

Primary Geography Subject Leaders

Leading a staff meeting

There's a real need for you to work with staff to enthuse about geography and give some ideas. That's difficult when you're new to the subject, so you need a few manageable, ready-made activities which will help to start you off.

In addition to the crucial staff meeting sessions where your school's policy for geography will need to be discussed and reviewed, here are a few ideas. Some of them are hands on and are designed to keep the subject in the forefront of everyone's minds.

How could we introduce geographical ideas in a more stimulating way?

Use the starter activity 'Why do you choose to live there?' from the Geography from Square One poster www.geography.org.uk/eyprimary/squareone/. Tease out the geographical ideas that are encapsulated in the activity. Allow time for the other activities to be studied computer(s) for quick access – perhaps home in on those most relevant to your particular age group/key stage to begin with, but then browse further afield. How could you incorporate these or similar activities within your current geographical study?

When do we teach 'geography'?

Take the opportunity to remind your colleagues that geography is not just being covered when being taught as a half-termly topic. It can also happen during assemblies, or when outside speakers are invited in, as well as when discussing a major event in the news or perhaps as part of an activity or environment week for example. Colleagues often need to identify just how much geography is actually being covered during the school year – they may be pleasantly surprised!

How well are my pupils doing in geography compared to others?

Use the QCA's geography website and take advantage of a really easy-to-prepare, ready-made professional development opportunity. The site helps you become more aware of the levels, of expectations and through illustrating examples of pupils' work, and also provides further ideas for teaching and learning activities. It's also non-threatening as it's not work from your school. Provide level descriptors 1-6 as reference from the National Curriculum spiral binder and study the exemplification material found in www.qca.org.uk/geography. Start by projecting several pieces in turn onto the interactive whiteboard and asking colleagues to level the piece of work and justify the level, or set them off to find their way around their own year and levels examples.

Which are the most helpful websites for geography?

Another ready-made, but valuable activity is to use give a brief demonstration of one website you've found really helpful and explain why (for example, try www.mapzone.co.uk and one of the games there). Provide colleagues with a list of sites (see Resources and ICT section on the Primary Subject Leaders website) and allow them to explore the sites in relation to their units/topics. They may come across a new and better one than they already know. Very often teachers appreciate directed time to simply explore new websites.

How important is the correct usage of specific geographical terminology in our school?

Ask colleagues to discuss and record key geographical vocabulary for their current unit of work/theme. Have card pre-prepared so that they can be transferred immediately (and then

laminated). Ask for ways of using the words and phrases with a class as a starter activity or perhaps with groups as part of their word level work in Literacy. Here are some possibilities:

- Ask for definitions (crossword clues?)
- Match definitions to words
- Draw a pictorial representation of each and use to play dominoes/snap/pairing games
- Order alphabetically to create a class glossary for geography
- Use correctly in a sentence
- Use correctly as labels on a display/poster/diagram/map.

Is everyone aware of the geography being carried out in other classes?

Provide a quick resume of the way that the National Curriculum organises the key areas of knowledge, skills and understanding and the expected breadth of study at each key stage. Can your colleagues work out how their current 'unit' fits in with any of these areas? How do subsequent units build on earlier work? Talking openly about teacher's perceptions of the key learning objectives within each theme studied should make others more aware of the geography curriculum as a whole within the school. It may also raise new issues of appropriate continuity and progression which you as subject leader should address.

How well do we know our local area?

When the evenings are light, or as part of a development day, get colleagues out in the local area to point out features and familiarise themselves with the locality around the school. Make sure you've done this yourself first. So many teachers now commute to work and, therefore, have limited knowledge of the school's local area. If possible, include the classroom assistants because they often have good local geographical knowledge. To involve everyone actively, get them to make a photo trail or a trail they could use with their pupils; if necessary, work in pairs. The *Primary Geography Handbook* Chapter 13 'Using the school locality' will give you lots of further ideas.

How much progression is there in map skills work in our key stage and school?

Lack of progression in map skills, both map and atlas, often results in a big hole in geography curricula because the National Curriculum programmes of study give little guidance. If you need to address this issue get everyone to bring along their units or topics for the year. Split the group into Foundation and KS1 Stage, lower KS2, Upper KS2 teachers, or to work in Foundation/KS1 and KS2 groups in a smaller school. Ask them to identify to each other which skills are integrated into their units. Look out for repetition (application of earlier skills to a different place or problem context is really useful) or more likely, absence of skills. Note these. Decide which missing skills need to be dealt with and by which year groups. Take account of these when planning in future and write into units. Refer to Chapter 8 of the *Primary Geography Handbook*; it's on mapwork skills so it will help.

How could we integrate literacy into our geographical work?

There are so many natural linkages between geography and literacy, which, for many of us, have been squeezed out over recent years. Now with the emphasis shifting towards cross-curricular work, Excellence and Enjoyment, we can return to our more instinctive roles as educators of primary-aged pupils. Here are just a few possibilities:

- **Speaking and Listening** – using key vocabulary cards and their definitions (see first idea, above) create a 'loop' style game, which most of us are more familiar with from Numeracy activities. Have an example ready to play – just ensure that you have the right number of cards for the number of teachers present. (The 'child' reads out the definition – which they may have devised

in an earlier session - of a geographical word, e.g. 'I am an area of lower lying land between mountains, often a river may run along me. What am I?' The child with the word 'Valley' on their card calls it out, then turns their card over and reads out the next definition). In this way, all pupils are involved and important concepts or knowledge can be reinforced. It is also possible to differentiate sensitively for those weaker pupils within the class by giving them the cards with 'easier' words and definitions on them. It can help with the assessment of pupils too.

- **Reading** – What books, both fiction and non-fiction, does the school already have to support geography? It may be appropriate to spend time looking through any reference books held in the Library (if you have one). Now would be a good chance to highlight any storybooks that lend themselves particularly well to geographical ideas. Perhaps the next time your school runs a book day/week, you could specifically incorporate an element of geography within it. The Kent website (www.kented.org.uk/ngfl/prigeog/stories1.html) contains a list of fiction books suitable for location studies at key stages 1 and 2.
- **Writing** – If your school has it, spend 20 minutes watching the video BBC video plus *Mountains & coasts - programme 5 Writing about the landscape*, which demonstrates and models how non-fiction writing strands can be taught using geography as a context. Genres considered are:
 - Instructional writing
 - Chronological recount
 - Non-chronological report
 - Explanation
 - Persuasion
 - Discussion

If you do not have this video, spend time as a group discussing which aspects of these text types could be incorporated into the geography work currently being covered in your school. Add this to your medium-term planning so that it isn't forgotten in the future.

How can we develop our resources more on such a small budget?

Initiate a discussion on how to build up the geography resources in your school by asking colleagues to list the type of things that might help geography teaching. Newspapers (including those from abroad), coins, stamps, small every day artefacts which show life in other countries, calendar pictures, photographs, rocks and fossils, children's toys and models (especially from distant places). The list is endless. It is important not only to have resources and artefacts connected to the topics you teach, but it's also useful to have ones that can be displayed in order to stimulate questions and interest and raise a general awareness of other places around the world.

The other thing to consider is how to classify and store your resources. This is very important and your storage should be designed so that items are easily available, but well protected when not in use.