

## The 2011 Ofsted Report "Learning to Make a World of Difference"

### *Geographical Association initial response*

We want to embrace the Report, in the context of the National Curriculum Review, as a platform for improvement.

- The GA agrees with Ofsted that geography "**is more important than ever in today's world**" (p5)
- We also agree that although it is for teachers, individually and in teams, to make geography engaging, interesting and enjoyable, both in the 'field' and in the classroom, they are often hampered by insufficient training and support, which undermines confidence and what we call **curriculum making** capability.
- This Report therefore sends a strong message to **senior leaders** in primary and secondary schools: it is unacceptable to tolerate geography that is weak, because this impoverishes the curriculum. If geography is weak it "is a key issue to be addressed by the leadership teams in these schools" (p5)

The Report links poor teaching to school contexts in which geography has been **marginalized** – in terms of curriculum time, curriculum organization or in terms of curriculum specific training and support.

- The Report shows many examples of schools in which geography has been encouraged and is flourishing. These are schools where the geography is driven by challenging questions about the contemporary world, where pupils' knowledge of people, places and environments is extensive and where the teaching is lively, topical and well informed. One reason for good geography was found to be where "**subject specific professional support** had been sought out and utilized" (p6)
- A strong theme is the polarized pattern of provision in terms of the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum between schools. This is linked to the lack of subject specialist teachers and/or lack of subject specialist training. It is therefore a worry that training numbers are being cut in geography. This is doubly so in the context of the introduction of the EBacc: in many schools specialist teachers will be deployed in KS4, further undermining quality at KS3
- The Report provides evidence to suggest that an emphasis on **core knowledge** in the primary and secondary curriculum, such as is provided in the 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*, should be welcomed. The GA certainly does. However, there is little in the way of definition in the Report, or in the White Paper, as to what is meant by core knowledge – beyond a notion of being "able to locate countries, key mountain ranges or other features" (p22) and developing "mapwork skills".
- The GA looks forward to working with teachers in the context of the curriculum review to refine and develop **geographical knowledge development** through the primary and secondary years (including, but not limited to, 'core knowledge')

**In conclusion**, we think the Report carries strong messages for school leaders:

Thus, although in some cases the geography teachers in secondary schools need to get to grips with what an engaging, challenging and enjoyable geography curriculum looks like, in many more cases we believe it is the overall management of the curriculum which is at fault: for instance, geography lessons are routinely covered by non specialists, especially at KS3, and there is little encouragement or opportunity to engage in subject specific professional development.

In many primary schools, the subject is poorly understood and its leadership is not prioritised within the whole curriculum. The subject is therefore paid lip service only: what a wasted opportunity!

**4 February 2011**