

## A creative curriculum to support outstanding teaching and learning in geography: Corsham Primary School

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### Brief description

This example shows how a school integrates geography into teaching to create a broad and balanced creative curriculum. Exemplars of planning and pupil outcomes provide a flavour of the varied and exciting experiences provided for pupils and show what can be achieved with creativity linked to good subject expertise.

### Overview – the school’s message

‘Geography is an inspirational subject which supports and enhances the learning experiences for the children. Our pupils love to find out about the world around them; their desire to expand their knowledge and understanding of all things “geographical” means the curriculum we offer has to be rich in content and experience. Seven of our teachers are geography graduates and their enthusiasm and in-depth subject knowledge helps to further enhance the quality of planning, specifically the key skills that need to be taught from the foundation stage through to Year 6. This is the key to our success in achieving high expectations, outcomes and achievements for the pupils.

The tri-annual Pupil Symposium guarantees that the children have a voice in how they would like the curriculum to be organised; experience tells us that our pupils have very clear ideas about what they would like to be taught and why. Feedback from the last Symposium resulted in changes to the curriculum framework to ensure that creative starting points are used to engage and motivate children in each topic. From an alien landing, to a campsite - every topic starts with a bang! And these rich experiences complement learning, making geography a favourite across the school.’

*Fiona Allen, Headteacher*

## The good practice in detail

### Background

The last national [geography report](#) identified that: 'Planning for teaching geography was often inconsistent. In the classes where this was the case, evidence from discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work often showed that teachers were selective in what they taught, apparently concentrating on the aspects of the curriculum where they felt most secure. As a result, pupils did not get a comprehensive and cohesive experience in geography. In more than half the primary schools visited, little or no geography was taught in Year 6 until after completion of the national tests.'

The report also said that: 'Most of the teachers surveyed were not sufficiently secure about geography to be able to interpret effectively the outline curriculum ideas that had been provided, and ensure that high quality experiences for learning geography were interwoven into the topics they were teaching. As a result, many of the teaching units did not provide a clear and sequential structure which would enable pupils to develop and improve their geographical understanding.'

### Creative curriculum

At Corsham, a comprehensive geography [curriculum outline](#) ensures full pupil entitlement to the National Curriculum. In addition, learning is enhanced through frequent and creative enrichment opportunities. The focus is on making geography relevant and incorporates practical experiences using both the local environment and further afield. Planning is collaborative and works across all three classes in each year group. The overview is broken down into medium-term plans for each unit of work. Unusually for a primary school, seven of the teachers are geography graduates. They apply their subject expertise to support the planning and ensure that high-quality experiences are being identified. There is also good sharing of effective practice and ideas. Pupils receive a very good grounding in geography as they move through the school. Most make very good and consistent progress because the teaching and planning are secure.

### Effective planning

An extensive and detailed medium-term plan provides the basis for teachers' day-to-day work, which is done in collaboration with other colleagues across each year group. This well-structured plan provides excellent guidance for non-specialists to be able to follow the programmes of study and provides them with the confidence to deliver it successfully. At the beginning of each unit of work there is a creative start which grabs pupils' attention and provides an engaging introduction to each topic. These creative starts could be a parcel arriving from a partner school; a video from the town council asking pupils for their opinions on facilities in Corsham; or a tent appearing in the classroom overnight to represent a campsite. As a Year 1 pupil says: 'I was very excited when a parcel was left in our classroom. It was a video of aliens who were flying to Planet Earth and we looked at Google Earth to find where they could land safely.'

There is a strong focus on topicality which ensures that pupils are fully aware of what is going on in the world around them. 'I use "espresso newsbytes" regularly in my class to ensure that children are aware of topical issues and this also means they are immersed in geography on a regular basis' says one teacher. The school also uses [First News](#) - a

children's newspaper - to engage pupils in discussion about world events. Teachers review their planning, evaluate and modify it as part of a cycle of continued improvement.

