

What does Ofsted say about GIS?

(Source: *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference*, Ofsted, February 2011, paragraph 56)

For a small number of students, geographical information systems (GIS) were revolutionising and extending their experiences. Visual images from around the world provided via internet links gave immediacy to their learning, and satellite technology brought landscapes to life. Higher-attaining pupils were challenged by being able to overlay data and explore interactive maps to interpret patterns and solve problems. This sixth form lesson illustrates good practice.

The students collected laptops on entry and logged in. In the opening activity the students were shown a photograph of an Indian slum. Google Earth was then used to zoom in and study slums in Mumbai, encouraging the students to discuss whether or not it would be appropriate to make the slums legal. Reference was made to two contrasting less economically developed countries and linked to previous learning. The teacher's questions were challenging, with a strong emphasis on sharpening geographical vocabulary and the skills of interpreting photographs and maps needed for work at AS level. The very effective use of satellite technology for data interpretation engaged all the students. In the final part of the lesson, the teacher referred to the learning objectives and linked them to the next lesson when students would be expected to consider contemporary urbanisation in Britain.

The students' responses showed their detailed understanding and good prior knowledge as a result of a well-planned curriculum. The teacher had very good subject knowledge, taught confidently and challenged and supported individual students. The students' learning at home was used well. As a result, they gained a good understanding of where and how to access different types of satellite images and different types of maps for a range of purposes.