

# LEADING QUALITY LEARNING

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Leadership is vital in ensuring that quality geography happens across a school. Here Naomi, Paul and Jon offer three perspectives on the role of the Primary Geography Quality Mark in ensuring learning is well-led.

## The PGQM's impact on teaching and learning – Naomi Wagner

At South Farnham School, the process of applying for the Primary Geography Quality Mark (PGQM – see web panel) has provided the impetus for reviewing and subsequently reinvigorating our learning and teaching of geography. As a direct consequence, we now share a more effective and creative interpretation of what being a young geographer in the 21st century means for our pupils because, like their teachers, 'they are all geographers because they live in the world' (Martin, 2006).

Geography is seen as an exciting area within our curriculum, in which pupils learn how to apply skills and processes and to find, organise, analyse and critique the information they have researched. The initial audit checklist for the Quality Mark highlighted that, while we taught geography every week, we needed to review whether pupils were being challenged to think critically across year groups. As Fisher (1990) notes, 'The critical thinker needs to have knowledge about himself [sic] as well as an understanding of others'.

The school already has a high level of medium-term planning, which identifies questions that encourage pupils to investigate topics purposefully. For example, how do volcanoes affect the lives of people living close by? However, we realised the need to talk about geography more often. We recognised that the word 'geography' does not feature in day-to-day activities or conversation. (When was the last time you heard or used the word 'geography' outside of a lesson?) To support this, we started to look at news items around the world such as weather patterns, the impact of tornadoes in Washington, and interesting journeys (such as the first freight train to China). We discovered that pupils were interested in demonstrating not only their knowledge of different countries, but also their experiences of travel. The pupils recognise that they live in a changing world and ask why this change is happening.



Figure 1: After investigating the global issue of plastic waste, pupils as young as eight were able to justify the need to care for our planet to a whole-school audience.

Having recently completed a Global Learning course, we recognised the need to develop our 'local' understanding to a 'global' scale. We wanted to encourage the view that pupils' impact on their local environment has an impact on the world. The BBC's Blue Planet series inspired one class to reconsider our whole-school approach to plastic waste (Figure 1). They opened their assembly with the fact that 'More than 8 million tonnes of plastic reach the sea every year. There will be more plastic than fish in the sea by 2050, and 99 per cent of the planet's seabirds will have eaten some (see photo). Humans are already eating plastic from the sea' (see web panel). Pupils as young as eight were justifying the need to care for our planet to a whole-school audience, rising to a global challenge but wishing to contribute in a local way.

I would recommend applying for the PGQM to any school because it encourages reflective professional practice. It enables a school to both identify what it does effectively and to recognise areas of development, which in turn improves the geography provision we make for our pupils going forward.

## Our PGQM journey – Paul Spear

*'The Primary Geography Quality Mark? Why do I want to do this?' I thought to myself in 2010, when the Head suggested it. I was already leading history and the creative curriculum in my school and saw myself as more of a history expert.*

*Nevertheless, I knew that we needed to have a vision for geography and was very interested in further exploring and embedding the creative approaches that our science co-ordinator had been championing. This involved the use of TASC (Wallace et al., 2012) to organise children's enquiries (Figure 2), using a deep structure for learning.*

*It is key to get Senior Leadership Team support. Fortunately, my Head is very supportive about using creative approaches. We recognise that creativity lights fires in teachers and pupils alike. After spending time in staff meetings and on CPD, staff are keen to adopt creative and enquiry-based approaches.*

*As the months passed, I continued to promote and share practice around creativity, but was unclear on how far my vision was satisfying the*

*strands in the Primary Geography Quality Mark; then Paula Owens paid a visit and I read some of her work (e.g. Scoffham and Owens, 2017). Paula highlighted that hard geographical concepts were missing; she sent me back to speak to colleagues so that we could more closely match our learning to such concepts. As a subject leader, I have learned how important it is to make time to see what colleagues are covering and how they are covering it.*

*Most people just want help and advice. We now carefully link our learning to attainment targets, but have not let the creativity go. We have continued to nurture staff engagement and development through peer observation. We have begun to develop our own deep structure to foster creativity through a 'mastery' approach to the curriculum.*

*Looking back at my original question, what would I say in hindsight? I would highlight how geography now has a high profile in our school. There is no doubt this is due to the PGQM: it made me build a vision for geography. As a result, our pupils like the subject area – as one commented:*

*'I like geography... because it helps us understand our world and what is in it by investigating the effects of us and others. When doing creativity, we use all of our abilities, like empathy.'*

*We have travelled a long way on the geography road. Along the way, I have gained enough confidence to lead training at another school (something I never would have dreamt of eight years ago). We now run a Geographical Association Branch from our school, lead a series of training sessions on the Global Learning Programme, and I am mentoring two other schools through the Quality Mark process. I can honestly say the PGQM has led to some of the most positive experiences in my career.*

*Our Head teacher summed up the value of the PGQM: 'The Geography Mark is an incredibly useful learning and strategic guide. It offers teachers and leaders time to challenge and reflect upon their practice, and how to drive it forward in a way that is meaningful and has impact on pupil outcomes and experiences'.*



Figure 2: The pupils used the TASC wheel to organise their enquiries. Photo © Our Ladys CP School.



