

# SO, YOU WANT TO BE A GEOGRAPHY CO-ORDINATOR?

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## Here, Kate offers thoughts and advice for those taking on the role of geography co-ordinator.

I have wanted to be a geography co-ordinator ever since I left my home village in Norfolk and took the long journey to the Isle of Raasay with my A level geography group. There, I truly started to understand the importance of both physical and human geography. Since then, I have been lucky enough to hold the role in several schools around the country, and currently in Shropshire at Oxon CE Primary School.

So, what do you need to be a great geography co-ordinator? When I began jotting-down what had worked for me, I soon realised that many elements make for good co-ordination, none of which require a PhD in geography. As my list grew, it became clear I was going to need the support of my local geography network colleagues to prioritise these elements.

Every school is distinctive and at a different point in its development of geography. What follows are some of the elements you should consider when taking on the role. There are of course many more. Although I do not claim to be an expert, I teach at a school packed with enthusiastic and hard-working staff, who greatly value the contribution geography makes to our broad and exciting curriculum. They are willing to give things a go, with just a little persuasion here and there!

## Being positive, making it visible

My main role is to be positive about geography and the world around us, and to be willing to fight for its place in the curriculum. With so many pressures on time, my role has been about helping colleagues to spot the cross-curricular links that benefit more than one subject: 'this is how my subject fits with your subject' – all the while, ensuring that good progress in geography does not get lost.

At Oxon we teach geography as a discrete subject, but I also ensure that my colleagues highlight the geography throughout their teaching. From when

pupils start school and learn to navigate their way around the building; through looking at maps whenever they are on a visit; to having atlases and globes readily available for pupils to look at where a story is set or a pupil has been on holiday. This is all valuable geography that teachers should point out to their pupils.

## Know colleagues: offer challenge and support

To ensure all the staff are on-board it is essential that you are approachable and have a good understanding of your colleagues' strengths. Make them stronger still by finding ways to make geography teaching enjoyable and rewarding. Embrace change too: be willing to drive change and add challenge by asking 'So what...?' and 'What next?'. Where teachers feel less confident about the subject, your role is to ensure they become confident by supporting them. After all, the pupils deserve the very best.

## Have a school vision for geography

The best co-ordinator, in my experience, has vision: a map for the direction of geography in school. This includes all aspects of school improvement, underpinned by knowledge both of the local area and of what is relevant to the pupils in the school environment as well as further afield. The National Curriculum provides us with the foundation, but in our school, for example, it has been important to make use of the origins of some pupils' families and our link with a school in Kenya (established through the British Council and the Global Learning Programme – see web panel). Our 'vision map' requires us to review what we are delivering, why, and whether it remains fresh, current and engaging.

## Network and seek advice

As a subject co-ordinator you might (wrongly) think you are alone in this task. You are not, and it is vital to look beyond the walls of your school to network with other co-ordinators and make the most of organisations like the Geographical Association (see web panel) for support and ideas.

One of the most valuable resources I have used in moving my school forward is this journal. When a new edition of *Primary Geography* arrives, I share articles with the relevant year groups and we discuss how we can change our current delivery to take account of the material. It is a great morale-boost, too, when we find something we already do being shared as good practice.

Consider how closely linked geography is to subjects such as science and global learning. Recently, I spent a valuable few hours reviewing geography planning with our global learning lead and looking for resources to enhance our current provision. By adding texts and web links we revitalised geography planning and made some of our global learning more explicit, giving staff exciting new ideas. Remember that teachers like to learn too.

## Get outside... and invite people in

So, you want to co-ordinate geography? Well go outside! No advice on geography is complete without emphasising the importance of hands-on learning, preferably outside the classroom (Figure 1). It is vital for a co-ordinator to be up-to-speed on what the local area can offer as well as what the current local issues are.

In my experience, working with organisations like the National Trust or the local museum service to tailor visits to our specific needs have provided the best learning opportunities and, therefore, value for money. Support colleagues in maximising cross-curricular links during fieldwork and ensure there is clear progression in geography skills.

Another useful – and free – resource for co-ordinators is parents and school governors. Inviting visitors into our school to talk about, for example, their country of origin or their employment skills has provided many valuable learning opportunities for our pupils. In addition, during our annual Arts Week we study different countries around the world and encourage parents to get involved in running cooking or sewing sessions. Although the main focus is on art, there is a huge geographical element.

A project to improve our school grounds involved school staff, pupils, the school council, the PTA and Governors. Together we mapped the areas for play equipment, sculpture (Figure 2) or quiet seating.



Figure 1: Pupils enjoying a hands-on investigation of rivers at Cardingmill Valley. Photo © Kate Thurston.



Figure 2: Plans to improve the school grounds included making and siting willow sculptures. Photo © Kate Thurston.

Many geographical skills were used to ensure success – especially in the production of maps to help us decide where new trees should be planted. This demonstrated to pupils that geography is part of everyday life, which gives rise to further discussion and learning.

## Resources and special days

So, you want to be a co-ordinator? Then make the most of special events, e.g. 'Recycle Week' or 'World Environment Day'. In my experience, the free resources provided can trigger excellent geography. The fresh and current material can also help you create engaging cross-curricular experiences.

