

Notes from – Keynote Address

Source: Stephen Twigg MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (2004).

Keynote address at GA Annual Conference, from website: geography.org.uk

- I would like to begin by thanking the Geographical Association for inviting me to their annual conference. It is, I know, an important date in the Geography calendar. This year is particularly significant as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the end of apartheid in South Africa. My congratulations to the GA on their successful field trip there last year. I visited Pretoria and the Western Cape as well last year and would like to extend a very warm welcome to South African colleagues here today
- Charles Clarke has given all Ministers subject specialist responsibilities. I am responsible for Geography, as well as for PSHE, Citizenship, modern foreign languages and PE. Geography is an important subject for children of all ages and I want to see it develop and grow.
- We published the *Primary Strategy* last year, building on the success of literacy and numeracy and emphasising the importance of a broad and rich curriculum. High standards, in both core and foundation subjects, are not incompatible with curriculum enrichment – they are mutually reinforcing.
- The 2002 Ofsted report – *The Curriculum in Successful Primary Schools* – illustrated how schools which were successful in helping their pupils do well in English and mathematics did so within a broad curriculum, offering out of school activity, (field studies, visits to environmental centres or growing in school grounds). They offered good quality Geography, history, music, art, PE/sport and a range of after school clubs.
- Geography has an important place within the primary curriculum. Very young children need to understand their place in the world and their relationship with other people and places. They need also to begin to appreciate how human activity impacts on the natural environment, and how what happens in one place can affect many other people far across the world.
- We are seeking to build on literacy and numeracy, placing a much greater emphasis on other subjects in primary schools.
- Workforce reform – giving teachers the space to teach – is a challenging area. We are making progress, as the most recent feedback from teachers and heads shows. There is a welcome rise in headteachers reporting improvements in teacher workloads, up from 4% in November 2002, to 22% in November 2003.
- School support staff, or other adults with particular expertise can be valuable for both teacher and pupils. In Geography, they can help with field studies, or with using GIS systems, or accessing the rich imagery that brings Geography to life.
- There is a lot of work in preparing and following up a field studies visit, for example, as well as running one. A number of organisations offer support for schools, from LEA Advisers, through the Field Studies Council, to locally based field studies centres, and other groups with an interest in the ‘outdoor classroom’. I have recently heard of a classroom assistant playing a leading role in field studies within the school grounds.
- Making use of the help on offer, and at the same time, thinking how these opportunities can make Geography more engaging for your pupils

some who perhaps don't respond well to standard teaching techniques may blossom if they are offered a new experience.

- Geography teachers are in the forefront of teaching developments – notably thinking skills, learning through enquiry and the development of 'argument' as a key skill for pupils.
- Today I came from visiting Featherby Junior School in Gillingham and saw how the interactive whiteboards in every classroom are making a big difference to teachers and pupils.
- There is so much on offer via the Internet, including web-based materials available from Curriculum Online. Geography deals with the 'real world', has access to contemporary images and relevance to current events. Stunning web images of landscapes, water, farming, people in other parts of the world must surely bring Geography to life.
- Our relationship with schools needs to change. We are moving towards greater freedom for schools within an overall national framework. This goes hand in hand with more frequent but shorter, more focused Ofsted inspections rather than a big event which happens rarely, and we are consulting on this at the moment.
- This is an opportunity for each subject to have a rethink and fresh impetus. You may feel this is long overdue for Geography in your school and I urge you to take advantage of self-evaluation to make a difference in your subject.
- I remember being fascinated by Geography when I was at primary school. I even did extra projects on population! There are so many connections with everyday life – how people live, work, travel and consume. Geography looks to the future as well as tracking the effects of the past. It has relevance for the moral, spiritual and ethical dimensions of the National Curriculum and other subjects. When I visited Allfarthing primary in Wandsworth I was struck by their imaginative approach to teaching modern foreign languages. I sat in one lesson where the pupils were studying Geography *and* speaking French.
- Geography is the main home of education for sustainable development, bringing together the environmental, social and economic elements, and relating them directly to pupils' lives. No other subject looks, for example, at patterns of land use locally, connects these to the transport of goods and services, and identifies the effects on people and landscapes on the other side of the globe.
- Geography gives pupils a window on the natural world – and, there is the importance of place. Being able to locate oneself, one's town and country within the globe, making sense of maps. I was at an event at Broomfield Secondary School where Ordnance Survey launched their maps for schools and I saw how captivated the pupils were. These are real life skills as well as creating a sense of identity – literally enabling pupils to make sense of the world.
- The unique contribution of Geography is: preparing young people to engage with the real world, to make judgements about events, to make responsible personal decisions and to understand the complicated interactions between places and people.
- 'Think globally: act locally'. Geography offers practical examples of linking with schools around the world in, for example, Africa. Links like these add value to

learning in Citizenship and create an important cultural awareness.

