An interpretation of the Geography National Curriculum

The geography National Curriculum is both specific and vague so in the next few pages I hope to be able to shed some light on each part of the curriculum as well as some ideas for teaching some areas of the curriculum.

**Locational knowledge** – this is traditional geography knowledge or what I call the ‘pub quiz’ geography. This is about children using geography vocabulary accurately in order to be specific with locating their geography.

**Place knowledge** – this concerns what a place is like. Children must gain an understanding of their local area and areas around the world. There is no definition of ‘small area’ or ‘region’ but neither word means a whole country. Often children will follow a topic on a whole country which leads to some very general and possibly misleading geography being compared to their local area.

**Human and physical geography** – this is the geographic content or matter. This should always be taught in the context of a real place locally and/or globally. It is not stated how long children are expected to learn about ‘land use and settlement’ or ‘earthquakes’ or ‘hot and cold areas’ as this vagueness allows the curriculum to be tailored to suit the needs to the children and teachers in your school.

**Geographical skills and fieldwork** – this section is often forgotten or studied in isolation and out of context. The skills and fieldwork are the tools of a geographer and allow children to develop skills that allow them to think and work like a geographer. Almost all of the skills should be present in each topic and children should be carrying out fieldwork at least once a year. The school grounds are rich with fieldwork opportunities and children reflect on fieldwork with great fondness. Atlases are a fantastic resource and should be used regularly throughout each topic. Take time to look through the atlases in your school and see all of the links to the curriculum and beyond.

Geography topics can be planned around a place with relevant human and physical geography linked to the place. Alternatively topics can be planned around the human and physical geography with places linked to the content. If the second approach is adopted then the two (KS1) or three (KS2) place knowledge topics need to be detailed and deep. Geographical skills and locational knowledge should be present in each topic

**KS1**

**Locational knowledge**

Name and locate the world’s seven continents and five oceans

Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, South America.

Arctic, Atlantic, Indian, Pacific, Southern.

Name, locate and identify characteristics of the four countries and capital cities of the United Kingdom and its surrounding seas

England and London, Northern Ireland and Belfast, Scotland and Edinburg, Wales and Cardiff.

English Channel, Irish Sea, Atlantic Ocean, North Sea.

Children need to be speaking these words and playing games around maps to interact with the location of these places, e.g. use the hall or field and mark out the UK or world and get children moving between areas, name the tables in your class, play music from or link a famous person to each continent or country, give children a map with the land and sea specifics labelled and get them to plan a journey visiting land marks.

**Place knowledge**

Understand geographical similarities and differences through studying the human and physical geography of a small area of the United Kingdom

This is the school grounds and surrounding area and to appreciate the similarities and differences around the world children need to develop a deep understanding of their area. At each Key Stage it grows in scale and by GCSE it covers the social, economic and environmental opportunities and challenges of two cities. This area needs to be kept relatively small in order for children to make geographical and accurate similarities and differences to their contrasting non-European place.

Understand geographical similarities and differences through studying the human and physical geography of a small area of a small area in a contrasting non-European country

You can pick anywhere outside of Europe as your contrasting place. Anywhere you like! There is no magic place so pick somewhere that links to your children or teachers in order for it to make sense for your school context. The word ‘contrasting’ isn’t defined but is often interpreted as an economic contrast. You can pick somewhere that contrasts by climate or biome which will naturally lead to other contrasts. Dubai, Singapore, Las Vegas and Rio de Janeiro all contrast to our Hampshire schools so don’t limit yourself to an obscure place that is vastly different to the lives of your children. If there are some glaring similarities it makes children connect to the place of study and in turn make the differences more geographical. Some contrasting place end up being a social comparison of possibly the wrong kind of awe and wonder.

**Human and physical geography**

Identify seasonal and daily weather patterns in the United Kingdom

Aim: to get children to understand the different seasons in the UK as well as the different weather around the UK.

Teaching idea – pick a seaside town, lighthouse or similar in the four UK countries and look at the weather in those places. Type ‘weather X’ (where X is the name of the place) into Google and it gives a weather forecast and shows the differences and similarities clearly.

The location of hot and cold areas of the world in relation to the Equator and the North and South Poles

Aim: to give children the basic understanding that it is warmer at the equator and colder at the poles because of the proximity of the sun. It also begins to teach children to use specific positional vocabulary to describe global patterns. In KS2 this develops to look at climate zones, biomes and vegetation belts plus the positional vocabulary increases.

