

Ofsted Research Review - Geography

- ▶ On the 17th June 2021, Ofsted published a literature review with the aim of identifying the factors which contribute to creating a high-quality geography curriculum. The guidance is very thorough and in-depth, investigating all possible areas of a geography curriculum, from early years to A-level.
- ▶ This summary document has gathered together all the suggestions for a high-quality geography curriculum - based upon the research findings - into one abridged document. This is similarly arranged, under the same headings used to organise the research review. A key phrase, highlighted here, is used repetitively throughout the review, to iterate that an effective geography curriculum means pupils 'know more, remember more and are able to do more'.
- ▶ For the full document, with the reasons, justification and research behind the suggestions below, see here: [Ofsted - Research review series: geography](#).

▶ Curriculum

- A sufficient breadth of geographical content is identified and learnt in-depth by pupils.
- Geographical education begins in EYFS and is built upon year on year, developing pupils' expertise.
- Teachers carefully and thoughtfully select curriculum content using sound subject knowledge and thinking about how pupil knowledge will build over time.
- The curriculum is organised in such a way that pupil knowledge is built and that they can revisit and use it in the future.
- Pupils are able to understand the world around them by applying geographical generalisations.
- Pupils develop their expertise in geography by building upon solid geographical knowledge. They are exposed to a broad range of concepts, understanding and making links between concepts in order to appreciate the different aspects, as well as the subject of geography as a whole.

▶ Forms of geographical knowledge

- Taught geographical content is split into small steps/constituent parts, taking into account pupils' prior learning.
- Starting in EYFS, pupils secure their learning about distance, orientation, scale and positioning systems, which gives them the framework they need to understand locational knowledge later.
- Pupils build their identity and sense of place by knowing 'where's where'; this supports their understanding of geographical processes.
- As pupils learn and remember locational knowledge over time, their fluency in identifying locations increases.

▶ Place knowledge

- The geography curriculum prioritises place knowledge, which gives meaning to locations and processes studied.
- Planning builds knowledge of place by making links to familiar and known places, which can be from personal experience and previous teaching.
- Pupils receive the knowledge they need to develop their understanding of place. This helps them to draw links between different elements of geography and provide a variety of perspectives to view the curriculum content being studied.
- Pupils build place knowledge over time which allows them to draw relevant comparisons between places.

► Environmental, physical and human geography

- Detailed knowledge of physical and human processes is built upon, supporting a pupil's ability to describe and explain a variety of environments, thus also developing an awareness of interconnectedness.
- Pupils are presented with precisely identified and sequenced component parts of knowledge that underpins phenomena, enabling them to completely understand a wide range of geographical processes.
- Unfamiliar and less visible geographical processes are taught to pupils over the course of the curriculum.
- Opportunities are planned for older pupils to take a broader view, make generalisations and critique models representing specific processes.

► Geographical skills and fieldwork

- The geographical skills that pupils possess allow them to gather, analyse, present and interpret spatial information. They are good at identifying patterns in this information.
- Skills that allow pupils to represent and interpret geographical data are embedded in the curriculum and these are repeatedly practised to increase fluency and accuracy. Pupils also know how and when to apply them.
- Data collection, analysis and presentation are experienced through fieldwork, bringing together locational knowledge and human and physical processes, which helps pupils to understand how they interact.

► Spatial thinking in the curriculum

- Subject leaders make sure the curriculum is planned carefully, with informed choices about content that may go beyond the national curriculum, for example, exploring phenomena observable in the locality.
- Real, relevant examples and case studies are carefully chosen to demonstrate the geographical aspect being studied.
- Teachers ensure that pupils are able to relate new knowledge to what they already know, emphasising how this is interconnected, facilitating the building of strong schema and allowing them to remember more.
- The curriculum is designed carefully so that each form of knowledge is given sufficient consideration and pupils can construct their knowledge within each form, as well as how each form relates to others. This interplay develops and secures pupils' geographical thinking.
- The geography subject leader understands the structure of the subject and creates effectively constructed curriculum plans that make sure pupils know more, remember more and can do more.

► Thematic or topic-based approaches

- As pupils move through the curriculum, the goals become more challenging. This could be done by increasing the complexity, considering more variables, making multiple comparisons or utilising the application of abstract concepts.
- Content is revisited to support the introduction of new, more complex knowledge.
- Thematic approaches have carefully planned subject lessons, with goals that keep subject specificity.
- Teachers planning a thematic curriculum are aware of and maintain the discipline of geography in lesson plans.
- Those who plan thematic approaches have a secure understanding of how geography relates to other subjects and have suitable expertise in geographical disciplines.

