Progression in geographical fieldwork experiences

Julia Tanner

In this article Julia reminds us why fieldwork is such a valuable and vital component of high-quality geography, and provides us with practical guidance for effective progression.

Recent Ofsted reports suggest that both the use of the local area and development of fieldwork skills are weak in many primary schools. This article outlines a framework for progression in fieldwork, suggesting opportunities pupils should have in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS – ages 3–5), KS1 (ages 5–7), Lower KS2 (ages 7–9) and Upper KS2 (ages 9–11). For each age range, it identifies:

- possible geographical issues and themes for investigation through fieldwork approaches
- possible locations and sites for fieldwork activities
- a range of fieldwork techniques for observing, recording, analysing and presenting fieldwork data.

The purpose of this framework is to offer guidance to teachers and schools in planning for meaningful fieldwork experiences that are integral to a stimulating, coherent and progressive geography curriculum. The framework is laid out on pages 16–17 and is also available to download as an online extra along with an 'auditing your local area' sheet (see web panel). This article supports the framework by defining the spectrum of fieldwork experiences primary-aged pupils should experience, by considering the power of enquiry-led fieldwork as a pedagogical approach, and by exploring and analysing the nature of progression in fieldwork. It also provides details of useful resources to support teachers' planning for fieldwork experiences.

A spectrum of fieldwork experiences

Fieldwork experiences bring learning alive across the curriculum. In geography, purposeful fieldwork experiences are engaging and stimulating, inspiring in pupils 'a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people' (DfE, 2014).

Fieldwork can include a range of ways of coming to know a place, from holistic experiences that nurture pupils' sense of place to building their knowledge and understanding of the physical and human geographical processes that shape our environment. This spectrum is illustrated in Figure 1. Open-ended explorations involving immersion, sensory exploration, playing, wondering and affective engagement nurture pupils' sense of place (Witt and Clarke, 2020), while more structured investigations develop pupils' core locational and place knowledge, through opportunities to 'observe, measure, record and present' geographical information (DfE, 2014).

The power of enquiry-led fieldwork

Fieldwork empowers pupils. It offers endless opportunities for authentic learning activities, which are themselves empowering for pupils because they offer real purposes, real audiences and (ideally) outcomes in the real world (Tanner, 2019, p. 77). Every school's site and local area abounds with issues for potential investigation, from site problems with litter, parking or plastic use, to proposals for local developments or facilities improvements, and much broader questions of environmental quality and sustainability. Investigating real life issues ensures that pupils have a genuine 'need to know' the answers to the questions the enquiry will generate (Roberts, 2013). Such authentic learning activities are motivating for pupils, especially where, from the outset, they know that they will report their findings to a relevant, real audience – be it their peers, the Head teacher, school governors, local officials/politicians, or the wider community. It can provide the impetus for practical action or campaigning to change things for the better, ensuring pupils develop a sense of agency as local and global citizens who can make a difference.

Fieldwork also empowers pupils by affording a fantastic context for the development of enquiry skills and specific geographical knowledge and understanding.