- I want to move Geography forward through subject specialism. Subject specialism is important, because teachers need opportunities to refresh their knowledge and skills, and continue to develop as subject specialists. We are thinking carefully how to make subject specialism a reality for teachers of all subjects.
- Subject Associations have a key role. The GA is one of the most active and well supported subject associations. It already does much for its members, through an informative website with downloadable resources, publications, conferences, continuing professional development and local curriculum development. For example, there is the new 'Valuing Places', which promotes the international and global perspective within Geography.
- The partnership with the Royal Geographical Society draws on the strengths of both organisations and gives teachers an excellent source of support, advice and resources.
- I want to strengthen our relationship with the GA and RGS, and build on the things we are doing to support Geography:
 - We have provided support, for the three 'Getting Started' projects covering primary Geography, GIS and the new GCSE.
 - We have also funded development of the GA/Open University/FSC fieldwork qualification – Managing and Leading Fieldwork – being trialled at the conference.
 - We organised the recent successful Geography Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) conference with GA, RGS, Ofsted and QCA.
 - We are promoting the new RGS video *Why Geography?* to ASTs and around 8000 careers advisers
 - We are undertaking very important new work as part of the DfES Sustainable Development Action Plan, looking to embed ESD more securely within the National Curriculum.
 - Enhancing Schemes of Work units in Geography, science, design and technology and Citizenship;
 - looking also at what sort of support teachers feel they need to teach about sustainable development with confidence;
 - following up the recent small scale Ofsted ESD study, to develop a framework for a 'whole school approach' to ESD.

Other work in support of Geography:

- Growing Schools – using the outdoor classroom as a resource across the curriculum, supporting developments in field studies. New website and programme of work for this year to be launched soon.
- We have been sole funders of the Met. Office Education Service for a number of years.
- There is a new Humanities category for specialist schools. There are four so far, and we expect more in the coming round. This is a real opportunity to make a powerful case for Geography.
- Key Stage 3 Strategy – in 2003 there was a 5% increase in the number of

pupils attaining Level 5 or above in Geography (tested through teacher assessment) from 63% in 2000, to 68%.

- Last year LEAs and schools were invited to select strong teachers/departments to lead Foundation Subject developments – Geography departments featured well with just under a quarter (23%) of those selected.
- Key Stage 3 Consultants report high quality of planning and teaching in Geography, and on Geography teachers' capacity to improve their practice and share with others.
- This is all very positive and we should celebrate these successes.
- **BUT** Geography teaching is not given good ratings by Ofsted, and many secondary teachers feel the subject is under valued, even marginalised in their school. Primary teachers too have worries about Geography and are often not confident in teaching it.
- Geography needs a boost. I have decided to set up a **Geography Development Fund (£100,000)** to allow the subject community to raise its profile, in advance of future decisions on subject specialism. I will be inviting the GA and RGS to come forward with proposals, in conjunction with other partners. This may be a small step, but an important one.
- I hope the proposals will begin to tackle the issue of CPD – both for primary and secondary teachers and perhaps, will consider the training needs of non specialist inspectors as well
- I will also ask the GA and RGS to continue their lead role in taking forward aspects of the SD Action Plan.
- I would like **you** to think about some wider issues, particularly the contribution that Geography can make to raising achievement for all young people.
- Does Geography appeal to both boys and girls? And to people from different ethnic backgrounds?
- What contribution does it make to communication and mathematical skills?
- Could it do more, for example, in developing reasoning, writing and using data confidently?
- 'Excellence and Enjoyment' applies across all phases, not just primary. There are new opportunities for Geography which I hope you will recognise and exploit. I am a strong supporter, and I hope you will also use me to make the case for Geography, and to raise its profile.