



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTING SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS 11-18**

**GEOGRAPHY**

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# INSPECTING GEOGRAPHY

## INTRODUCTION

As an inspector of geography, you need to find out how good the pupils are at the subject, to what extent they understand what lies at its heart, and whether it captures their interest. You are likely to be able to explain your findings largely by evaluating the rate at which they progress and judging how stimulating and effective the teaching is.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

These are the main questions which your inspection should answer.

- How high are the standards in geography, and are they high enough?
- How well are pupils progressing?
- How well is geography taught?

### Before you begin your inspection in the school

- Revise your knowledge of the *Handbook* and associated guidance.
- Where necessary, make sure you are familiar with the course objectives and the examination syllabuses used by the school.

*You should already have a good knowledge of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for geography and the level descriptions*

- Analyse performance data to form a view of the standards achieved in recent years and any trends, and to establish hypotheses about strengths and weaknesses in geography.
- Study any departmental documentation which has been made available, and evaluate its potential contribution to the quality of teaching and its coverage of curricular requirements.

### When you are in the school

- Use the first-hand evidence from observation of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with them to assess what the current pupils are like at the subject, what they do well, and where they could do better. Focus on the current pupils in the year groups in which they become 14, 16 and 18. Refer to the records of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Assess what progress pupils are making through the school - how rapid it is, on how wide a front and in what depth.
- Observe teaching, talk with teachers about their work, look at their plans and records, and judge how effective the teaching is - how it contributes to pupils' attitudes to learning, progress and standards. See which approaches work well and which are unsuccessful.

- Take stock of any other factors which affect the teaching of geography and the standards achieved. In particular, assess how effectively the subject is led and managed.
- Make sure that your observation forms contain enough evidence to support your judgements; telling examples are needed for your subject report.

### **Literacy, numeracy and information technology**

- Judge the contribution of geography to pupils' reading and writing.
- Assess the contribution which geography makes to pupils' skills in numeracy.
- Evaluate any contribution which geography makes to pupils' capability in information technology.
- Where information and communications technology is used to support pupils' learning in geography, evaluate the extent to which it enhances the pupils' standards of work. Whilst the pupils may be working well below their competence in information technology, this may still be appropriate to the geography task.
- Record your evidence and evaluations in the 'Other significant evidence' section of the observation form.

### **Feeding back your inspection findings**

- Feed back your findings clearly and helpfully to the head of geography and to the individual teachers by:
  - identifying the most important strengths and weaknesses in the teaching, and supporting your assessments with illustrations from the lessons you have seen;
  - giving convincing reasons for what you judge to be successful or otherwise, making clear how the teaching affects what is achieved;
  - showing the head of department how other factors, particularly leadership and management, affect the quality of teaching and the standards achieved;
  - ensuring that there is opportunity to discuss the findings and that points for development are identified.

### **Writing the subject section**

The geography section of the report should tell a coherent and convincing story. It should explain why the standards achieved are as they are. In particular, you should evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the teaching. The following questions will help you to check the quality of your reporting.

- Are test and examination results interpreted so as to give a clear view of the standards attained, to show how they compare with other subjects in the school, and to identify any trends over time?
- Are there clear judgements of what is achieved by the pupils in the years in which they become 14, 16 and 18? Are the strong and weak features identified in the different aspects of the subject?
- Is there a convincing explanation of any significant differences between what is seen and what results indicate?
- Are variations in the progress of different groups or in different years evaluated and explained?
- Does the evaluation of teaching spell out how it affects the pupils' response and what they achieve? Is it clear which teaching methods are successful and which are not? Is there an explanation of any other factors, such as leadership and management, which are significant in affecting standards?
- Is it clear how far standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection and are reasons given?
- Are the main judgements supported by the most telling examples?
- Is it clear what needs to be done to improve standards in geography?

## ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS

Your judgements on attainment and progress in geography will be based on performance **data** and direct **observations** in the school. Any differences between these judgements **must be explained convincingly**.

### Interpreting data

- For pupils aged 16, compare the school's GCSE results with:
  - the results achieved in schools nationally;
  - the results for schools of 'similar type' (comprehensive, selective or modern);
  - the results achieved in other subjects in the school.

*You should consider the proportion of those studying geography who have attained a GCSE grade in either the full or short courses. Your comparison with other subjects in the school which have a similar proportion of candidates, and with the geography results in other schools, will help to indicate whether standards of attainment are as high as they should be, and whether there are any notable points - for example, differences in the attainment of boys and girls.*

*Bearing in mind the school's curriculum policies and the options available, you will be alert to the patterns of entry for GCSE geography and how these may influence the*

*standards attained. In interpreting results, you may need to refer to matters such as a change in the syllabus or the nature of the year group.*

- Evaluate the A-level and AS results, comparing them with the national results, including those for schools of a similar type. Look at results over several years and take account of performance in GCSE and any value-added measures.