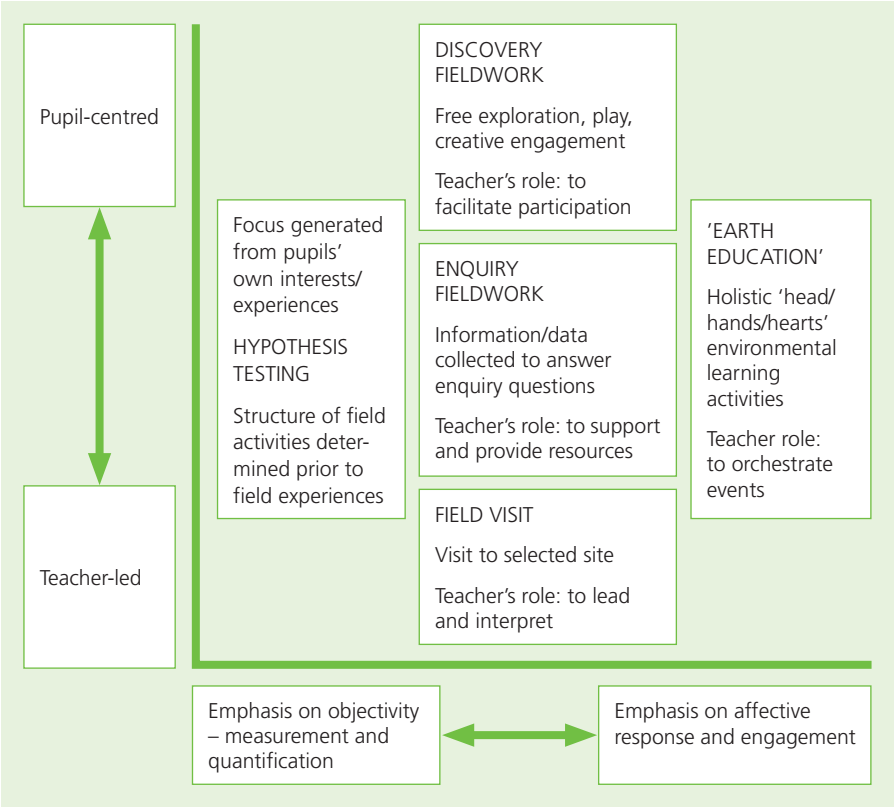

Figure 1: A classification of fieldwork experiences. After: Kinder, 2013 and Job, 1996.

What do we already **KNOW**?

What do we **WANT** to know?

HOW can we find out?

What have we **LEARNT**?

Figure 2: The KWHL grid.

First, meaningful fieldwork is embedded in an enquiry approach, which provides pupils with a model of the enquiry process and associated enquiry skills. These can be applied in a variety of other subject areas, especially history and science. In enquiries, eliciting what pupils already know or feel about the topic to be investigated is a powerful starting point. It engages pupils by valuing their existing knowledge and opinions, and provides an excellent baseline for later reflection and evaluation of what pupils have learnt. A group or whole-class KWHL grid (Figure 2) is a powerful device for structuring and recording an enquiry as it progresses from initial thoughts to conclusions.

An enquiry approach can be applied across the curriculum and used to investigate a range of topics and issues. In geography, the complete enquiry cycle involves distinct stages: establishing a 'need to know', asking questions, collaborating and selecting how to organise the investigation, carrying out the investigation, reflecting on the results or outcomes, communicating what has been learnt to someone, and evaluating the whole process (Figure 3). A copy of this diagram is available to download for use when planning (see web panel).

Second, meaningful fieldwork builds, through memorable real-life learning activities, the geographical knowledge that is essential for pupils' understanding of the geographical processes that shape their environment. Fieldwork involves 'doing geography', and through this active learning, makes otherwise abstract geographical concepts concrete. Pupils who have observed a fast-flowing stream *in situ* are likely to have a much better understanding of the power of water to erode, transport and deposit material than those who have only read about it, studied a diagram or watched a video. Equally, pupils who have interviewed bus users about proposed reductions in local bus services will gain a vivid understanding of how public transport provision is critical. For example, for people to get to essential services (such as food shops and health centres) or to access education, work and leisure opportunities.

Progression in fieldwork experiences

Progression in fieldwork is concerned with pupils' competence in geographical enquiry, and the development and application of their skills in collecting and presenting fieldwork data (GA, 2020). As pupils move through the primary school, they should have opportunities to:

- undertake fieldwork in the school grounds, local area and increasingly unfamiliar environments
- ask and answer increasingly more complex geographical questions
- use increasingly specific vocabulary to name and describe the features they observe
- employ an increasingly sophisticated range of techniques to collect, analyse, evaluate and communicate geographical data.

The Framework for Progression in Geographical Fieldwork Experiences (see pages 16–17) illustrates how this progression can be embedded in a school curriculum plan. It exemplifies the range of experiences pupils should encounter and the fieldwork techniques they should have opportunities to learn, apply, practise and evaluate.