Teaching idea – Place environment specific animals, e.g. polar bear, orangutans and penguins, at the North Pole, Equator and South Pole respectively to give some context to the theory. Get children to think about why they are found where they are based on their adaptations.

Use basic geographical vocabulary to refer to:

* key physical features, including: beach, cliff, coast, forest, hill, mountain, sea, ocean, river, soil, valley, vegetation, season and weather
* key human features, including: city, town, village, factory, farm, house, office, port, harbour & shop

Aim: to get children identifying human and physical features that are common across a UK landscape.

Teaching idea – Embed these words into topics rather than teaching them in one lesson. For example, forest, vegetation and house fit comfortably into a hot and cold areas topic whereas beach, cliff, sea, town, office and shop may fit into a local area topic. When studying the local area pick about 5-10 words that children may and may not find in their local area. Play ‘I spy’ with the children when carrying out fieldwork and get them to tick or shade in the words when they have spotted the feature. Pick 5-10 different words with some words that are the same and carry out ‘I spy’ in another place using Google maps and dropping the yellow man onto a road. This tool allows you to carry out virtual fieldwork in a different place to allow children to see the human and physical features that are not found in their local area.

**Geographical skills and fieldwork**

Use world maps, atlases and globes to identify the United Kingdom and its countries as well as countries, continents and oceans studied at this key stage

Children should be able to interpret a map with increasing independence so it is vital that they get to see different types of maps. An atlas holds a plethora of maps so it is vital that children become fluent in interpreting them to identify features and patterns.

Use simple compass directions (North, South, East and West) and locational and directional language [for example, near and far; left and right], to describe the location of features and routes on a map

Children can speak significantly more than they can write so developing their confidence with locational and directional language is best done verbally. This can be nicely developed through the two map ideas described previously.

Use aerial photographs and plan perspectives to recognise landmarks and basic human and physical features; devise a simple map; and use and construct basic symbols in a key

Geography is a visual subject and children need to have many opportunities to see different places as well as time to make maps. From Year R to Year 2 children can make maps with blocks and craft materials as well as by hand. Over time the maps should move from how a child sees their house, the classroom or the playground to an accurate representation of reality.

Use simple fieldwork and observational skills to study the geography of their school and its grounds and the key human and physical features of its surrounding environment

Children live geography so they need to be given the opportunity to get out of their classroom to observe the world around them. Going out to look for human and physical features gets children looking at their surroundings. Looking for suitable places for Mr Men and Little Miss characters to live gets children matching characteristics to the environment. Exploring the school grounds through the eyes of a visitor, pirate or cat gives children a different perspective from which to consider their school and the opportunity to see areas they aren’t usually allowed in such as the Head Teacher’s office, the caretaker’s room and the kitchen.

**KS1**

**Locational knowledge**

Locate the world’s countries, using maps to focus on Europe (including the location of Russia) and North and South America, concentrating on their environmental regions, key physical and human characteristics, countries, and major cities

Aim: for children to add detail to their knowledge of the world’s continents learnt in KS1. They do not have to learn the location of all of the countries of the world or in Europe, North and South America but they do need to learn some relevant countries around the world. Atlases have a wealth of maps that can be used to help this learning.

Name and locate counties and cities of the United Kingdom, geographical regions and their identifying human and physical characteristics, key topographical features (including hills, mountains, coasts and rivers), and land-use patterns; and understand how some of these aspects have changed over time

Aim: for children to add detail to their knowledge of UK countries, cities and seas. They do not need to learn all of the counties or cities but those relevant to their location and places they learn about.

Teaching idea: Get the children to plan a journey around the UK to celebrate a medallist from the Winter Olympics or to show a foreign celebrity the delights of the UK. Decide a success criteria for features that must be visited or crossed and allow children to use atlases and google maps to draw and annotate their blank map.

Identify the position and significance of latitude, longitude, Equator, Northern Hemisphere, Southern Hemisphere, the Tropic of Cancer and Capricorn, Arctic and Antarctic Circle, the Prime/Greenwich Meridian and time zones (including day and night)

Aim: for children to use geographical vocabulary to describe global patterns precisely and concisely. The words should not be taught in one lesson but introduced throughout KS2 in relevant topics. For example, latitude, longitude, the Tropic of Cancer and Capricorn are appropriately placed when learning about biomes and climate zones.

