

GEOGRAPHY

Key Concepts

‘Geography knowledge is rarely static. The subject is dynamic because the world, and our understanding of it, is continually changing. Yet some key geographical concepts are enduring and will be relevant in any geography curriculum past, present or future:

‘Space’ - the location of points, features or regions in absolute and /or relative terms and the relationships, flows and patterns that connect and / or define them.

‘Place’ - a construct that is defined in terms of what it is like, what happens there and how and why it is changing.

‘Scale’ - the ‘zoom lens’ that enables us to view places from global to local levels.’

(Geographical Association - <https://www.geography.org.uk/Primary-geography--curriculum-content>)

There are other key concepts that you may see within individual schools’ curriculums that are developed over time. These may include:

- Place;
- Space;
- Interconnection;
- Human and physical geography
- Scale
- Environment
- Sustainability
- Change
- Locational knowledge (this is a key part of the National Curriculum subject content).

You may also see the use of the local area as a key feature curriculum progression. Schools will be looking at how they can incorporate a practical use and understanding of the local area into the curriculum

National Curriculum Purpose of Study and Aims

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. Teaching should equip pupils with knowledge about diverse places, people, resources and natural and human environments, together with a deep understanding of the Earth’s key physical and human processes. As pupils progress, their growing knowledge about the world should help them to deepen their understanding of the interaction between physical and human processes, and of the formation and use of landscapes and environments. Geographical knowledge, understanding and skills provide the frameworks and approaches that explain how the Earth’s features at different scales are shaped, interconnected and change over time.

The national curriculum for geography aims to ensure that all pupils:

- develop contextual knowledge of the location of globally significant places – both terrestrial and marine – including their defining physical and human characteristics and how these provide a geographical context for understanding the actions of processes
- understand the processes that give rise to key physical and human geographical features of the world, how these are interdependent and how they bring about spatial variation and change over time
- are competent in the geographical skills needed to:
 - collect, analyse and communicate with a range of data gathered through experiences of fieldwork that deepen their understanding of geographical processes
 - interpret a range of sources of geographical information, including maps, diagrams, globes, aerial photographs and Geographical Information Systems
 - communicate geographical information in a variety of ways, including through maps, numerical and quantitative skills and writing at length.

Specific pedagogical considerations

- Map-work and fieldwork are unique to the Geography curriculum – look for opportunities when on trips and within the local area to explore the local area. See the map-work and fieldwork session on the 23rd Sept for more reading and activities ideas for this.
- Make sure there is time for map-work and fieldwork within your curriculum. Make sure this is prioritised within your curriculum as key geographical concepts cannot be learnt only in the classroom. There is important risk assessments you will need to do with pupils before you plan these lessons.
- This subject is a chance to dispel stereotypes pupils have around different countries. Do not reinforce or create stereotypes through the resources you use in your teaching. For example, if studying Kenya as a country, make sure there is representation of urban and rural areas as well as different socio-economic groups. Build in time to your teaching for discussion and be prepared to talk about differences and similarities.
- Enquiry-based teaching is a key pedagogical choice for this subject. This allows pupils to see how their knowledge can help to solve problems – there are clear links to climate change here.

Further questions for reflection

- Do pupils need the knowledge around key issues before they can access enquiry-based learning or does taking part in the enquiry give pupils the knowledge?
- Is the content of the National Curriculum too knowledge and fact based? Is there too much emphasis on knowing key facts?
- How can pupils’ understanding of spaces support their emotional literacy. How can the curriculum be supplemented with a focus on an emotional response to space and place?

What might progression look like? What do look out for and emphasise in your teaching

- Within your teaching, look out for opportunities to link concepts together and to emphasise the way that places link together . Pupils will develop a sense of place and space as they progress through the year groups and it is important that topics and concepts are explicitly linked together. For example, pupils need to see and understand how their learning about the weather and seasons in Key Stage 1 is linked and built upon their understanding of climate zones and the water cycle in Key Stage 2.
- You will notice pupils making greater linked within their reading and developing their knowledge of different places – sometimes fiction texts include a fictional map.
- It is important to make sure that any studies of the local area is progressive over time. For example, you do not want pupils in Reception and Year 4 to be completing a traffic survey and completing it in exactly the same way without there being some progression around purpose and understanding.

Key misconceptions and specific issues to be aware of:

- Pupils will think that continents are countries – i.e. many pupils think Africa is a country
- There is a great deal of vocabulary that pupils will need to use and understand across the curriculum. Ensure vocabulary is a key aspect of all lessons and you expect pupils to use this
- Developing an understanding of place and how the world is connected is a very complex idea and pupils will not develop this fully until they are older. Make sure that you scaffold this knowledge and are aware of previous knowledge to build upon.
- Be aware of those who have had more experience than others. Some pupils in your class will have travelled widely or have a deeper knowledge of place. Others will have not travelled very far from home. Make sure you take this into account when planning and build in time to ensure all pupils have the same opportunity to secure basic knowledge
- Covering a lesson around specific locational knowledge does not mean that pupils will remember this and be able to use it, Make sure there are opportunities for pupils to retrieve this knowledge at spaced intervals.

Resource links

Scottish maps – useful for viewing OS maps and how maps have changed over time

Geographical Association – a range of teaching resources that can accessed without being a member

National Geographic Magazine for Kids – lots of useful resources with links to the curriculum made clear

Royal Geographical Society – useful fieldwork resources and advice

WWF Climate Change resources – useful resources to explore this complex issue with primary-aged pupils.

Classroom maps
Have a world map and a UK map available on the classroom wall to refer to whenever places come up in reading or other areas of the curriculum.

Key questions when observing or teaching this subject

How has specific geographical vocabulary been developed?

How are pupils developing a sense of space, place or interconnectedness?

How are pupils building on their knowledge and understanding of key geographical concepts?

Is there an opportunity for pupils to develop their enquiry skills?

How are stereotypes, of people and places, challenged?

How is pupils’ prior knowledge considered as part of the teaching?

Further reading

Geographical Association – become a member and have access to up to date knowledge and teaching ideas

Ofsted research review series: geography (2021)

Catling, S. and Willy, T. (2018) **Understanding and Teaching Primary Geography**. 2nd edn. London: Sage Publications.

More about **enquiry learning** – Roberts, M. (2013) *Geography Through Enquiry* (2nd Edition). Sheffield: Geographical Association

Catling, S. (2014) **Giving younger pupils voice in primary geography**: empowering pedagogy – a personal perspective, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*. 23(4), 350-372.

Ofsted subject review of geography (2023)