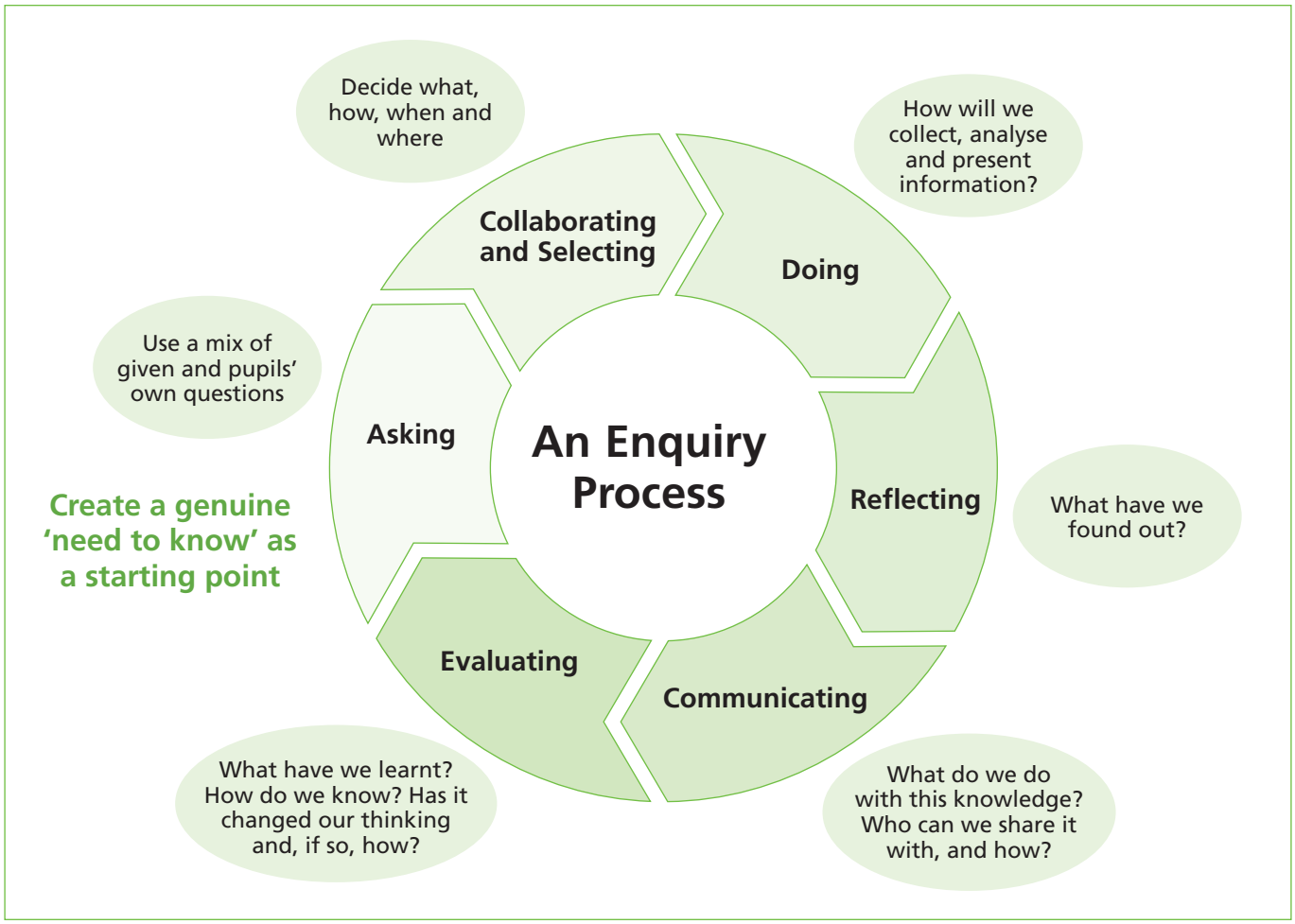

Figure 3: The enquiry cycle in geography. Source: Paula Owens/Geographical Association.

Collecting data in the school grounds. Photo © Shaun Flannery.

The school grounds and local area are the best contexts for many fieldwork experiences throughout the primary age range (Tanner and Whittle, 2015). An audit of your school's local area will reveal the specific opportunities it offers. (A document to support your audit is available to download with the framework – see web panel.)

EYFS

Early Years Foundation Stage pupils should have plentiful opportunities for free exploration of their setting and outdoor area and to visit places in the immediate vicinity (e.g. local streets, park, shop, church or mosque). They can become familiar with these places through first-hand sensory exploration, observation and talk. Pupils should have opportunities to ask questions and follow their own interests. These early experiences provide opportunities for language development as pupils name and describe what they see to peers and adults.

Key stage 1

Pupils in key stage 1 should have a wider range of fieldwork experiences, from free exploration and imaginative engagement to more structured enquiries that involve the use of simple techniques to record field data and answer geographical questions. Fieldwork should continue to involve plentiful opportunities for first-hand sensory exploration, observation and discussion with peers and adults. The school grounds and the local area within walking distance of the school provide many opportunities for pupils to plan and conduct simple geographical enquiries that involve fieldwork. Where feasible, pupils should have an opportunity to visit a place that is different from the local area. Fieldwork investigations in KS1 should be linked to the themes and topics in the Key Stage Curriculum Plan, to enhance and enrich pupils' knowledge and understanding of place, and of physical, human and environmental geography.