*In making judgements, you will need to **exercise caution** because of the various factors at play, such as the numbers involved and the nature of the students and courses.*

### Using evidence from observations

- In making judgements about pupils' attainment in the year in which they become 14, you should use the evidence of what pupils know, understand and can do according to what is typical in relation to the places, themes and skills in the National Curriculum Programme of Study. For pupils in the year groups in which they become 16 and 18, judge their attainment according to the courses which they follow.

*Teachers' assessments of pupils by age 14, using the level descriptions, are not nationally moderated, but will give you some indication of standards and allow comparisons with other subjects, including any differences in the performance of boys and girls.*

*The school's organisation of the geography curriculum may be such that these three foci of places, themes and skills are not developed in parallel all the time in the lessons and work observed, but a **significant weakness in any of these three foci compared to others means that standards overall cannot be high enough.***

*In all year groups, you need to ensure that the outcomes of fieldwork are included in the judgements which you make, by studying pupils' coursework, projects and any displays, and by talking with them.*

- Judge the **progress** which pupils make in each year, referring to any significant differences between particular groups, such as able pupils, those with special educational needs, and boys and girls.

*The evidence comes from talking with pupils, looking at their written work and seeing how they get on in lessons - how much do they learn and at what rate?*

*For pupils with special educational needs, including those in special schools, judgements on standards, particularly progress, should be made taking into account their best means of communicating - for example, by computer or other form of technology. There may be a need for pupils to do work pitched at levels lower than is normally associated with their age.*

- **Look at pupils' current and previous written work**, ensuring that you also have access to coursework, projects and notes, as well as to exercise books.

*Although the volume of work and the quality of its presentation are important, the focus is on the knowledge, understanding and skills which pupils demonstrate and the progress they*

*are making in communicating them. There should be evidence showing how pupils apply skills in different contexts - for example, an investigational sequence.*

- **Observe pupils working in lessons or in the field**, to obtain evidence of their attainment and progress by:

- listening to their questions and answers, their discussions and group work;
- and talking to them about their current and previous work.

*Your questions and discussions will enable you to find out how tasks were carried out, what is remembered or recalled and what conclusions were drawn from the activity.*

- **Ask questions** which help pupils to show the following:

- development of a sense of place, through curiosity about other places in the world and what it is like to live there;
- the ability to make connections between different aspects of physical, human and environmental geography;
- enquiry and problem solving skills;
- abilities in collecting, analysing, interpreting and presenting data.

- **When you look at pupils' work, see them in lessons and talk with them**, concentrate on the extent to which they:

- know where places and case studies are located, locally, nationally or globally;
- use technical and specialist words accurately to express themselves;
- use an atlas for reference and research;
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of places and of physical, human and environmental themes;
- understand the links between physical and human geographical processes;
- apply geographical skills in their studies of places, themes and issues;
- pose geographical questions, carry out geographical enquiries/investigations and suggest different solutions to problems;
- interpret maps, plans, photographs and other geographical data including that from information and communication technology;
- demonstrate an understanding of geographical issues;

- demonstrate competence in analysing increasingly complex geographical problems;
- show an awareness of different points of view, such as those about competing pressures on the environment;
- investigate independently selecting suitable evidence and using a range of methods and techniques to present findings;
- make appropriate use of information and communication technology;
- use their field-based and practical experiences to develop better understanding of geographical ideas and skills.

*Your answers to these questions will help you determine the major strengths and weaknesses in the subject, as well as your overall judgement about standards.*

## **PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO LEARNING**

- Look out for these characteristics in pupils studying geography:
  - interest in topical geographical matters, such as natural hazards, and their implications for others;
  - curiosity about other places and the people who live there;
  - perseverance in collecting and processing data, ranging from field and practical work to persistence in finding a place in an atlas or on a globe;
  - willingness to ask and answer questions about geography;
  - co-operation with others - for example, in role play, decision making activities or fieldwork;
  - concentration when observing; for example, the match between maps, photographs and satellite images.

## **TEACHING**

- Judge the quality of teaching by weighing its strengths and weaknesses according to the criteria in the *Framework*, and assess its **impact on educational standards**.

