

## Geography

*Learning to make a world of difference*

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*This is an adapted extract from Ofsted Report No. 090224, February 2011.*

*This report draws on evidence from visits by Ofsted inspectors to look at geography in a sample of 91 primary and 90 secondary schools (including one special school) from 2007 to 2010. It builds on *Geography in schools: changing practice* published by Ofsted in 2008.*

During the period of the survey, geography was at an interesting stage of development in secondary schools. Generally, provision was weaker at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4 and in the 45 sixth forms visited. In some of the schools visited, the numbers choosing to study geography at GCSE level were declining. The quality of the provision was also declining and time allocated to the subject at Key Stage 3 was being reduced. In other schools, however, the subject was flourishing. Their senior managers and the teachers saw geography as relevant and valuable. In these schools, the students had good core geographical knowledge and an awareness of political, social, economic and environmental issues, locally and globally. They were skilful in interrogating and interpreting a range of sources of geographical information. They cared about their environment and were aware that they needed to act as responsible citizens.

The primary schools also presented a polarised picture, with a sharp contrast between inadequate and outstanding practice. Half the schools visited demonstrated work of good quality in geography; a lack of expertise and awareness of what constituted good geography characterised the others. As a result, pupils experienced too much variation in the quality of their geography provision. In those primary schools where the subject was inadequate, the majority of the pupils had weak core geographical knowledge and a poor understanding of the world they lived in. In the final year of the survey the picture was even more pronounced with inspectors judging the provision to be outstanding in five of the 30 primary schools visited, but inadequate in seven.

The report highlights how good and regular fieldwork motivated pupils and enhanced their learning in geography, although just over half the primary and secondary schools visited did not use it enough. Fieldwork encouraged a higher than average take-up of examination courses at a time when examination entries for geography were falling nationally.

The report also describes the value of learning geography and what needs to be done to reverse its decline. By paying greater attention to literacy, the global dimension of geography and the use of topical exemplars, teachers enhanced pupils' learning, engaged them and made lessons more interesting and enjoyable.

Geography has a distinctive role in the curriculum in linking the disciplines of science and humanities. In those schools where geography was strong, the subject contributed effectively to curriculum coherence as well as satisfying pupils' curiosity about people and places. Geography also offered opportunities to develop a wide range of skills and knowledge. This was particularly the case with information and communication technology

35 (ICT) and where the enormous potential of geographical information systems (GIS) was used to give students insights into areas such as cartography, statistical analysis and natural resource management. In strong secondary school geography departments many students were inspired by challenging and engaging questions; with diverse sources and data; and with more in-depth and detailed descriptions and explanations of contemporary changes.

40 Developing a deeper understanding of people and places, and of the need to live in balance with an increasingly fragile environment, is more important than ever in today's world. Thus, in schools where geography was weak, as was sometimes the case in primary schools and at Key Stage 3, pupils were denied crucial elements of a broad and balanced education for life. These pupils had a narrow conception of the world and lacked knowledge of both  
45 physical and human environments. They also missed out on fieldwork and the power of learning directly in particular places and environments. They were denied the opportunity to think about change in the contemporary world and how to imagine alternative futures. This impoverishment of pupils' experience was a key issue to be addressed by the leadership teams in these schools.

### Task 1

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**Select three phrases from the list below to complete the bulleted list – the last bullet point has been done for you.**

- A. Senior managers and staff see the relevance and importance of geography.
- B. There is a tradition of success at GCSE and A level in the subject.
- C. Fieldwork is seen as an important aspect of the subject.
- D. Teachers inspire students with challenging, in depth and more detailed analysis.
- E. Schools in rural areas and can get the students out of class more regularly.

**Geography as a subject thrives and is judged is good or outstanding in schools where:**

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• Teachers enhanced learning by paying attention to literacy, the global dimension and the use of topical exemplars.

## Task 2

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### Identifying the meaning of words and phrases

Choose the correct meaning of the phrases quoted as they appear in the context of the passage.

... interrogating and interpreting ... (line 9)

<b>A</b>	Asking questions and guessing the answers	
<b>B</b>	Investigating and making deductions based on evidence	
<b>C</b>	Being able to make sense of maps and data	

... polarised picture ... (line 12)

<b>A</b>	A very wide range of quality of practice was found from outstanding to inadequate	
<b>B</b>	Most primary schools' provision for geography was found to be inadequate	
<b>C</b>	There was little to choose between the KS2 and the KS3 findings of the survey	

... topical exemplars ... (line 27)

<b>A</b>	Concentration in KS3 on issues to do with rain forests and deserts	
<b>B</b>	Up to date and stimulating examples taken from real and current events in the world	
<b>C</b>	Lessons made more interesting and enjoyable by the use of films and ICT facilities	

... impoverishment of pupils' experiences ... (line 47)

<b>A</b>	The needs of children from poor areas needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency	
<b>B</b>	The narrowing of opportunities in some schools is a cause for much concern	
<b>C</b>	Poor provision in some schools denies children the opportunity to think and learn about the world and their place in it.	

### Task 3

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#### Evaluating statements

For each of the following statements use the code to show which are:

S supported by evidence in the text

EC explicitly contradicted or refuted by the content of the text

I implied to be the case by the content of text

<b>A</b>	Pupils in the primary schools surveyed experience too much variation in the quality of provision in geography.	
<b>B</b>	In primary schools there is little difference between inadequate and outstanding practice in the teaching of geography.	
<b>C</b>	The integration of geography with ICT and other core curriculum subjects can broaden the area of student enquiry hugely.	
<b>D</b>	If more schools used good quality fieldwork in their teaching the downward trend in geography entries at GCSE could be reversed.	

#### Answers

Task 1: ACD. Task 2: BABC. Task 3: A - S, B - EC, C - S, D - I.