Ofsted review of Geography – ‘Learning to make a world of difference’

Introduction

The extract below is taken from the Ofsted review of Geography, ‘Learning to make a world of difference’, published in February 2011. It summarises the findings of research carried out into the provision of fieldwork in secondary schools and sixth forms, between 2007 and 2010. We hope this extract will provide a useful starting point for our discussion about the current situation with fieldwork in schools. If you would like to read the full review please go to; http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/geography-learning-make-world-of-difference.

107. Fieldwork was underdeveloped in the majority of the secondary schools visited. Only around one fifth of the schools visited had an integrated programme to develop fieldwork skills progressively. In almost half the schools there was no significant fieldwork in Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4 only enough to meet the examination criteria.

108. Fieldwork was developed best in the 45 sixth forms surveyed. There were more residential visits and smaller groups of mainly enthusiastic students made fieldwork more manageable.

109. The secondary schools that had successful fieldwork programmes recognised that its benefits outweighed any difficulties. A new emphasis on fieldwork in some of them had been a turning point, revitalising teaching and making geography more relevant and exciting. The schools visited that had a vibrant fieldwork programme frequently said that increasing numbers of students were choosing geography at examination level at a time when numbers were declining nationally. This was often because fieldwork experiences added detail and depth to students’ learning and they understood the relevance of what they were studying.