

Global learning with geography

A high-quality geography education should inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people that will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

Opening line of the National Curriculum for geography

The new national curriculum, for first teaching from September 2014, lays out the geographical knowledge, understanding and skills that teachers should include within their schemes of work across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. In common with the other statutory subjects the National Curriculum for geography has the following sections:

- Purpose of study
- Aims
- Attainment targets
- Subject content
 - Locational Knowledge
 - Place Knowledge
 - Human and Physical Geography
 - Geographical Skills and Fieldwork

Robust and secure knowledge is vital if geography is to make a significant contribution to young people's ability to view and understanding the world at different scales and from different geographical perspectives. However, it is all these four sections taken together which constitute the full curriculum, not *just* the subject content. The temptation for some teachers, possibly non-specialists without a background in geography, may be to move immediately to the subject content section for their respective Key Stage to discover 'what' they need to teach. However, the Society would strongly recommend that all teachers fully review the purpose of study, aims and content sections of the curriculum - as well as the respective Key Stages which precede or follow their own year groups.

For example, both the Purpose of Study and Aim section illustrate the value of geography; signal the importance of interconnections and change; recognise places of global significance; and the need collect analyse and interpret different types of geographical information through the use of fieldwork and maps and other sources. Such a review, which could form the basis of a departmental meeting or part of an in-service day, will help develop a clearer understanding of the conceptual framing of the subject; what is and how it can help young people better understand the world; its different approaches and also how the subject progresses through the primary and secondary years.

Key Stages

In very broad terms the different stages can be described in the following ways:

- *Key Stage 1*: a focus on using geographical vocabulary correctly



- *Key Stage 2*: the description and understanding of key aspects of human and physical geography
- *Key Stage 3*: a focus on the key processes in human and physical geography.

This conceptual progression develops through the respective sections on Locational and Place Knowledge, Human and Physical Geography and Geographical Skills and Fieldwork.

Example progression

For example, there is a clear progression in the coverage of Human and Physical Geography:

Key Stage 1: Identify seasonal and daily weather patterns in the United Kingdom and the location of hot and cold areas of the world in relation to the Equator and the North and South Poles, and use basic geographical vocabulary to refer to:

- key physical features, including: beach, cliff, coast, forest, hill, mountain, sea, ocean, river, soil, valley, vegetation, season and weather
- key human features, including: city, town, village, factory, farm, house, office, port, harbour and shop

Key Stage 2: Describe and understand key aspects of:

- physical geography, including: climate zones, biomes and vegetation belts, rivers, mountains, volcanoes and earthquakes, and the water cycle
- human geography, including: types of settlement and land use, economic activity including trade links, and the distribution of natural resources including energy, food, minerals and water

Key Stage 3: Understand, through the use of detailed place-based exemplars at a variety of scales, the key processes in:

- physical geography relating to: geological timescales and plate tectonics; rocks, weathering and soils; weather and climate, including the change in climate from the Ice Age to the present; and glaciation, hydrology and coasts
- human geography relating to: population and urbanisation; international development; economic activity in the primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sectors; and the use of natural resources
- understand how human and physical processes interact to influence, and change landscapes, environments and the climate; and how human activity relies on effective functioning of natural systems

Interconnected content

The potential danger with a focus just on the subject content, and particularly seeing its sections as distinct and separate, is that this can inadvertently reduce geography to a simple and unconnected list of 'what is where'. The Society would argue that it is the combination of locational and place knowledge, with the human and physical processes, and geographical skills and fieldwork which will allow pupils to move from the 'what is where' to a fuller understanding of the geographical 'how and why'. Such an approach rightly demands that the study of places, and the broader geographical and locational contexts, is not divorced from an understanding of the geographical features and processes which give them their characteristics, link them with other places and bring about change.

So there is the need, as already demonstrated in many leading schools, to set the understanding of geographical processes within places; to connect such places within their wider locational and geographical context; and to explore how geographical processes combine and interlink to bring about change. As the curriculum identifies; “Geographical knowledge, understanding and skills provide the framework and approaches that explain how the Earth’s features at different scales are shaped, interconnected and change over time.”

Geographical fieldwork

The curriculum also identifies a statutory requirement for geographical fieldwork which progresses through the stages. This starts with the study the geography of the school and its grounds and the key human and physical features of its surrounding environment at Key Stage 1. It then develops to the use of fieldwork to observe, measure, record and present the human and physical features in the local area using a range of methods, including sketch maps, plans and graphs, and digital technologies at Key Stage 2 and at Key Stage 3 requires fieldwork in contrasting locations to collect, analyse and draw conclusions from geographical data, using multiple sources of increasingly complex information. It is through such experiences, be it a winter’s walk around the play-ground for 6 year olds or teenagers using GIS to map their local area, through which pupils can gather their own geographical data and apply first-hand what they have learnt in the classroom to the ‘real-word’.

The classroom is a jumping off point not an end point for education how can you know how this land was shaped and formed, and how choices that people made in the past determine the lives we live now, unless you’ve had the chance to study geography and spend some time seeing how the world (is) shaped?

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education (15 January 2014)

Indeed, there are probably few better ways to help youngsters become more knowledgeable, more engaged with and perhaps even more respectful of their local surrounding, environments and communities than to actually get them studying their local area – from its historical geography to current social, environmental and economic processes shaping the places they live in. With the publication of the National Curriculum, the debates about what should be included have now been settled, although there is of course no restriction on the teaching of topics which might extend beyond the formal requirements of the curriculum. The baton has now been passed over to teachers to implement a re-calibrated course for geography which can incorporate existing good practice, refine existing schemes of work, draw on external support and develop new materials where necessary.

Further support

- [Royal Geographical Society \(with IBG\)](#)
- [National Curriculum for Geography](#)
- [Barefoot Books](#)
- [Esri UK](#)
- [Field Studies Council](#)
- [Geographical Association](#)
- [Ofsted](#)
- [Ordnance Survey](#)
- [Phillips Atlases](#)