

# LEADING FIELDWORK

RICHARD HATWOOD

**In this article, Richard considers the benefits of fieldwork and outlines how risk can be managed through using pupil voice.**

Often, fieldwork is seen as a challenge for those teachers who may not have formally studied geography beyond school themselves. Managing the associated risks and ensuring progression in fieldwork skills can be two of the main challenges. Guidance from the Department for Education (2014) on managing risks notes that, 'Children should be able to experience a wide range of activities. Health and safety measures should help them to do this safely, not stop them'. These challenges can be overcome when a whole-school approach is taken – especially one that involves utilising pupil voice.

Fieldwork is an essential element of high-quality geography teaching and learning. Taking the pupils out into the environment and letting them collect and analyse their own data adds depth to their work. This, in turn, helps to increase their engagement in the subject and embeds underlying skills necessary to the study of geography, as pupils move through primary into secondary schools.

When planning the development of fieldwork, start with the school grounds. This is an environment both pupils and staff are familiar with and, as a result, they can focus on developing skills and reinforcing their understanding of this environment. As pupils gain confidence in using equipment, collecting and handling data, and working with each other, they will be more at ease when they move into the local (and potentially more hazardous) environment beyond the school. In addition, fieldwork can include visits to outdoor education centres and take place during other extra-curricular activities in a variety of environments. In order to plan progressive fieldwork, it is imperative to draw on all of the staff's experience. Work together to consider:

- how to bring high-quality fieldwork into learning and ensure that the whole school engages with it,
- where to build fieldwork into current planning and embed it as a regular occurrence (rather than an 'add on'), and
- what additional equipment will be required and how you can purchase it in the most cost-effective way.



**Fieldwork is a vital component of geography and the benefits pupils can gain from well-managed fieldwork make all the planning worth it for pupils and staff alike.**  
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Managing risks during fieldwork can be an area of concern for some teachers. When planning fieldwork, it is essential to allow ample time for the pupils to develop their understanding of risk and the associated methods to reduce it. This approach will also aid their understanding of risk as pupils move up through the school.

It is difficult to remove every risk, and we would be doing pupils more harm by attempting to do so. However, by educating and helping pupils to navigate risk successfully teachers help develop not just fieldwork skills, but also life skills. Explore fieldwork risks through card sorting, diamond ranking and photo-based activities for younger pupils. Older pupils can access online media, build risk tables and calculate risk factors. These approaches give rise to whole-class discussions in which pupils are involved in outlining what they will/will not do, and when. They also allow the teacher to integrate the pupils' voice during work in the field.

Fieldwork is a vital component of geography. Integrating the pupil voice in planning and implementing fieldwork and associated risk enables them to develop skills. Taking them to places beyond the classroom also provides opportunities for pupils from all backgrounds to explore different environments and develop as responsible citizens.

## Reference

Department for Education (2018) *DfE Advice Template*. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335111/DfE\\_Health\\_and\\_Safety\\_Advice\\_06\\_02\\_14.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335111/DfE_Health_and_Safety_Advice_06_02_14.pdf) (last accessed 1/10/2018).



## WEB RESOURCES

GA fieldwork information:  
[www.geography.org.uk/Geography-fieldwork](http://www.geography.org.uk/Geography-fieldwork)

**Richard Hatwood is an Inclusion Officer at Denbighshire County Council and member of the *Primary Geography* Editorial Board. Prior to this, he was Geography Subject Leader at a junior school in North Wales, and led the school to gain a Primary Geography Quality Mark, a British Council International School Award and an Eco Schools Platinum Award.**