▶ Selecting examples and case studies

▶ Cases studies and examples are selected by taking into account:

- accurate representation;
- avoiding portraying a 'single story';
- ensuring sufficient depth of understanding;
- reflecting the dynamic nature of geography;
- supporting pupils to see the interconnected nature of the subject;
- broadening pupils' knowledge of the world;
- fostering a sense of place;
- supporting pupils' appreciation of generalisations and models.

▶ Disciplinary knowledge

- Curriculum design allows pupils to view geography as a dynamic subject with changing ideas and viewpoints.
- Planning supports pupils to develop disciplinary knowledge by: taking a holistic view of geography; making decisions about the validity of geographical questions asked; methods applied and the answers found; seeing how differing content is interconnected; asking geographical questions themselves.
- Having disciplinary knowledge helps pupils to understand the context in which the knowledge was made/created, differing viewpoints and how views have changed over time.

▶ Misconceptions

- The secure subject knowledge of teachers allows them to address pupils' misconceptions.
- Teaching is effective, accurate and clear, supporting pupils to learn the foundations before moving on to broader knowledge.
- Learning is sequenced logically without any 'corner-cutting'.

▶ Curriculum structure

- Well-organised content, with clear connections, supports pupils to build and retain knowledge in the long term.
- Pupils develop strong schemata as the curriculum builds on prior knowledge and revisits content.

▶ Pedagogy

- Large concepts or ideas are split into small steps or chunks and the working memory of pupils is not overloaded.
- Recall and repeated practice means pupils save knowledge in their long-term memory.
- Procedural knowledge and skills are practised regularly; as a result, pupils are efficient at these.

▶ Carrying out enquiries and making decisions

- Pupils are secure in their prior knowledge which means that they are efficient in carrying out enquiries and making decisions.
- Tasks are structured to give pupils adequate instructions, guidance and support.
- Pupils develop disciplinary knowledge through an inquiry approach which supports them to recognise and ask geographical questions, critique sources and reflect on methods used, as well as on their own learning.

► Special educational needs and/or disabilities

- The scope of the curriculum and teachers' ambitions are the same for all pupils, including those with SEND. Specialist advice is used to help adapt teaching where appropriate.
- Some resources and fieldwork may be adapted to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Teaching assistants supporting SEND pupils are well briefed in the geography being taught and are supported by teachers, specialists and the SENDCo.

► Pupils' motivation and interest

- Teachers take advantage of the interesting and motivational nature of geographical knowledge and use many thought-provoking aspects in the curriculum.
- Teachers make sure that pupils experience success by building on what they already know.
- Example events and locations may be chosen specifically to pique pupils' interest.
- Teachers are conscious of not narrowing the curriculum, politicising teaching or losing subjectivity when using personal experiences to stimulate interest.
- Examples are used thoughtfully to compare and contrast and stimulate interesting discussions.
- Teachers are aware that, when using engaging, contemporary media content, they need to check that it is geographically accurate and the knowledge to be learned is at the forefront of it.

► Assessment

- Effective assessment allows teachers and pupils to acknowledge learning and is designed to identify specific gaps in knowledge and misconceptions.
- Clear assessment criteria supports pupils' motivation and improves attainment.
- Information from assessments identifies areas of secure pupil knowledge and elements that may need to be retaught. Leaders will review and adapt the curriculum in light of any common issues.
- The cumulative nature of geographical knowledge is appreciated and teachers recognise progress is not often linear because of this.

► Culture, policies and systems

- Leaders ensure teachers' substantive, disciplinary and pedagogical geography knowledge is supported by high-quality, subject specific professional development.
- An up-to-date and wide-ranging selection of resources are available to teachers to use in developing pupils' locational knowledge and spatial cognition.
- Live data sources are used by teachers to enthuse pupils.
- The geography leader has strong subject knowledge and a good understanding of the discipline of geography.
- The teachers, supported by the geography lead, have clarity about content and effective teaching approaches.
- The leader monitors pupil progress in geography and uses this to identify strengths and areas for development, revising the curriculum as required.
- The leader carefully timetables geography to allocate sufficient teaching time, in order to cover the breadth of subject knowledge pupils need to learn.
- Non-specialist geography teachers are supported with professional development and support in the nature of geography, as well as subject knowledge.