*Teaching will not be satisfactory where pupils, or a significant minority of them, learn less than you would expect considering what they already knew. The same is true if they do not firmly consolidate their learning. Effective geography teaching is based on a secure, confident and up-to-date command of the subject, an understanding of geography as a discipline, and high expectations of what pupils can achieve.*



- Inform your views by reference to the characteristics of effective geography teaching, in which the teacher:
  - provides geographical content which is accurate and reflects current information, knowledge and understanding about places, themes and issues being studied (*subject knowledge*);
  - enthuses pupils with descriptions and explanations of places and geographical phenomena, showing how physical and human processes have particular outcomes (*subject knowledge, methodology, expectations*);
  - helps pupils to develop a strong "sense of place", both for their local area and for distant places, by showing how geographical factors connect and interrelate (*subject knowledge, methodology, planning, expectations*);
  - provides pupils with good opportunities to have first hand experiences of geographical investigations and data collection (*planning, methodology, expectations, resources*);
  - exploits information and communication technology as a means of learning geography, through use of a rapidly expanding library of software (*subject knowledge, planning, resources*);
  - encourages pupils to sequence their enquiries and to ask geographical questions, such as "Where is this place?" "What is it like?" "How and why is it changing?" "What might happen next?" (*subject knowledge, methodology, planning, expectations*);
  - shows sensitivity in dealing with controversial questions which arise in geography - such as the equitable distribution of resources, ethnic backgrounds, demographic changes, decisions about land which advantage and disadvantage - whilst acknowledging the need to help pupils develop their own points of view (*subject knowledge, methodology, expectations*);
  - shows pupils how a geographical perspective can help them to understand some of the major concerns facing the world and their relevance to their own lives - for example, through globalisation and sustainable development (*subject knowledge, methodology, planning, expectations*);
  - acts as a role model for pupils by using specialist and technical vocabulary accurately and regularly (*subject knowledge*);
  - ensures that pupils learn to become increasingly independent in their geographical enquiries and investigations, capable of organising and managing the individual coursework and projects in public examinations (*methodology, planning, expectations*);
  - uses field-based and practical work to make links between theory and practice (*subject knowledge, planning, methodology*);
  - ensures that in fieldwork and other practical activities there is equity in the experiences offered to pupils, within a framework of safe practice (*planning, methodology*);

- encourages high quality and accurate presentations of cartographical, graphical and written work (*methodology, expectations*);
  - provides a range of resources and experiences to stimulate and extend all pupils' learning; for example, audio-visual materials, information and communication technology, photographs, maps, globes, atlases, textbooks, journals, magazines, simulations, role play and specialist equipment (*subject knowledge, planning, methodology, resources, homework*).
- Be alert to work which is limited in its effectiveness and insufficiently challenging because it:
- encourages restricted activities such as colouring in, copying or filling gaps in sentences;
  - confuses data transfer with data transformation when dealing with numerical and other presentational devices;
  - relies too much on a single textbook or photocopied worksheets which limit understanding of different approaches in geography;
  - rewards neatness - for example, in the presentation of maps and diagrams - without sufficient concern for content;
  - uses paired or group work as an organisational feature without sufficient thought to membership, task or intended outcomes.

## **OTHER ASPECTS OF PROVISION OR MANAGEMENT**

### **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

- Consider the suitability of teachers' qualifications.

*The majority of teachers of geography in secondary schools have an initial qualification in the subject. However, some non-specialists may be deployed to teach pupils aged 11 to 14. Their subject competence, commitment and level of support will need to be investigated.*

- Also, take the following into account:

- the sufficiency of accommodation and furniture; for example, to ensure effective map work and display;
- the allocation of time to the subject;
- the need to ensure that all the qualities noted in this guidance are met when geography is integrated into a wider programme such as *humanities*.

### **Literacy and numeracy**

- Judge the contribution which geography makes to the development of literacy and numeracy.

*Geography can make a significant contribution to pupils' literacy and numeracy. High standards in the subject require secure skills in reading and writing, as well as numerical and statistical applications.*

### **Information technology**

- Judge the contribution which **information technology** makes to learning in geography.

*The use of information and communications technology in geography is a statutory requirement for pupils aged 11 to 14.*

- Also judge the contribution which geography makes to the consolidation and development of skills in information technology.

### **Curriculum**

- Be alert to the contribution which other subjects make to standards in geography.

*Pupils can gain much from work in other subjects, such as earth formation and structure in science, the origins of settlements and landscape in history, and the moral issues of religious education.*

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

- Evaluate the contribution of geography to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by taking account of examples where:
  - opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect on the earth's origins, future, diversity and beauty;
  - pupils are able to reflect on wider moral and ethical concerns in society, such as the distribution and consumption of the world's resources;
  - in their studies of population, pupils consider the implications of ethnic and religious factors and gender;
  - studies of places, local and distant, rural and urban, illuminate social and cultural characteristics in societies;
  - pupils study environmental issues which cause tensions between peoples - for example, over water resources and deforestation;
  - pupils' studies of environmental matters, particularly conflicts in their local area and the United Kingdom, assist them in their understanding of the law, political processes, democratic institutions and the responsibilities of citizens.