In 2018, for our World Environment Day we looked at the plastic problem – something we wanted to make our pupils more aware of. We mapped floating plastic islands across the globe, and looking at the plastic problem in our local area led to a range of learning opportunities. These included writing to our local MP (Figure 3) and creating hanging baskets from re-used plastic bottles.

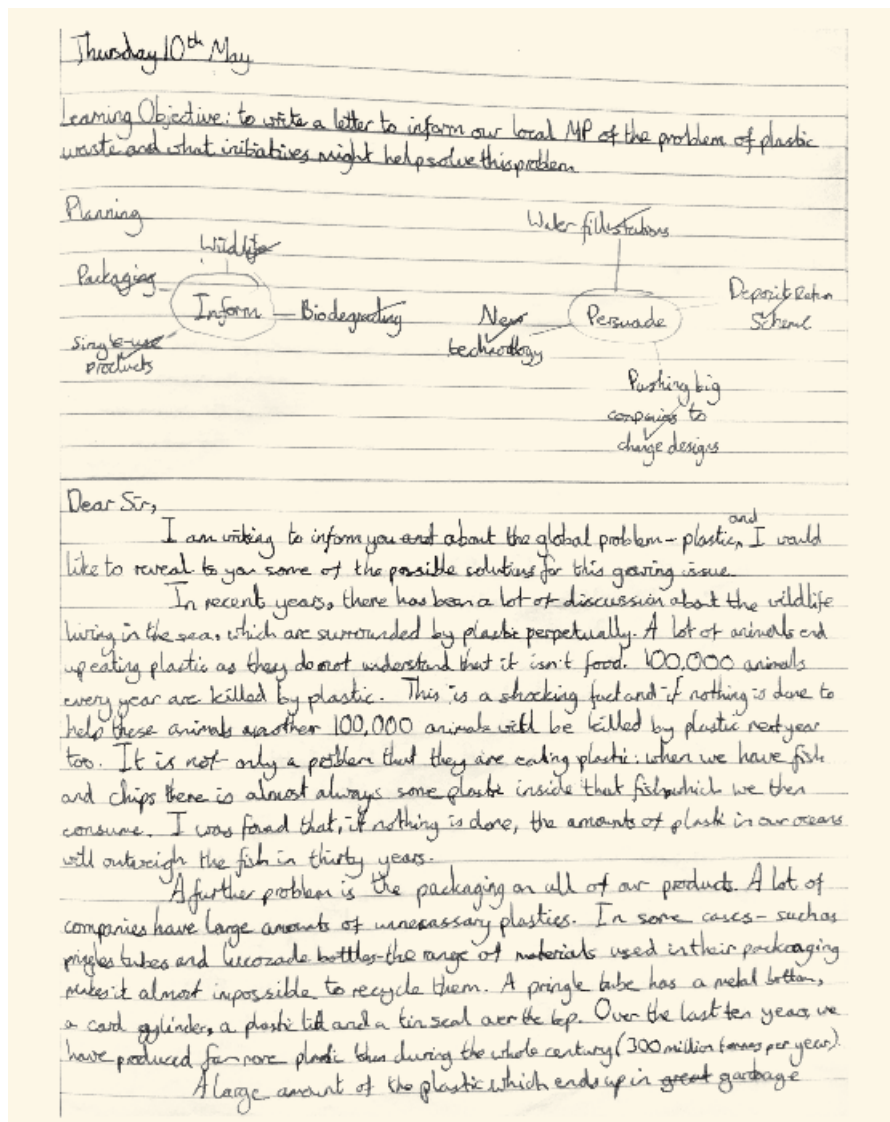


Figure 3: for our World Environment Day we looked at the plastic problem, culminating in writing to our local MP.

As a co-ordinator, it is important to take the time to look at the wealth of free materials available on the internet, finding those that will be of use to your school. Resourcing does not have to be costly: BBC Newsround and First News provide news that is appropriate for primary pupils – all of which is, of course, excellent geography. Despite curriculum changes, 'Geography in the News' remains an important element in our school; here my co-ordinator role is to support colleagues in ensuring that our pupils get a national and international diet of current news.

## Lead by example

The best co-ordinators lead by example and take advantage of all the opportunities that come their way. In 2013, I took the opportunity to teach in Kenya as part of our link with the British Council. This has proved an incredible resource: no buying of photo packs that are out of date before they can be used in the classroom. I now have a 'WhatsApp' link to everyday life in our partner school, Kamukuywa, which our pupils feel a real connection with.

We view their sports day, exam result day, weather conditions, classrooms, uniforms, curriculum and – even better – they see our school's too. We have welcomed teachers from Kamukuywa to Oxon and are learning from each other as our partnership continues. What better resource could there be? It certainly keeps me excited about the power of geography.

So, you want to be a geography co-ordinator? Go on, you will love it!

## WEB RESOURCES

Geographical Association:  
[www.geography.org.uk](http://www.geography.org.uk)  
 Recycle Week: <https://recyclenow.com/recycle-week-2018>  
 World Environment Day:  
<http://worldenvironmentday.global>

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