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Notes from Secondary Geography Network 6.11.23

Key messages as shared by HMI Mark Enser

Headlines:

- Positive - The quality of the geography curriculum now and since the 2011 report is massively improved. Key knowledge is identified, and the sequencing of the curriculum is strong.
- KS3 was an area of weakness before, now it is the strongest as all schools visited had considered the layering of knowledge.
- KS4 - 'exam specifications have become the de facto curriculum'. There was less thinking and planning to the synoptic links between topics at KS4 as leaders were using the list of content from the specifications as the curriculum. In the schools visited all specifications had case studies and every one was in a different place.
- Place knowledge was weaker where some schools were teaching a region when in fact students were compiling fact files about a country.
- Skills – there is room for deeper planning and consideration of how we build progression of skills at KS3. For example, when and why do you teach choropleth maps?
- Pupils need to learn how to do fieldwork in the classroom – present, analyse, conclude and evaluate.

Disciplinary knowledge - are pupils thinking in a geographical way?

- Overall disciplinary geography and the identification of disciplinary thinking is weak.
- Are geog models used and explored as a way of disciplinary thinking – often used in KS4/5 especially if spec mentions it such the DTM or Burgess model. A few schools unpicked models and students learned why they were created, how they changed and were challenged over time.

What is being taught in the curriculum and what areas are less well covered?

- Locational knowledge is strong and growing stronger. Much more focus on 'where is this taking place?'
- Human/physical processes are strong as schools arrange their curriculums around related phy/hum thematic topics. However, where schools had built in time to study place through a wider lens and moved away from the 6-week half term thematic approach this helped students to know and understand more.

- Place knowledge is patchy and there was evidence of children having a 'single story' of a place. Strong where HoD considered where places were going to reoccur, and the place ran through the curriculum.
- E.g Nepal EQ a popular KS4 case study but this is a place in isolation and pupils are learning a single story, the story of the causes/impacts/responses to the EQ not the population, landscape, migration and economic activity that helps provide the context.
- Skills often had an 'ad hoc' approach as and when the teacher chooses to include them and leaders need to plan when to introduce skills at KS3 and when to come back to them.
- Fieldwork (f/w) - drop due to covid and some schools not yet recovered. Many schools do 'trips' but few examples were seen in the study where children are collecting, presenting, analysing and concluding findings.
- Question asked by Mark 'Are we getting students through the f/w element of the exam?'
- Consider progression in f/w - how is it more complex Y7 to 8? 9 to 10? How are we helping students to learn to do all aspects of f/w?
- Current affairs and significant places – in most schools teachers used the news to add to learning or highlight an issue rather than showing the latest Sir David Attenborough documentary which is on TV this month.

Approaches and pedagogy – curriculum implementation

- What is the rationale for the activities chosen in lessons?
- There is less variation in the way geography is taught. Common approaches are: retrieval starters and knowledge recaps, teacher input and some whole class Q&A, paired or independent student work, feedback on what is produced.
- HoD need to consider INPUT VS APPLICATION.
- Resources – generally good quality seen. A few schools had specific resources to support GIS, not the majority. All schools had atlases and textbooks. Digimaps for schools was used well to support skills.
- Some stereotypical views evident through worksheets/PPT's seen with pupils. A lack of diversity needs addressing, at simple level use Dollar Street and unequal scenes.

These notes were taken during the presentation, to capture key messages from the report findings. They are not a word-by-word account of what HMI said.

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