

Getting started as a non-specialist geography subject leader

- Recognise that you will not be able to make sweeping changes overnight.
- Realise that your subject is **one** component of the whole school's development/improvement plan and that any specific needs will have to be in line with other long term strategic plans. Having said that, it is your responsibility to 'champion the cause' for geography.
- Remember to keep a running note of all that you do for your role within the relevant section (Professional Development?) of your subject leader's folder.
- Nationally, geography has been found by Ofsted to be the worst taught subject in the primary school (11th out of 11), with pupils making the least improvement compared to other subjects. If you suspect that this may be the case in your school, don't despair – **you** will be able to make a difference!
- Investigate applying for the new, nationally recognised GA Quality Mark (www.geography.org.uk/pgqm). This will help you self-evaluate geography as a subject in your school and has been devised to recognise any **improvements** made.
- Scan through these suggested phases for approaching your new post; if you are going to need to do most of the points, approach your line manager with a request for some non-contact time in order to achieve them.

Phase 1 – Fact Finding

- Make a copy of the relevant parts of your school's last Ofsted report(s). This will form the baseline from which to make improvements and will add weight and justification for any bids for money from the school's budget.
- Start researching sources of help – becoming a GA member would be a good start (www.geography.org.uk/join). Invest time in studying the pages of the Primary section on the GA website (www.geography.org.uk/eyprimary) and follow the suggested links.
- Find the relevant current geography documentation for your school such as the policy, schemes of work, planning formats and assessment. Note when geography is due for review. Ideally, these documents should be handed over to you by the previous subject leader – if not, make a mental note to have things in better order for your successor!
- Become familiar with the National Curriculum orders and Level Descriptors for geography – these are the legal requirements and framework.
- Where/how are geography resources stored? If there isn't an up to date list, audit them and update regularly. We're all guilty of hoarding useful items in our cupboards from time to time, so if necessary, declare an 'amnesty' and recall everything on a particular day – but make sure that you have definitely allotted enough time to manage the task.
- Find out how your school writes its subject development plans and what the timescales involved are. Note what the current targets are for the subject – these will be your first areas to investigate. Begin to jot down your own ideas too – it may help you get used to the terminology involved in such documents.
- Begin to gather specialist resource catalogues and keep sticky notes in likely purchases. Make sure that the school secretary (or whoever deals with the post) knows that **you** are the person responsible for geography and should receive all relevant information.
- Scan the CPD courses for the next year and make sure that you put in any bids well in advance – training budgets disappear extremely quickly, but if you have done all your research and can put together a good case it will have far greater impact on the decision maker.

Primary Geography Subject Leaders

- Take the time to get to know the school's locality. Collect free resources, such as local free papers and tourist information leaflets if available. Get to know which members of staff are useful sources of information too – especially those who have lived in the area for a long time and have seen how places have changed. Begin to create a photo gallery of local features and landmarks.

Phase 2 – Making Plans

- Now you have a good background knowledge of the 'state' of geography in your school, it's time to start making plans for improvements. If you have to bid for your budget, make sure that you are aware of any possible costings – both in terms of resources and time.
- Prioritise the school's needs. It may help to think in terms of 'maintenance issues' e.g. continuing a rolling programme of resource enhancement and 'innovation/improvement issues' e.g. special projects such as introducing Geography Days or Multicultural Week. Set realistic timings – short, medium and long term.
- You are becoming more aware of your own needs and those of the subject, but how about your colleagues? How do they perceive geography? A non-threatening open and honest audit of their skills may bring to light hidden talents or training issues. (See <http://www.geography.org.uk/eyprimary/geographysubjectleaders/leadinggeography/> for useful auditing tips)
- Make a conscious effort to be a good role model for teachers and the subject – you can't expect your colleagues to try new things if you haven't done so yourself. Do you always have good displays of geographical work up in your room? Can you spread to any shared areas – perhaps a contribution from each year group every half term? (This might also then become the basis of a portfolio of pupil work for moderation/levelling purposes in the future)

Phase 3 – Making Changes

- Once you're feeling more confident yourself with the subject, and may have attended appropriate courses, you should be ready to start to develop the subject according to your planned priorities.
- Remember to keep all colleagues informed of what is going on – if new resources have been bought, display them for a week in the Staff Room before letting them go to the relevant person/place.
- If the subject has suffered from a lack of status in the past, keep bringing it back to the forefront with colleagues, pupils and parents/carers.
- At this stage you may feel confident enough to monitor the teaching of geography in the school – remember to seek guidance, if necessary, first and to follow the school's protocol. Ensure that colleagues are aware of the focus of any observations and that feedback is a professional dialogue.

Phase 4 – Evaluating and reviewing

- Don't forget to evaluate any actions regularly – this will form the basis of your yearly subject review and will help to keep Governors informed. It will also help you to make informed future decisions regarding the subject.