

# Leading Geography

**Research review series: geography**

**Source: Ofsted** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-geography/research-review-series-geography>

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## Summary

Children start on their geography education journey in the early years foundation stage (EYFS). Until 2021, the EYFS framework contained few references to geographical learning. The 2021 update includes many more. For example, the 'people, culture and communities' and 'natural world' strands set out much clearer, identifiable geographical knowledge that children are to learn. In other strands, there are opportunities for children to draw on geographical content. For example, they may develop their fine-motor skills when drawing plans and sketch maps. Crucially, in the early years, children begin to acquire some of the geographical vocabulary that they will build on through the rest of their schooling.

One article highlights the empowering nature of geography and its importance as a subject in its own right and also for strengthening pupils' comprehension across other subjects. Others also emphasise the significant role geography plays in primary schools, helping pupils to understand their world, their role in it and the responsibilities that come with it.

- Substantive knowledge sets out the content that is to be learned. The national curriculum and other geography education literature presents this through 4 interrelated forms:
  - locational knowledge
  - place knowledge
  - human and physical processes (the geography community also includes 'environmental' as part of this)
  - geographical skills.
- Disciplinary knowledge considers how geographical knowledge originates and is revised. It is through disciplinary knowledge that pupils learn the practices of geographers.

A successful geography curriculum reflects teachers' careful thought about what is to be taught, the rationale for it, the sequencing of learning and the relationships between the forms of knowledge. With this in place, pupils are likely to know, remember and be able to do more.



In geography, unlike some other subjects, there is not a commonly held view on what disciplinary knowledge is. Disciplinary knowledge can be viewed as the connection between the academic discipline and the school subject. Broadly, disciplinary knowledge introduces pupils 'to specialised forms of knowledge, modes of thought and experience, which are the symbolic products of past human endeavours to better know the world and the people within it'.

Research states that the 'task of academic geography is to inform, challenge and conceptually re-wire people's understanding of the world'. This gives some insight into the disciplinary knowledge of geography. Other research highlights the importance of initiating pupils into how geographers develop their own thinking. An example would be generalisation, which allows pupils to go beyond their everyday experiences and gain 'insights and understandings'. Consequently, the geography curriculum in schools should allow pupils to gain an understanding of the interconnectedness of the subject and give some insight into the ways of academic geographers.

Teachers need to consider how pupils gain an insight into the discipline when planning the curriculum.

One way of doing this is through the 'powerful knowledge' approach. This approach emphasises pupils' need to learn about disciplinary knowledge, in particular that knowledge is 'open to debate, challenge and discussion by subject experts'. Through building from pupils' personal and 'everyday' geographies in 'dialogue with the academic', there can be 'the possibility of the creation of new knowledge that can give learners a sense of social and environmental agency'.

Given the complexity of disciplinary knowledge in geography, research suggests that 'subject-specialist, qualified, professional teachers are key to the process'.

## Misconceptions

The role of the teacher is to tackle these misconceptions so that pupils are able to properly understand the knowledge being studied. To do so, it is fundamental that teachers' knowledge is secure. Understanding pupils' misconceptions, however ill-conceived they may be, is useful in establishing how best to teach pupils to correct thinking.

**Source:** Chartered College of Teaching

**Date:** September 2018

**Summary:**

- The fundamental role of geography is to help children to understand the world around them, environments, places near and far and geographical processes.
- Strong geographical enquiry develops proficiency in asking questions, collecting and analysing data and coming to conclusions.
- Geographical enquiry is creative and enables children to engage in constructive and imaginative ways to learn.
- Fieldwork develops knowledge and understanding of the environment, including their sense of responsibility and desire to care for and improve what is around them. At Askwith we believe that this will, therefore, provide them with the cultural capital to become global citizens.
- Geography provides children with the knowledge to tie together the past, the present and what may occur in the future.
- Geography has many opportunities for cross curricular links, including:
  - Maths - statistics and directions
  - Science - physical processes such as rock types and the water cycle
  - Computing - interpreting and creating digital maps
  - History - political decisions in the past, such as why armies used terrain for attack and defence

**Source:** Geographical Association (Primary geography curriculum content)

**Date:** 2016

**Summary:**

- Geography learning enhances mental, social and emotional learning.
- Geography knowledge is dynamic because the world is continually changing, as is our understanding of the world.
- Children should be fully engaged in the active process of investigation. This enquiry should include open-ended activities in which children are independently discovering things for themselves.
- Geography synthesises different ideas and types of knowledge, which is why it is challenging and exciting.

**Source:** Geographical Association (Planning a high quality primary geography curriculum)

**Date:** 2016

**Summary:**

- Geography helps children to understand how and why places are changing, and to better imagine, predict and work towards likely and preferred futures.
- Deepens children's understanding of what places are like, why and how they are connected, and the importance of location.
- To help children to learn what the future could/should be like.
- Expose children to a vast range of vocabulary and provide building blocks for a deeper understanding to be a part of geographical conversations about the world.
- Enables children to explore, discover and make sense of the world around them.
- Children develop a connection and understanding of the world and their place within it.