

Geography: learning to make a world of difference

(Source: *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference*, Ofsted, February 2011, paragraphs 110–1, 115–9)

Geography plays a vital role in helping children and young people recognise their contribution and responsibilities as citizens of their local area, their country and the wider global community. It helps them to appreciate diversity and equips them with the skills to make informed decisions and act responsibly. It gives young people opportunities to:

critically examine their own values and attitudes; appreciate the similarities between peoples everywhere, and value diversity; understand the global context of their local lives; and develop skills that will enable them to combat injustice, prejudice and discrimination. Such knowledge, skills and understanding enable young people to make informed decisions about playing an active role in their own community as well as others.¹

Geography education encourages students to explore how places have been changed by the contexts and processes that have shaped them. It helps them to understand the complex ways in which communities and societies are linked and to appreciate the diversity of people's backgrounds. Geography also helps students to understand society better. Appreciating diversity encourages positive relationships and shared values. It promotes tolerance and partnership, within local and wider communities.

In most of the 54 secondary schools visited where inspectors reported on the global dimension of geography, there was some evidence to show that geography had provided opportunities for the students to consider their place within a community, locally and more widely. However, as in the primary schools visited, in 30 of the 54 secondary schools such learning was incidental rather than planned. The schools often had a better understanding of the social rather than geographical dimensions of community. As a result, the idea of 'community' was often narrow, focused on the school and its immediate locality. There was less evidence that the students understood their role as citizens of a global community.

However, in eight of these 54 secondary schools, geography was well managed and understood as a distinctive discipline. The teaching was relevant to the students. For example, they discussed topics in the news, found these interesting and, in most cases, were able to gain a balanced picture of, for example, conflict in the Congo, Gaza and the West Bank or of migration into the UK. National and international initiatives also stimulated their interest and encouraged involvement, as in the geography department described here.

An excellent range of opportunities was provided for students to learn about local, European and global issues. For example, participating in the Eco-Schools Award and promoting the work of the School Waste Action Team (SWAT) helped the students to recognise their responsibilities to conserve resources. However, it was the geography department's active involvement in the International Schools

Award (ISA) that had helped to increase the students' appreciation of diversity. Work on the 'Global Diet and Health' project with the science department had helped to increase the students' understanding of the interdependence of and connections between places. 'Exploring South Africa' had established the school's links with Dweba High School in the Eastern Cape Region and had helped students to appreciate differences and similarities between people, places and environments. Finally, as 'International Ambassadors', the experiences that these students had gained in primary schools in Namibia had been shared with local primary schools. Cultural understanding had been enhanced through, for example, sharing language, costumes and games.

The staff and students had a very good understanding of how places, people and cultures are interrelated and, as a result, schemes of work had been revised systematically. Units of work were developed on Fairtrade, Aids and rivers using the knowledge and first-hand experience that the activities had provided. The students were enabled to explore their perceptions of places and understand better the complex world in which they live.

Some of the best practice seen often had clear links with citizenship, including responsible action. In one of the schools visited, for example, geography students had worked together to achieve Fairtrade status for the school. Two of the projects in which they became involved are described below. They illustrate how the students acted on their geographical knowledge about others in the global community.

Two students presented the ideas of a Fairtrade school to the governors. They explained how this would benefit people around the world who were being treated unfairly and could not speak out. The governors approved the initiative, committing the school to using Fairtrade products wherever possible.

The whole of the Fairtrade group took to the streets of the local shopping centre to encourage shops and cafés to sell Fairtrade products. They wore brightly decorated Fairtrade T-shirts and distributed leaflets with information about Fairtrade products. The students saw that a lot of the shops were already selling products to help those in developing countries but those that did not needed convincing. After the event, one of the students said, 'I feel that we have made a big difference to the attitudes of managers and bosses of many of the shops and cafés. Even if people did not want to listen, I am sure our leaflets and T-shirts made an impact and made them more aware of what is really going on in the world.'

A geography lesson, in a school where the students were predominantly White British, explored the idea of Britishness and what it meant to different people. The intention was to highlight the difficulties of defining Britishness and to encourage students to talk about their personal 'geographies', to think critically about their own place in the world and to appreciate the diversity of the world.

Year 7 students watched a news item showing secondary school students in a London school being interviewed about whether they felt British and discussed what Britishness meant to them. Initial discussions reflected their immediate heritage but began to broaden to include grandparents and great grandparents. Perceptive points emerged: 'You don't have to be born here to be British'.

The teacher skilfully linked the points being made to the diversity of places in the United Kingdom. The students considered whether images shown on the interactive whiteboard were from the UK or elsewhere. The pictures were actually of the Notting Hill Carnival, China Town in Manchester, a back street in Bradford, the London Eye and the London Mosque. Perceptive questioning challenged the students' thinking and perceptions as they explored the images and began to look beyond the obvious. For example, one student felt that the image of the Notting Hill Carnival was not in the United Kingdom. However, the majority of the students disagreed. They identified it as a festival and noted background details, such as brickwork and burglar alarms, as typically British.

The teacher then presented a range of stereotypical images, such as a bulldog, fish and chips, Big Ben, a London taxi and so on. One image, however, was of a girl wearing a hijab whose face was painted with a Union Jack. Students discussed questions such as, 'Is it a British image?'; 'Does it surprise you?'; 'Would you remove it?'; 'Is anything missing?' The students created a 'word wall', with sticky notes, to answer with one word the central question of the lesson: 'What is Britishness?' The students considered the responses they had all made and, as a whole, tried to define Britishness. A small minority of the students reinforced stereotypes, but other students were more evaluative: 'It's how you feel and not where you come from.' This excellent lesson raised awareness, challenged stereotypes and left the students with food for thought.

In the primary and secondary schools that had a well-balanced and integrated programme, the students understood that geography was about what was happening around them, from the local to the global. They had a good understanding of the diversity of life in other countries. This helped them to challenge stereotypes and hold balanced views, as in these examples.

The excellent provision of memorable first- and second-hand experiences through the use of visits and visitors from different communities and the extensive use of ICT ensured that students had a wealth of opportunities to compare similarities and differences and experience a range of places and cultures.

A school had established good links with schools in India and Dubai. The students regularly exchanged photographs and information by email with children of their own age through extensive use of ICT.

A school placed great emphasis on diversity, sustainability, poverty and social justice. It used geography to influence students' attitudes and values positively. Staff and students had an excellent understanding of how places, peoples, cultures and economies were interrelated.

The students in one school visited were actively engaged as local and global citizens. They had been instrumental in improving their own school's environment and had recently established their own allotment. They had been involved in improving the quality of play spaces in their local community and sharing this work with other local schools and councillors. They had raised funds for local and international charities, including Promised Dreams and Oxfam.

The following key features characterised the schools in which geography contributed effectively to students' understanding of their roles and responsibilities as global citizens.

- The students were knowledgeable about the similarities and differences between people and places in their own community and around the world.
- The students learnt to look at places and communities as a whole and examined the interrelationships between people, places and localities.
- The students critically evaluated community and world concerns and had a good appreciation of the impact of development on places and people locally as well as further away.
- The geography curriculum provided a relevant context through which students enriched their understanding of other cultures and societies.
- Students gained first hand, as well as secondary experiences of their local environment and community as well as those in different localities.
- Links with schools in England and in other countries enhanced their learning and encouraged global, cultural and socio-economic perspectives.'

ⁱ *Developing a global dimension in the school curriculum* (DfES-1409-2005), DfES, 2005