Key stage 2

Pupils in key stage 2 should continue to have an extensive range of fieldwork experiences, including free exploration and imaginative engagement, as well as more complex and systematic enquiries requiring them to use more specific fieldwork techniques. As with younger pupils, fieldwork should continue to involve plentiful opportunities for first-hand sensory exploration, observation and discussion with peers and adults. Although the school grounds and local area remain the most important contexts for fieldwork, pupils should have more opportunities to visit unfamiliar places to extend their knowledge and understanding of the wider world, and of unfamiliar environments. Fieldwork investigations in key stage 2 should be linked to the themes and topics in the Key Stage Curriculum Plan, providing opportunities for pupils to develop, extend and apply their fieldwork skills, enhancing and enriching their knowledge and understanding of physical, human and environmental geography.

References and further resources

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Acknowledgement

Thanks to all the members of EYPPC who gave invaluable feedback on earlier versions of the framework.

Web Resources

Downloads to accompany this article: https://ww.geography.org.uk/pg

Selection of Primary Geography progression articles: *https://www.geography.org.uk/eBooks-detail/55e6c4b0-0c32-4ef2-81a9-737fc082dad6*

GA fieldwork information: *https://www.geography.org.uk/Geography-fieldwork*

GA guidance on progression: *https://www.geography.org.uk/Announcements-and-updates/ga-guidance-on-progression/247164*

GA maps and mapping information: *https://www.geography.org.uk/Curriculum/Mapping*

Ordnance Survey Digimap for Schools: *http://digimapsforschools.edina.ac.uk*

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A framework for progression in geographical fieldwork experiences

This framework for pupils in EYFS (ages 3–5 years), key stage 1 (ages 5–7 years), lower key stage 2 (ages 7–9 years) and upper key stage 2 (ages 9–11 years) is concerned with providing opportunities for learning. Individual pupils will inevitably develop their understanding of the enquiry process and fieldwork skills at different rates. Progress can be secured only if the long-term curriculum plan provides for frequent and repeated opportunities for fieldwork as an integral element of purposeful geographical investigations.

The framework is organised in terms of the range of experiences pupils should have, and the fieldwork techniques they should have opportunities to learn, develop and apply in geography. Most fieldwork experiences in primary schools can take place in the school grounds and local area within easy walking distance of the school. A local area audit (see web panel) will reveal the specific opportunities available in each school's local area.

Fieldwork experiences in the Early Years Foundation Stage (ages 3–5 years)

EYFS pupils should have plentiful opportunities to freely explore their EYFS setting and outdoor area, and to make visits to places in the immediate vicinity of the school (e.g. local streets, park, shop, church or mosque). They can become familiar with these places through first-hand sensory exploration, observation and talk. They should have opportunities to ask questions and follow their own interests. These early experiences will provide opportunities for language development as pupils name and describe what they see in discussion with peers and adults.

Young pupils should be provided with opportunities to:

- explore their setting's outdoor area, noticing and naming its features (e.g. play equipment, different areas and surfaces, flower beds)
- experience different weather conditions and their impact on the environment
- examine and discuss natural objects (e.g. leaves, twigs, stones)
- explore the immediate local area through walks and visits to selected sites

During and after their explorations, pupils should have opportunities to record what they observe and notice by:

- using small world play or the role play area to represent a visited place
- making drawings (e.g. of their favourite place in the outdoor area, what they saw at the park)
- taking digital photos (e.g. of a collection of natural objects, buildings in the locality)
- sequencing photos to recall features seen on a visit or short walk
- drawing a map (e.g. of the outdoor area)
- counting (e.g. cars parked at the start/end of the day)
- expressing their feelings about places they visit, saying which features they like/dislike

Fieldwork experiences in key stage 1 (ages 5–7 years)

Pupils in key stage 1 should have a wide range of fieldwork experiences, from free exploration and imaginative engagement with outdoor environments to more structured enquiries, which involve the use of simple techniques to record field data to answer geographical questions. The school grounds and the local area within walking distance of the school provide many opportunities for pupils to plan and conduct simple geographical enquiries that involve fieldwork. Where feasible, pupils should have opportunities to visit a place that is different from the local area. As with younger pupils, key stage 1 fieldwork should involve opportunities for first-hand sensory exploration, observation and discussion with peers and adults.

