

# Generic grade descriptors and draft supplementary subject specific guidance for inspectors for geography

## Comments from the Geographical Association

These comments result from feedback via the GA's Education Committee and internal discussion. They are sent in the spirit of open dialogue and debate, for the GA acknowledges that composing this document is difficult in a number of ways.

1. We strongly support the aspiration to produce subject specific guidance for geography.
2. There are many references to the FREQUENCY with which some things are done (like using maps) as a means to differentiate between good and outstanding. This is a possible hostage to fortune. Frequency is not necessarily correlated to QUALITY or level of challenge.
3. There may be an issue to do with process and teacher activity on the one hand (which is highly valued in this draft document) and pupil learning outcomes on the other (which seem to be taken for granted in this document). The 'message' of the document as a whole may be that process takes precedence over product.
4. The element of learning least visible in the subject specific guidance is arguably the most important: knowledge. Thus, under 'achievement in geography', apart from knowledge of where places are and what they are like, what are the knowledge outcomes of geography classrooms? It is very unclear what knowledge and understanding may signify an outstanding geography classroom/department. And yet it should be possible to specify this! – maybe (for example) in terms of more multivariate explanations as opposed to simpler cause and effect reasoning; or where there is clear focus on spatial interactions – exploring human-physical environmental links, pattern and process that link the local through to the global (taking in biomes and regions; nation states ). Thus, to be specific, at the end of the final sentence in 'outstanding' can it not add '*... contemporary issues in society and the environment.*' Or else doesn't geography risk becoming simply what happens in the geography classroom? This may lack subject rigour – this guidance surely should take steps to counter this, for the good of the subject in school<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> A personal note: I am reminded here of the difficulty sometimes exhibited by new geography teachers (often in possession of first class degrees) who have difficulty expressing what 'the geography is' in some lessons, and the ideas or knowledge they are trying to teach.

5. We realise this is not a simple matter. We realise that the guidance cannot – and should not – simply rehearse specifications and syllabuses. The GA would be very pleased to participate in a process by which 'knowledge and understanding' may be specified in this guidance.
6. Under 'Quality of Teaching' we are surprised at how little reference there is made to teaching in the field and fieldwork.
7. We feel a discriminator between 3/4 and 2/1 maybe evidence of deeper departmental discussion about teaching quality that is informed from research and the wider practitioner community. Are journals, publications and on line CPD materials used in departmental meetings?
8. Under 'Curriculum' we would make a similar comment, though in even stronger terms. Evidence of engagement with the Geographical Association – events, subscriptions, CPD, website – and their use and application in what we call 'curriculum making' would be a fine way to demonstrate being 'well informed by current initiatives in the subject'. Similarly with other community resources through the APG or RGS-IBG.
9. Under 'effectiveness of leadership and management' it would be welcome to require evidence of obtaining or working towards the Geography Quality Mark and/or Chartered Geographer (teacher) status. Both are demanding and both require leadership as well as management. Other professions are demanding in this way and geography teachers should aspire to high levels of recognised professional practice.
10. It may be that this aspect also needs to be more forthright about the need (at level 1) to sustain an informed professional conversation about the purposes of geography in education and links between school geography and the wider discipline.

We hope these brief comments are helpful.

David Lambert

Chief Executive of the Geographical Association