

## Ofsted's view of enquiry and critical thinking

Geographical enquiry encourages questioning, investigation and critical thinking about issues affecting the world and people's lives, now and in the future<sup>1</sup>

### How does critical thinking contribute to pupil achievement?

Ofsted's reviews suggest that creating opportunities for pupils to develop critical thinking is an important factor in promoting achievement in geography. It is linked in particular to the development of enquiry skills, the design of geographical enquiries and activities which may promote originality, creativity and independence; opportunities to consider contemporary issues, and skilled teacher questioning.

### Geography subject-specific guidance 2013

In this [guidance](#) inspectors draw on criteria and grade descriptions in the inspection handbook and apply them to geography; it is their reference point for subject inspections. Critical thinking contributes to outstanding judgements in a number of ways:

#### Achievement

##### Outstanding

- Pupils are able to carry out increasingly complex geographical enquiry, apply questioning skills and use effective analytical and presentational techniques ... They reach clear conclusions and are able to develop reasoned argument to explain their findings.
- Pupils show exceptional independence; they are able to think for themselves and take the initiative in, for example, asking questions, carrying out their own investigations and working constructively with others. They show significant levels of originality, imagination or creativity in their understanding and skills within the subject.
- Pupils are able to express well-balanced opinions, rooted in very good knowledge and understanding about current and contemporary issues in society and the environment.

#### Quality of teaching

##### Outstanding

- Very effective use is made of geographical enquiry to encourage questioning, investigation and critical thinking about issues affecting the world and peoples' lives, now and in the future.
- Very effective use is made of ICT and Geographical Information Systems (where relevant) to promote learning and enable pupils to use data and information sources to search and select, organise and investigate, and refine and present information skilfully and independently.

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<sup>1</sup> Geography in schools: changing practice: [Ofsted subject report](#), 2008

## **Quality of the curriculum in geography**

### **Outstanding (1)**

- The curriculum provides consistently high-quality opportunities for pupils to develop and consolidate the key geographical skills of enquiry, graphicacy and geographical communication.
- Rigorous curriculum planning ensures that the subject makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

### **Geography: learning to make a world of difference (subject report, 2011)**

Ofsted's subject reports summarise the evidence from inspections in recent years. The 2011 subject report highlights strengths and areas for development in geography, including commenting on:

- the link between effective practice and opportunities to develop 'questioning, investigation and critical thinking – key skills in terms of intellectual development and the acquisition of workplace skills' (p.8)
- geography's contribution to local, national and global citizenship, which 'equips them with the skills to make informed decisions and act responsibly ( giving) young people opportunities to critically examine their own values and attitudes ... (and) make informed decisions about playing an active role in their own community as well as others (p.45).

These are developed in detail in a number of case studies.