Fieldwork investigations in key stage 1 should be linked to the themes and topics in the Key Stage Curriculum Plan. Fieldwork opportunities should be planned to enhance and enrich pupils' knowledge and understanding of places and of physical, human and environmental geography.

Fieldwork opportunities

Pupils in key stage 1 should be provided with opportunities to:

- investigate the physical and human features of the school and school grounds: naming and describing what they see (e.g. different areas including playground, car park, field, wildlife area) and how these areas are used; routes around the school site, people's jobs, places that have been/could be improved, and so on
- investigate different weather conditions through observation and by making and using simple measurement devices (e.g. to record wind direction, to measure rainfall)
- observe and record seasonal changes (e.g. to flowering plants and deciduous trees) in the school grounds and local area
- explore the local area of the school to investigate the range of buildings, roads, green spaces and other local features
- visit some local facilities (e.g. shops, a library, a health centre) and talk about what happens there and investigate why people go there
- take a short journey by bus, tram or train to investigate a slightly more distant site that contrasts with the immediate local area
- visit a park or local green space to observe its physical and human features and investigate how people use and enjoy it
- investigate environmental issues (e.g. lack of play facilities, where litter collects, road safety issues) in the school grounds or local area

Fieldwork techniques

Pupils should have opportunities to plan and conduct geographical investigations that include fieldwork, and to develop skills in using a range of simple techniques for collecting, analysing and presenting what they learn through fieldwork, including:

- using small world play, model making, or the classroom role-play area to represent a visited place (e.g. a shop, the library or Health Centre)
- adding details to a teacher-prepared drawing (e.g. doors, windows and other features to the outline of a house)
- making annotated drawings to show variations (e.g. in a row of houses in a local street)
- drawing a freehand map (e.g. of the school grounds, local street or park)
- relating a large-scale plan (e.g. of the school grounds or a local street) to the environment, identifying known features
- marking information on a large-scale plan (e.g. of the school grounds or a local street) using colour or symbols to record observations
- using a simple compass and cardinal compass directions (north, south, west, east)
- taking digital photos (e.g. of buildings in the locality, things seen on a bus journey)
- making digital audio recordings when interviewing someone (e.g. shop worker, librarian, nurse) about their job
- collecting quantitative data (e.g. to create a pictogram of favourite places to play or how pupils travel to school)
- using a questionnaire (e.g. to find out the most popular options for improving playtimes)
- collecting and sorting natural objects (e.g. leaves, twigs, stones) to investigate their properties
- using a simple recording technique (e.g. smiley/sad faces worksheet) to express their feelings about a specific place and explaining why they like/dislike some of its features

Developing fieldwork experiences in lower key stage 2 (ages 7–9 years)

Pupils in lower key stage 2 should continue to have a wide range of fieldwork experiences, including free exploration and imaginative engagement. They should also undertake structured enquiries that involve the use of specific fieldwork techniques to record data to answer geographical questions. The school grounds and the local area will provide many opportunities for pupils to plan and conduct geographical enquiries that involve fieldwork. In lower key stage 2, pupils should have more opportunities to visit unfamiliar places to extend their knowledge and understanding of the wider world, and to develop and apply their fieldwork skills. As with younger pupils, key stage 2 fieldwork should continue to involve opportunities for first-hand sensory exploration, observation and discussion with peers and adults.

Fieldwork investigations in lower key stage 2 should link to the themes and topics in the Key Stage Curriculum Plan. Fieldwork opportunities should enhance and enrich pupils' knowledge and understanding of places, and of physical, human and environmental geography.

Fieldwork opportunities

Pupils in lower key stage 2 should be provided with opportunities:

- *to use the school and its grounds as a site for studying aspects of physical and human geography* by investigating questions such as 'Where does the water go when it rains?', ' How do we travel to school' and ' Where does the food for school dinners come from?'
- *when learning about the water cycle, weather and climate,* to investigate and record different weather phenomena through observation and by using standard measurement devices (e.g. thermometers, rain gauges and anemometers)
- *when learning about biomes and vegetation belts,* to visit a woodland to study the trees, plants and animals, as an ecosystem
- *when learning about land use*, to investigate local buildings, land use, and local facilities and explore issues of environmental quality and value (e.g. by investigating which spaces or places are valued by the local community)
- *when learning about economic activities,* to investigate local shops (e.g. to find out how far people travel to them and why) or investigate local journeys and routes, including road safety, public transport provision and more sustainable travel choices
- *when learning about natural resources*, to explore issues of sustainability in everyday life (e.g. energy generation and use, water supply and use)
- *take fieldtrips to more distant places* (e.g. farm, water treatment plant, botanical gardens) to investigate their physical and human geography, as appropriate to the curriculum plan

