

What does Ofsted say about speaking and listening in geography?

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

'In the primary schools visited, there was more evidence of speaking and listening in geography than in the secondary schools. Primary students were more used to working in groups and with 'talk partners' whereas in most of the secondary schools, students' interactions were often with the teacher rather than with their peers and opportunities to learn through well-focused discussion were missed. In general, as noted earlier, teachers' questioning was not effective enough in developing students' thinking and ensuring rigour.

Speaking and listening were best developed when students had the opportunity to talk for various purposes such as giving explanations, information and instructions and using arguments, as well as using a variety of written texts and resources, to encourage discussion about geographical ideas. Resources often included a variety of different maps, flow diagrams, tables, cartoons, 'concept maps', graphs, annotated photographs (both aerial and ground), news reports and articles, and extended extracts from, for example, travel writers.

The following are examples gathered during the survey of how texts supported students' oral language.

- Geographical vocabulary was frequently reinforced during questioning and discussion and displayed in the classrooms as a constant reminder of its importance in geography.
- Teachers regularly used extracts from literary texts in Key Stage 3 as a basis for discussion, such as Bill Bryson's *Notes from a Small Island* in Year 7. Students in Year 11 used a poem by Cecil Rajendra (from *Society Pieces*) to discuss the impact of tourism on less economically developed countries.
- In Year 9, interpretation of media, such as evaluation of fashion advertisements, formed part of a debate on the global fashion industry linked to ethical purchasing.
- An interesting range of texts in a Year 13 meteorology lesson included personal recollections of the Great Storm in Britain in 1987 to support group work, with students feeding back their perceptions of the impact of extreme weather on people and the landscape.
- At the end of a Year 9 lesson on plate tectonics, the teacher used an extract from *Himalaya* by Michael Palin to assess students' understanding.