## Year by year

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, there are six topics - one each for the six terms. Some topics, like 'Caring and sharing' and the 'Seaside' have a specific geographical focus, but geography is also clearly evident in other topics. Throughout, there is a clear focus on the environment, the local area and sustainability. Pupils also go on weekly 'welly walks' to develop an awareness of their surroundings. In term six, there is a fieldwork visit to Warleigh farm.

In Year 1, two units, taught in terms three and five are identified as having a specific focus on geography. 'Alien Encounter', focuses on homes around Corsham to raise awareness about the immediate locality. Learning involves a fieldwalk around the local area to familiarise pupils with key landmarks and features and develops good observation skills. 'Castles and Knights', looks at the location of castles around the world and the provides pupils with opportunities to develop good place knowledge. [Inspectors](#) noted that: 'Place knowledge is good and pupils are able to locate many places as far apart as Thailand or Canada, with a high degree of accuracy.' Citizenship week occurs in term six, when the whole school participates in activities based on citizenship and the global dimension.

In Year 2, the geography is focused in term four with the theme 'Brunel's Bridge Challenge' which incorporates a local study of Bristol, including fieldwork in Bristol. In term five, pupils re-visit [Bristol](#) and spend a day at a contrasting partner school - Compass Point Primary. In term six, pupils study 'Islands - a contrasting location' linked to the Katie Morag stories. Pupils particularly enjoy this work, as one remarked: 'I'm proud of the fact that I now understand human and physical features. On the Isle of Coll there are lots of physical features like beaches, cliffs and mountains because it's near the sea. In Corsham there are more human features like houses, shops and roundabouts because Corsham is a town.' In citizenship week their focus is on their local environment and climate.

In Year 3 the focus is on developing the geography of the local area with the whole of the autumn term dedicated to a local study of Corsham. Fieldwork includes observations around the local area as well as an enquiry where pupils consider the best location for a [campsite](#). Pupils are particularly engaged by the [creative starting point](#) where a campsite is erected in the classroom to stimulate discussion. 'I loved finding out where Reggie had camped when he left his tent in our classroom!' said one. Enrichment activities in the remaining terms focus especially on the environment and sustainability linked to upkeep of the school grounds in which the pupils participate.



During term one in Year 4, pupils complete a detailed study of [rivers](#). 'My favourite geography unit was rivers' says one pupil. 'It was so much fun and we learnt about erosion, different types of rivers and meanders. The best bit was going outside and pouring water on some soil to show how rivers can erode the land.' A contrasting location in Europe is studied in depth in terms five and six, using a linked school in Spain. An enquiry approach is also used to enable pupils to suggest a site for a picnic area. Enrichment opportunities focus on distant localities as well as sustainability.

The Year 5/6 curriculum has a more complex structure because pupils are split across two sites. However, there is a communality which sees pupils studying a range of geographically focused units including:

- 'Jurassic Coasts'; environmental issues including fieldwork linked to the Melksham bypass
- a study of facilities in Corsham including a fieldwalk around the local area
- 'Village settlers', which has a more specific history focus
- a study of a contrasting location in an less economically developed country. This includes using a link with a partner school in India.
- an enquiry focusing on where to build a new classroom. This includes observations and calculations in the locality of the school.

## Outcomes for pupils

This is a comprehensive and well-focused curriculum which encourages pupils to study a range of localities and places both near and far and includes the European dimension. Extensive use is made of links to partner schools and opportunities for fieldwork and fieldwalks are clearly identified to ensure continuity and consolidation of basic fieldwork and observational skills. Pupils also have opportunities to experience an enquiry-based approach looking at locational issues. The curriculum is continually reviewed and enhanced to ensure that it is flexible and responsive to children's needs. This ensures it is a relevant context for learning. The blend of discrete geography, enriched by a plethora of other experiences, provides a vibrant mix that supports learning very well. As one parent concluded: 'The staff work extremely hard to make learning fun and colourful'.

## The school's background



**Corsham** is a large primary school that operates over two sites 2.5 miles apart, at Pound Pill and Broadwood in Wiltshire. Currently 610 pupils are on role. 38% of pupils have a special educational need and/or disability of which 8% have statements. 14% of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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