Progression in Geographical Skills

What are geographical skills?

Geographical skills are the methods that geographers use to find out about the world. These include the range of skills for geographical enquiry (asking questions, finding data, analysing data, communicating findings). Geographers put particular emphasis on finding out about the world through different types of maps, photographs, diagrams and other types of spatial data. They also use fieldwork to investigate the world around them directly. There is some overlap between geographical skills and mathematical skills (e.g. drawing graphs) but in geography we use real-world data and it is always spatially located. Extended writing is often used to present findings.

What's the Opening Worlds approach to geographical skills?

Through the Openingworlds scheme of work, geographical skills are integrated throughout the booklet and PowerPoint slides for each unit. This is important because geographical skills are never an end in themselves – their aim is to show pupils how geographers create or communicate new geographical knowledge. Therefore, whenever possible, children should learn to use and to practise them as an integral part of building their own geographical knowledge.

For example, in Unit 3.1 (Rivers), children use a range of photographs and maps of the River Indus to find out about how the river changes from source to sea. They learn and practise geographical skills as they do so.

Just as with geographical knowledge, geographical skills need explicit teaching and regular practice if they are to become integrated into learners' long-term memories. The first time a new skill is introduced, it is taught and reinforced in small steps. Then it is practised regularly in a range of different contexts. Teachers keep reminding pupils that when they use geographical skills and practise geographical vocabulary, they are learning what real geographers do.

How are geographical skills integrated in the units?

Geographical skills are integrated in all units, as appropriate for the knowledge context and students' level of development. For example, simple directional language (e.g. left, right, near, far) is learned in Key Stage 1 then reinforced in Year 3 units. More precise ways of talking about location, for example the 4-point compass, are emphasised in Year 3 and 4 units, then more advanced skills, such as the 8-point compass, are introduced and practised in Year 5 and 6. The skills are always used to help the children learn about the world, not as an end in themselves.

How does fieldwork fit in with geographical skills?

Fieldwork is an important part of geographical enquiry to learn about the world around us. Ideally, all year groups try undertake some fieldwork each year as part of their geography lessons. This fieldwork is often conducted in the local area within normal lesson times, or as an extended lesson, and does not have to involve special equipment or transport costs. There are many opportunities for fieldwork around the school buildings and grounds or within walking distance, for example visiting a the River Mersey (Year 3 Autumn 1 Rivers), visiting a local high street (Year 3 Spring 1 Settlement) or recording the

weather in the school grounds (Year 3 Summer 2 Climate & Biomes). In Year 6, a longer enquiry unit involves fieldwork in the local area, or further afield.

What about Ordnance Survey maps?

The Ordnance Survey (OS) is Great Britain's national mapping agency. It has produced maps of Great Britain since 1791. While many types of paper and digital maps are available internationally and in the UK, OS maps have a particular place in English geography teaching and are part of the Geography National Curriculum in England for Key Stage 2. In the Opening Worlds booklets, children are provided with a rich resource of local, national and world maps, also thematic maps including topographical maps (showing height of land) and maps showing other geographical themes such as population density. In many ways the booklets mirror the resources of an atlas. However, it is also important for pupils to understand how to handle a simple atlas, to look places up in the index and find them on the page. As flat maps are always a distortion of the Earth's curved surface, it is also important for children to use globes. Both atlases and globes can easily be used to complement Opening Worlds booklets and PowerPoints.

What about digital/computer mapping?

Increasingly, spatial data is stored and produced in electronic forms. Many children have seen maps on smartphones or car navigation systems. Openingworlds recognise this by providing images of electronic maps as a resource in some Opening Worlds geography modules (e.g. Year 4 Spring 2 Tourism) Digital technologies can also be a useful resource when undertaking fieldwork.

What is geographical enquiry?

Geographical enquiry involves asking questions, collecting data, analysing data and communicating findings. Enquiry in geography has some similarities to scientific method but is distinct in its focus (always a place/space dimension) and the breadth of its data collection (selecting from a wide range of numerical, visual and word-based methods of collecting data). In Opening Worlds materials, the teaching of geographical enquiry skills is integrated in different units (e.g. asking questions in Year 5 Spring 1 Migration, interpreting tables of figures in Year 4 Summer 2 Deserts). All these skills come together in the Year 6 enquiry unit.

The table below shows this progression in more detail.

	Using ground photos	Using aerial/satellite photos	Using/making diagrams	Making a simple map with kev	Using world/country maps	Using thematic maps	Using simple directional	Using 4 point compass	Using 8 point compass	Using 4-figure grid references	Using 6-figure grid references	Using symbols and keys	Using key lines of latitude/longitude	Asking questions	Using tables of figures	Using graphs	Digital/computer mapping	Fieldwork
KS1	Х	х		х	Х		х	Х				х						х
Y3	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х				Х	Х			Х	Х	Х
Y4	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х		Х		Х		Х	Х		Х	Х	х	Х
Y5	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	х	Х
Y6	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х			Х	Х	Х	Х	х	Х	Х	Х	Х	х