### **Other contributions**

- Judge the contribution which geography makes to environmental education, as a part of personal, social and health education courses, humanities, and general studies in the sixth form.

### **OBSERVATION FORMS**

There follow two sample observation forms for geography. These are intended to show how evidence and judgements contribute to a coherent picture of attainment in these geography lessons. In one lesson, the teaching is judged to be 'very good' (grade 2) and in the other it is considered 'satisfactory' (grade 4).

### GEOGRAPHY YEAR 9 MIXED ABILITY - Very good teaching

**CONTEXT:**

Part of a unit on economic development (POS 11a, b, d and 14a, b). Particular focus is on very large cities and their rapid growth. Data interpretation and graphs.

**TEACHING:**

Very well planned: clear objectives; clear links to previous work on the topic; differentiated by three separate, related tasks; in-built assessment opportunities. Appropriate resources - atlas, textbook, graph paper. Authoritative exposition - good subject knowledge. V effective methodology: clear structure to lesson; exposition includes good q and a involving most pupils; appropriate pupil activity based on paired working. CT circulates providing support and encouragement during activity but initially spends too much time with a few, able, anxious pupils and not enough time with the less able group. High expectations of behaviour. Good momentum to lesson maintained. Grade 2

**RESPONSE:**

Well behaved pupils who settle quickly. Ps interested by CT input; listen well and keen to respond to qs. Good relationships - work well in pairs on the main task. A few less able ps become a bit frustrated because of insufficient teacher attention but the CT then addresses this. Grade 3

**ATTAINMENT:**

Most pupils at L5 or L6. Pupils demonstrate an understanding of population push and pull in Calcutta and Tokyo and can explain reasons for difference. Most present and interpret the data correctly. Higher attainers produce quality graphs and make some quite subtle comparisons and inferences from the data. Grade 3

**PROGRESS:**

Less able pupils had initial difficulty with percentages and scaling of axes but after help work hard to make time up and by end of the lesson they have completed their tasks successfully. Average v productive during tasks and higher attainers fully extended by the more complex qs set for them. Grade 2

### GEOGRAPHY YEAR 11 MIXED ABILITY - Satisfactory teaching

**CONTEXT:**

Models of industrial location. Lesson began with CT exposition and review of homework. Factors affecting industrial location - power, resources, labour etc. Ps read two pages from GCSE textbook describing how factors have changed over time and drew and annotated maps.

**TEACHING:**

Lesson plan satisfactory but objectives need clarification and differentiation plans too vague with single reference to differentiation by outcome. Methodology weakness: exposition too long (20 minutes) and does not cater particularly well for less able pupils; two ps who finish early have little else to do. Secure subject knowledge: exposition clear and relevant; good selection of material from textbook. Expectations reasonable but opportunities missed to develop pupils' questions and answers, and only limited attempts to assess pupils' understanding. Assessment sound: CT circulates during pupil activity and gives reasonable help though less able needed more. Grade 4

**RESPONSE:**

Homework - at least half a dozen pupils had not done it. In lesson, ps generally listen attentively and contribute to discussion when given the opportunity. Most ps work quietly and with good concentration on the map completion task and complete in lesson, but a small number of less able become restless because they cannot fully understand what is required. Ps generally well behaved. Grade 4

**ATTAINMENT:**

Typical standard around average GCSE grades. Most pupils have an understanding of how the importance of different location factors change over time (eg raw materials/coal market) and can deduce how factory locations change. Understanding of less able pupils more tenuous. Grade 4

**PROGRESS:**

Ps' knowledge of key location factors reinforced. Gains in understanding of how centres of individual activity in the UK have changed over time. But the two most able ps under-challenged - need extension work. And less able would benefit from more structure, more limited task if they are to be more successful and productive. Grade 2

## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This is one of a set of booklets which make up *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*. The set consists of:

- an introductory booklet, *General guidance*, which is for all inspectors who evaluate the work of secondary age pupils - it is mainly about inspecting subjects;
- separate booklets on inspecting specific subjects and aspects; the contents page of *General guidance* shows the subjects and aspects which have booklets.

The main points in the *General guidance* are summarised in each subject, but if you are inspecting the work of secondary age pupils you should read the introductory booklet so that you are fully in the picture of what you have to do.

The contents of all the booklets are on the Internet and can be accessed from OFSTED's website [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>]. This will allow you to obtain guidance for individual subjects or aspects.

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