitly.
Code PS for ‘unique poetic style’.
Code BT for ‘basic truths’.

Indicative material:
• graphic imagery/symbols and sound effects express deep convictions
• strong salute to nature is persuasive evidence of God’s presence
• ‘Terrible sonnets’ show frustration and anger with personal faith
• dramatic/disconcerting language expresses search for spiritual meaning
• syntax, compound words, sprung rhythm, inscape reveal poet’s feelings, etc.

Sample Paragraph 1
I don’t think Hopkins is struggling in his Bright Sonnets. I think he is celebrating nature. ‘Spring’ is all about his favourite time of year. But Hopkins is disturbed to think of how sin has ruined the purity of God’s creation. He describes the rush of energy, ‘wheeling weeds’, ‘heavenly thrush eggs’. He even thinks girl and boys are full of ‘Mayday’. I think he is just enjoying nature just like the ‘galloping lambs’, but he is never totally at ease in this world.
Examiner’s Comment

While this short paragraph includes some general references to the poet’s feelings and style, the points lack development. Expression is note-like and awkward. Quotations are careless, e.g. ‘wheeling weeds’, and lacking context and follow-up commentary, e.g. ‘I think he is just enjoying nature like the “galloping lambs”’. A very basic, unsuccessful response.

Sample Paragraph 2

Hopkins believed that our earthly beauty must be crushed so that our heavenly glory can be released. This, Hopkins thought, is the paradox at the centre of Christ’s mission on earth. Physically the crucifixion of Christ was a failure, but spiritually it was a triumph, because it enabled mankind to be saved. Hopkins captures the physical magnificence of the windhover in its natural habitat, ‘daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn falcon’. I found the alliteration and compound words really accentuated the wonder of the bodily beauty of the bird. Hopkins’ clever use of verbs, ‘the hurl and gliding’, celebrates the bird’s skill. Smooth alliteration and use of simile shows the bird’s mastery of its environment, ‘As a skate’s wheel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend’. A dramatic monosyllabic verb commands the subjection to the will of Christ, ‘Buckle!’ Then, the poet is convinced, a more brilliant beauty will be unfurled, ‘a billion/Times told lovelier’. I think he uses intense verbs in the last line to underline his belief in the sacrifice required, ‘Fall, gall’ and ‘gash’. This is the explosion of pain and blood in the spear-wound. Only then Hopkins has confidence that true loveliness is released and ‘blue-bleak’ becomes ‘gash-vermilion’.

Examiner’s Comment

Both tasks, ‘unique poetic style’ and ‘basic truths’, are competently discussed in this excellent top-grade response. Clear evidence of personal engagement enhances the quality of the discussion: ‘I found the alliteration and compound words really accentuated the wonder of the bodily beauty of the bird’. The command of language at the conclusion is particularly impressive: ‘This is the explosion of pain and blood in the spear-wound’.