

Excellent geography teaching: Greenbank High School

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Brief description

This case study explains how structured scaffolding enables students to compile detailed in-depth case studies for geography. This approach ensures that they have the detailed knowledge and information needed to answer GCSE examination questions with confidence. The summary sheets that students produce as they work through the sequence of related lessons provide a useful resource for future examination revision.

Overview – the school’s message

‘Students studying geography consistently meet challenging targets at Key Stage 4. Engaging teaching, high-quality resources and effective summative and formative written feedback result in students’ files and exercise books providing excellent revision resources. Good curriculum planning allows all students to build on their learning in an engaging manner that prioritises geographical learning.’

Ian Raikes, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

Background



Evidence from lesson observations nationally indicates that an emphasis on training students in examination technique rather than learning geography inhibits the quality of their geographical understanding. Frequently, such lessons focus on step-by-step dissection of an examination question and meticulous adherence to the marking criteria. While this approach can usefully prepare students to answer a specific examination question, it can become overly formulaic, restricting geographical learning and students’ love of the subject.

It is not good geography teaching to provide a narrow and repetitive approach to learning in lessons. Students may be able to answer a specific GCSE question but are not necessarily good geographers.

'Geography is a popular and successful subject', explains Neil Moore, Assistant Headteacher. 'In 2011, 95% of students attained grades A* to C at GCSE with over half gaining A* or A grades. The emphasis at this school is on learning geography to enjoy examination success rather than the other way around.'

Geography is taught as a discrete subject at Key Stage 3 with 3 hours per year group over a fortnight. It is a popular option and nearly 200 students study the subject at Key Stage 4. Fieldwork for all is undertaken in each year ranging from a river study in Year 7 at the National Trust site at Carden Mill Valley to a residential in the Lake District studying the impact and management of tourism in Year 11. The curriculum is well designed and uses current resources such as a study of the depression in January 2012, materials from the [Teaching Geography Today](#) website and toolkits produced by the [Geographical Association](#).

Students are well taught which supports their accrual of knowledge and information about an issue or topic to stimulate discussion and develop understanding. In particular, students build their understanding through a carefully constructed series of activities which enable them to summarise their thinking and ideas on a case study planning sheet. This also serves as a useful summary for revision. The result is that students are able to apply their knowledge and understanding confidently through the use of these case studies. And as a consequence, they answer examination questions very successfully.

Case study about the Trafford Centre

In the [first of a sequence of lessons](#) on economic activity, effective use of a range of high quality visual resources and skilful questioning help to develop students' thinking about the reasons for the location of the Trafford Centre and its impact on the local economy and community. Initially, the teacher uses a [presentation](#) to get students to use their existing knowledge of the Trafford Centre to develop preliminary ideas about the shopping and entertainment complex. Instead of sharing the lesson objectives immediately with her students the teacher challenges them to think what they might be. Many of

the suggestions are wide of the mark but it makes the students think about the purpose of the lesson.

‘In geography we do fun but challenging activities. The teaching really helps me take the subject in.’

‘Our lessons are broken down into key chunks which enable us to create case studies that are achievable in the examination.’ Lauren - Year 11.

Most students had visited the Trafford Centre. A short video clip stimulates their memories followed by a rapid question and answer session about their own experiences and key facts about the centre. This provides a common basis for further explorative work as students in pairs examine a [regional](#) and a [local](#) map to identify and suggest reasons why this particular site was chosen. Their suggestions, completed on sticky notes, are attached to appropriate points on the map. These ideas are fed back through a rapid question and answer session and expanded through the use of Google Earth photographs and an information sheet of [local public transport links](#). This stimulates further development of ideas about why the Trafford Centre was located on this site. Basic map skills are not forgotten as students use the maps provided to identify the direction from which the last photograph was taken. This requires them to identify key features in the photograph and align these to the maps to determine the direction. Students are given a set time to reflect on what has been learnt and complete columns one and two of the [planning sheet](#), which maintains the brisk pace of the lesson. Students then read through a selection of [speech bubble cards](#) that focus on the impact of the Trafford Centre on individuals and business. This activity stimulates further discussion as students categorise the cards into arguments for and against the Trafford Centre together with perspectives which are neutral. An animated whole-class discussion follows in which students develop their ideas further. They then complete the final two columns of the planning sheet and are encouraged to categorise the points further by identifying them as social, economic or environmental.

‘Case study planning gives me confidence in writing a more structured piece of extended writing. It is like having a skeleton to my work.’ Holly - Year 11.

The review at the end of the lesson builds on the key questions asked at the start. Mini-whiteboards enable the teacher to determine how well individual students had understood the lesson and the extent to which they had progressed. Skilful and pertinent questioning allows the teacher to challenge students’ ideas and answers. This ensures consolidation of ideas and information to enable students to complete the homework when students were expected to write up their case study. Two examples of completed case studies are provided, the first [graded A*](#) and the second [graded C/B](#).

Other case study materials provided by the school

- [Quality of housing in Rio de Janeiro](#) and how it affects the lives of the people who live there (Key Stage 4).
- [Coastal landform and erosion at Old Harry](#) (Key Stage 4).
- [Rural to urban migration in Brazil](#) (Key Stage 4).
- [The causes and different strategies used to control flooding](#) (Key Stage 4)
- [Why are companies moving jobs to India](#) (Key Stage 3)?
- [Assessing the impact of a volcanic eruption on people](#) (Key Stage 3)

The school's background



Greenbank High School is a smaller than average sized school for girls aged 11 to 16. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are low. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. The proportion of students known to be entitled to

a free school meal is also below the national average. The school has specialist status in languages and has achieved the International Schools Award, the Silver Eco Award and the Artsmark Silver Award. It also holds the Healthy School Award, Extended Schools and Investors in People status.

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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