Fieldwork techniques

Pupils should have opportunities to plan and conduct geographical investigations that necessitate fieldwork, and to develop skills in a range of standard techniques for collecting, analysing and presenting what they learn through fieldwork, including:

- making models, annotated drawings and field sketches to record observations
- drawing freehand maps of routes (e.g. of a walk to a site in the local area)
- relating a large-scale plan of the local area or fieldwork site to the environment, identifying features relevant to the enquiry
- recording selected geographical information on a map or large-scale plan, using colour or symbols and a key
- taking digital photos and annotating them with labels or captions
- making digital audio recordings for a specific purpose (e.g. traffic noise)
- collecting, analysing and presenting quantitative data in charts and graphs
- designing and using a questionnaire to collect quantitative fieldwork data (e.g. to compare how far people travel to different types of shop)
- designing and conducting interviews (e.g. to investigate which spaces/places local people value)
- using simple sampling techniques appropriately (e.g. time sampling when conducting a traffic survey)
- using a simplified Likert Scale to record their judgements of environmental quality (e.g. in streets near the school)
- developing a simple method of recording their feelings about a place or site

Extending fieldwork experiences in upper key stage 2 (ages 9–11 years)

Pupils in upper key stage 2 should continue to have a wide range of fieldwork experiences, including free exploration and imaginative engagement as well as more structured enquiries that involve the use of more specific fieldwork techniques to record field data to answer geographical questions. The school grounds and the local area provide many opportunities for pupils to plan and conduct geographical enquiries that involve fieldwork. Upper key stage 2 pupils should have more opportunities to visit unfamiliar places, including (wherever possible) a residential visit. As with younger pupils, fieldwork should continue to involve opportunities for first-hand sensory exploration, observation, and discussion with peers and adults.

Fieldwork investigations in upper key stage 2 should link to the themes and topics in the Key Stage Curriculum Plan. Fieldwork opportunities should be planned to enhance and enrich pupils' knowledge and understanding of places, and of physical, human and environmental geography.

Fieldwork opportunities

Pupils in upper key stage 2 should be provided with opportunities:

- *to use the school and its grounds as a site for studying aspects of physical and human geography* by investigating questions such as 'How can our school reduce its plastic waste?' and ' How can we make our school grounds more bee friendly?'
- *when learning about rivers,* to visit a local stream or river to investigate its physical features (e.g. meanders, sites of erosion and deposition) and its use by people now and in the past
- *when learning about settlements*, to investigate how buildings, land use and local facilities have changed over time; and investigate local development plans through visits to derelict sites, empty shops or buildings or places where developments (e.g. road, housing, industrial, retail or leisure schemes) are proposed
- *when learning about economic activities,* to investigate the range and location of primary, secondary and tertiary businesses in the local area
- *when learning about natural resources and trade*, to explore issues of sustainability in everyday life, including how everyday goods (e.g. food or clothing) are produced and traded, as well as consumption, waste and recycling
- *take fieldtrips to unfamiliar environments* to investigate the physical and human geography of those areas (e.g. mountains, rural areas, beaches) as appropriate to the curriculum plan

Fieldwork techniques

Pupils should have opportunities to plan and conduct geographical investigations that necessitate fieldwork, and to develop skills in a range of standard techniques for collecting, analysing and presenting what they learn through fieldwork, including:

- making models, annotated drawings and field sketches to record observations
- drawing freehand maps (e.g. of a site they have visited)
- relating large-scale plans to the fieldwork site, identifying relevant features
- recording selected geographical data on a map or large-scale plan, using colour or symbols and a key
- taking digital photos and annotating them with labels or captions
- making digital audio recordings (e.g. to create soundscapes)
- collecting, analysing and presenting quantitative data in charts and graphs
- designing and using a questionnaire to collect qualitative data (e.g. to find out and compare pupils' views on plastic waste)
- designing and conducting fieldwork interviews (e.g. to establish the range of views local people hold about a proposed development)
- using standard field sampling techniques appropriately (e.g. taking water samples from a stream)
- designing and using a tool to record their feelings about the advantages and disadvantages of a proposed development, for instance
- conducting a transect to observe changes in buildings and land use