## The PQGM process – Jon Cannell

The PQGM is designed to be a rigorous process, to improve standards of geographical learning. It supports schools to deliver a geography curriculum that impacts on pupils' knowledge, skills, values and attitudes; encouraging schools to ask: 'What is geography like in our school?', 'How do we know?' and 'What can we do to improve standards?'

The best applications are well organised and succinct, exemplifying accurate and explicit geographical learning within and beyond geography lessons. Successful schools take their time to carefully select the most representative evidence, conveying to the National Moderation Team that the school knows how to make geography engaging, impactful and progressive. The most powerful evidence is purposefully annotated examples of pupil learning. Be it pupils' written, visual or digital thoughts, actions and outcomes, the moderating team can clearly identify the impact of the school's approaches to pedagogy, assessment, fieldwork and subject development on pupil engagement and performance.

The most frequently asked question among the moderators during assessment is 'Where is the geography?' Schools are encouraged to include learning that goes beyond discrete geography teaching in support of their application, these can include cross-curricular themes, after school clubs and key events across the school calendar. However, when the learning is fundamentally scientific, cultural, historical, trips-focused, environmental or charitable, there can be a distinct lack of geographical context offered by schools, with no clear geographical pupil outcomes. Figure 3 sets out how some common school activities can deliver strong geographical learning outcomes.

The final consideration that should be made when studying and comparing different locations is scale. Africa, for example, is often portrayed in the media as a homogenous 'country' rather than a continent with a rich diversity of countries, landscapes, vegetation types and cultures. At three times the size of the USA (and 125 times that of the UK), comparisons are often better made at regional or country level.

Fieldtrips	Country/region study	Theme Days	Eco/Gardening club	Forest School
Are the pupils involved in the planning: generating enquiry questions, devising a route etc.?	Is pupil-led enquiry happening, where pupils ask: why, who, what if...?	Are cultural aspects explored for their geographical origins e.g. diet and food linked to climate and landscape?	Are pupils encouraged to ask why and how natural resources are precious?	Can forest school activities be mapped? For example, plotting, following and mapping routes.
Are the pupils using maps and other tools to collect geographical data on the field trip?	Are maps and aerial photos of the areas studied and features interpreted? Land use and settlement patterns considered?	Is there opportunity to discuss the origins of art/dance/music being rooted in the sounds, sights and movement of the natural biomes present?	Are 'plant to plate' journeys or food miles investigated?	Are learners involved in risk management?
Do the pupils create and complete risk assessments: maybe with a virtual trip first?	Are everyday human routines and practices studied? Is there the opportunity to challenge stereotypes?	How are the people/places/themes compared to the home locality?	Is there a focus on nature and wildlife? Biodiversity and map work linked to this?	Can any of the learning cover geographical themes such as seasons, weather, water cycle, land use and biomes?
Are pupils designing and carrying out surveys, e.g. land use, traffic, questionnaires?	Is time allowed for research into how and why change has/is occurring?	What is the follow-up work? How does the visit or theme day support the geography being taught?	Are soil types, local geology, micro-climate and the water cycle being studied?	Do different habitats lend themselves to different activities? Why? Does this change over time?
Are pupils able to take measurements and record observations, including digitally?	Do pupils investigate the weather or climate and compare information with 'home'?	Is there a link to map work?	Is a garden planting plan (map) being used?	Are emotional responses to place explored and given geographical relevance?

Figure 3: A sample of common school activities that can deliver strong geographical learning outcomes.

## Bibliography

- Fisher, R. (1990) *Teaching Children to Think*. London: Nelson Thornes.
- Martin, F. (2006) *Teaching Geography in Primary Schools*. Cambridge: Chris Kington Publishing.
- Scoffham, S. and Owens, P. (2017) *Teaching Primary Geography*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wallace, B., Bernardelli, A. and Molyneux, C. (2012) 'TASC: Thinking Actively in a Social Context', *Gifted Education International*, 28, 1, pp. 58-83.



## WEB RESOURCES

Plastic waste: [www.independent.co.uk/environment/david-attenborough-plastic-ocean-sea-blue-planet-pollution-microplastic-a8001641.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/david-attenborough-plastic-ocean-sea-blue-planet-pollution-microplastic-a8001641.html)

PGQM: <https://www.geography.org.uk/The-Primary-Geography-Quality-Mark-PGQM>

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