

# SUSTAINING KNOWLEDGE FROM KEY STAGE 2 TO 3

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**In this article Rosie reflects on how geography is taught in year 7, in order to provide help and guidance for primary teachers preparing their pupils for secondary education.**

## Transition in geography

The concern of geography education with the concept of sustainability is a long-standing one, incorporating issues as wide-ranging as water security, poverty alleviation and urban planning. However, of equal concern should be the sustainability of geography education itself and specifically the way in which students transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3. The concerns surrounding transition have been addressed in depth in educational literature (Bennetts, 1995; Carter, 1999; Chapman, 2001; Jones, 1999; Williams, 1997; Wood, 2001). Most researchers have focused primarily on the importance of ensuring that experience of geography from the final year of primary school (year 6) to the first year of secondary school (year 7) is one that builds on prior learning. Suggestions provide practical ideas of how to build links between students' learning at the two key stages. However, their success depends on whether schools have the time and resources to establish a close working relationship. The focus of this article is broader; it reflects on how geography is initially taught in year 7 so as to provide guidance to primary teachers on how best to prepare their year 6 pupils for the rigours of secondary geography education.

## Introducing geography in year 7

The material for this article is derived from my own experience teaching geography to year 7 students in an academically high-achieving comprehensive in Hertfordshire. The school has a mixed intake from more than 90 feeder primary schools, with students arriving in their first geography lesson with mixed experience of the subject.

Prior to the 2016/17 academic year, our geography department began year 7 with the topic 'Geography in the news'. This was intended to contextualise students' prior learning in light of current affairs, and it worked well with the most able students and those who watched or

read the news regularly. However, as a department we felt that the topic lacked focus on the skills and knowledge students need to develop in order to become successful geographers. Therefore, for this academic year we implemented a new introductory topic: 'What is geography?'. This comprised three initial lessons (Figure 1) followed by a baseline knowledge test.

We felt that this approach to initial KS3 geography education would ensure that not only would all students be at the same level of basic geographical knowledge, but also, from the outset, students would be developing the skills that would enable them to become more confident and able geographers as they progressed through KS3 and beyond. Our decision was taken in light of the growing emphasis within the new GCSE and A level specifications on geographical skills such as fieldwork, annotation, map-reading, statistical analysis and qualitative research. We felt that the more we could develop these skills in students in KS3, the better prepared they will be for their implementation at GCSE and A level. As such, our focus reflects a 'building-block' approach that promotes a deeper, more sustainable understanding of both geographical content and skills.

## Reflections on the 'building-block' approach Preliminary knowledge-building

The feedback we received from year 7 students on their initial geography education was very positive. Summative and formative assessments from the first two lessons reflected students had developed a solid understanding across the ability range of geography's three key strands (physical, human and environmental) (Figure 2) and the skills a geographer needs (Figure 3).

Students were asked to identify and recall a definition of geography, which was then built upon through the introduction of key words. We found that a simple key word test worked well in introducing students to some of the concepts and skills that they would encounter in their geography lessons. Crucially, focusing strongly on a definition of geography and its three inter-related components ensured that all students had a confident grasp of what the subject entails.

## Addressing misconceptions

Students completed a mystery activity as a way of identifying the unique skills and knowledge that geographers bring to the understanding of events and processes. In the activity, students visited four different 'information stations', with extracts of research from historians, religious studies scholars, mathematicians and scientists as to what caused the decline of the population of Easter Island. Students wrote down key pieces of evidence and then discussed as a class how geographical skills can help reveal additional evidence. We asked them to use these skills to explain how the mystery was geographical through a short written paragraph in their exercise books.

The activity was successful in helping students to identify how geography can be used alongside other subjects to understand past and current physical and human phenomena; and all students were able to write a solution to the mystery using their collated evidence. This lesson helped students to identify geographical skills amongst those of other subjects; particularly appropriate given that many students had studied geography at primary school as part of broader 'topic work' which incorporated a range of humanities subjects.

Lesson title	Learning objectives
What is geography?	Define the term geography Describe some geographical concepts Explain what skills a geographer needs
What links does geography make?	Describe and explain how geographical topics can be interconnected Explain how geographical knowledge can help you become a better geographer
How can I study like a geographer?	Describe how geographical understanding helps us to understand the world

Figure 1: Initial mini scheme of work for year 7 geography students.

## Baseline testing

Our lessons concluded with a baseline knowledge test that differed from those used previously, which had graded students by percentages and, in some cases, left them feeling less confident about their geography learning as a result of a low score. Our baseline test required no revision of key words or facts, instead students were asked to write their response to the statement 'Geography is only about maps and colouring in'. Their responses enabled us to assess both their existing geographical knowledge and how they had incorporated the lessons' learning into their understanding of what geography is. The test was evaluated by identifying where students are on the school's progress levels of Foundation, Competent, Accomplished, Advanced and Exceptional. As such, this test provided students with positive feedback on their initial geography learning and gave the teachers an invaluable insight into each student's understanding.

## Suggestions for KS2 transition preparation

The initial KS3 lessons emphasise the growing importance within secondary geography education on both knowledge and skills to ensure student progress. With the ever-increasing pressures in KS2 to focus on numeracy and literacy, particularly in year 6, it is unreasonable to expect primary teachers (including geography specialists) to radically overhaul their geography schemes of work. However, it is important that, as much as possible, the emphasis within geography work at KS2 also seeks to develop pupils' knowledge of what geography is. This could include:

- encouraging pupils to apply their understanding of the three strands of geography, whether as part of a dedicated geography lesson or as part of broader humanities topic work (it could include, for example, making reference to recycling as being part of environmental geography, or to a local river study as being part of physical geography)
- employing map-skills (such as identifying features on a map or measuring distance) as part of any topic work that includes an understanding of specific places and locations
- developing pupils' enquiry and evidence-gathering skills through the use of mysteries
- using mathematical skills to help pupils to interpret and construct simple bar charts to compare, for example, population size in different countries
- simple use of GIS through the use of programmes such as Google Earth, to help pupils to identify global locations and describe these in relation to the UK.

### What is geography?

1. Decide which of the following definitions (on the right) match each of the three types of geography (on the left). Use a line to join them up.

Human geography is	The study of natural features on our planet
Physical geography is	The combined study of how human geography impacts on physical geography
Environmental geography is	The study of people

2. What human and physical geography words do you know? Complete as many as you can in the table below.

Physical geography words	Human geography words
Mountains	Pollution
Volcanoes	Green-house gases
Rivers	

Figure 2: Measuring understanding of geography's three key strands.

By incorporating these and other fundamental geographical skills and basic geographical knowledge throughout KS2, students start their year 7 geography education with confidence and recognise the infinite value and usefulness of the subject. The pupils will also carry with them an enthusiasm for the subject, built upon the firm foundation of geographical understanding developed at primary school, both through specific geography teaching and through topic work that engages with geographical ideas.

## References

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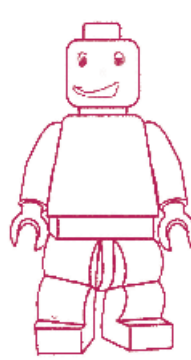
### Geographical Adventurer – mini me!

What skills does a geographer need?

Map reading

Open mind

Finding/using evidence for your opinions.



resourceful

compare and adjust to the opinions around you.

Compass reading

Figure 3: Gauging knowledge of the skills a geographer needs.

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