**Place knowledge**

Understand geographical similarities and differences through the study of human and physical geography of a region of the United Kingdom, a region in a European country and a region within North or South America

Aim: for children to increase their knowledge and understanding of places around the world at a larger scale than KS1. Many schools look at their local area in more detail as well as looking at another place in Hampshire or the UK to allow children a comparison within the UK. The requirement is for one place to be studied but two places can widen children’s understanding of their country. You can pick anywhere in the world for the other two place studies so pick places that are relevant to your children and teachers to allow children to really understand what the places are like. Avoid learning about a whole country as you need to pick a region within a country to allow comparisons to be made. In addition try not to spend time teaching the administrative regions of the country as it geographical trivia that children probably don’t need.

**Human and physical geography**

Describe and understand key aspects of:

* physical geography, including: climate zones, biomes and vegetation belts, rivers, mountains, volcanoes and earthquakes, and the water cycle

Aim: for children to learn some of the physical matter or content of geography. There is no guidance as to what should be taught within each topic or how long should be spent on each topic. It is important that children learn what is relevant to them for example flooding is a natural hazard that affects the UK and many areas within Hampshire so it is a suitable area to explore with them. Climate zones (areas of the world with similar climates, e.g. around the equator is sunny, hot and rainy), biomes (large ecosystem such as a desert or rainforest) and vegetation belts should be taught together as they largely follow the same global pattern. Mountains can be studied in isolation or alongside volcanoes and earthquakes or rivers and the water cycle as they have connections to both topics.

* human geography, including: types of settlement and land use, economic activity including trade links, and the distribution of natural resources including energy, food, minerals and water

Aim: for children to learn some of the human matter or content of geography.

Types of settlement and land use – Different types of settlements include: capital city; city; town; village; and hamlet. Children can learn about the services found in the different settlements and how they support the number of people living there. They can also look at shopping patterns and transport. Land use is simply what the land is used for and aerial images and Ordnance Survey maps are a great way to show this. Different types of settlement use land differently and it is also used differently around the world, e.g. the land use in Winchester is very different to that in New York.

Economic activity including trade links – This should include work, jobs, money making and how countries trade with each other. Focusing on a product, e.g. cars, raspberries, bananas or chocolate is a really good way of demonstrating trade links and economic activity. Southampton and Portsmouth docks are very economically active and they have good websites too.

The distribution of natural resources including energy, food, minerals and water – This should look at how natural resources are spread around the UK and the world. It can look at specific types of food, minerals and energy as there are too many varieties to look at them all. Minerals are a solid, naturally occurring inorganic substance such as diamonds and gold. Research the area around the school for farms, quarries, reservoirs, pylons and solar farms for example to exemplify the UK’s natural resources. Again the atlas is a brilliant resource for children to use as there are often maps showing the distribution of these natural resources.

**Geographical skills and fieldwork**

Use maps, atlases, globes and digital/computer mapping to locate countries and describe features studied

Aim: for children to be able to interpret maps to find out answers and generate questions. Children should be able to use the key and increase their understanding of patterns and interconnections in the UK and around the world.

Use the eight points of a compass, four and six-figure grid references, symbols and key (including the use of Ordnance Survey maps) to build their knowledge of the United Kingdom and the wider world

Aim: for children to develop their geography skills and fluency with accurately using maps.

Use fieldwork to observe, measure, record and present the human and physical features in the local area using a range of methods, including sketch maps, plans and graphs & digital technology

Aim: for children to independently carry out fieldwork investigations as part of enquiry learning. The aim of fieldwork is to get children observing, measuring and recording data that brings the theory to life and often in their local area. It is such a memorable part of their time at school and it is important that fieldwork is planned so children get the opportunity to learn the geography of their focus area. Sometimes geography fieldwork becomes a trip to a local landmark where actually the focus is walking safety and sightseeing. These trips are important but they are not geography fieldwork!

A process for an investigation is question/hypothesis, prediction, methods, data collection, data presentation, data analysis, conclusion, evaluation. Not all of the stages need to be carried out in detail and at times it is relevant for the teacher to present the data so children can spend time analysing their results and concluding their findings linked to their hypothesis. The stages do not all need to be recorded and the process can be completed quicker when writing is kept to a minimum.