

Geography Policy

Introductory Statement:

This plan will form the basis of each teacher's long and short term planning in Geography and so will influence the teaching and learning in individual classrooms. It will also inform new or temporary teachers of our approaches and methodologies in this subject area. This plan was drafted in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Primary Curriculum.

Rationale:

We recognise that Geography is an integral part of the Social, Environmental and Scientific Education of our pupils. In our school SESE provides opportunities for the child to explore, investigate and develop an understanding of the natural, human, social and cultural environment in which he/she lives and of those in the wider world. The distinct role of Geography plays in SESE is one of helping the child to understand and appreciate the physical and human features of their immediate and wider environments. This plan is drawn up in response to the 1999 Primary Curriculum, to conform to the principles outlined in this curriculum and to review our practices in light of these principles. As a whole school plan it guides the organised teaching and learning in Scoil Mhuire.

Vision and Aims

(a) Vision:

We believe that the Geography Curriculum enables children to make sense of the natural and human environments in which they live and in the wider world. As such, Geography is pivotal to each child's rounded environmental education. Geography prepares pupils to contribute and play a role in their communities by encouraging them to appreciate the interdependence of people. Geography promotes an understanding of and respect for different cultures and ways of life. The Geography Curriculum fosters children's responsibility for the immediate and wider environments.

(b) Aims:

We endorse the aims of the Geography Curriculum.

- To develop knowledge and understanding of local, regional and wider environments and their interrelationships
- To encourage an understanding and appreciation of the variety of natural and human conditions on the Earth
- To develop empathy with people from diverse environments and an understanding of human interdependence
- To develop the ability to use a range of communicative methods, especially those concerned with the development of graphicacy
- To encourage the development of a sense of place and spatial awareness
- To encourage the development of caring attitudes and responsible behaviour towards the environment, and involvement in the identification, discussion, resolution and avoidance of environmental problems
- To develop an understanding of appropriate geographical concepts

Strands and Strand Units

Each teacher is familiar with the strands and strand units, content objectives for his/her class level and indeed for each other's class levels. This is to ensure a coherent programme throughout the school. All strands and strand units will be covered each year and content objectives will be planned at staff-planning meetings.

The three strands of the Geography Curriculum are:

- 1) Human Environments
- 2) Natural Environments
- 3) Environmental Awareness and Care

Skills Development:

We are aware that the development of Geographical skills is of equal importance to strand content of this curriculum. The skills of working as a Geographer are:

- A sense of place and space
- Maps, globes and graphicacy (the ability to understand, interpret and communicate numbers in the form of a graph)

- Geographical investigation skills – Questioning, Observing, Predicting, Investigating and Experimenting, Estimating and Measuring, Analysing, Recording and Communicating, Evaluating.

These skills are developed through the content of the strands and strand units. Strategies for development of these skills involve the children being actively involved in fieldwork, trails and outdoor investigations as suggested in the curriculum.

- A sense of place and space is developed through the direct and indirect experiences first in relation to the child's own home and immediate surroundings but will later extend to include wider environments.
- The use of maps, globes and atlases are used in age appropriate ways from infants to sixth class and encompass a wide range of graphical activities.
- The geographical investigation skills are included in various indoor and outdoor investigation work. By following the content of this curriculum and by developing the geographical skills, the children in our school are given opportunities to work as geographers at every class level.

Children's Ideas

We use the children's ideas of places and spaces as a starting point for all geographical activity.

We find out what the children already know by:

- Talk and Discussion
- Play and Experimenting
- Enquiry Process and Questioning
- Brainstorming
- Concept Maps

We do this to build on the children's previous knowledge or to challenge the existing ideas if they are not accurate.

Approaches and Methodologies:

Our teachers follow the recommended sequential approach for Geography whereby local areas are first studied followed by regional, national, European and global studies. We use the key methodologies of the Primary Curriculum in the teaching of Geography:

- Active Learning
- Problem Solving
- Developing skills through content
- Talk and discussion
- Co-operative learning
- Use of the environment at school level, village level, county level, wider country level.

In learning about our own natural and human environments we will use the following methodologies specific to Geography:

- Fieldwork and trails
- Survey
- Interview
- Maps
- Photographs
- DVDs

Architects' drawings of plans of Scoil Mhuire and environment to teach pupils how to recognise scale in a map—start with map of classroom, proceed to scaled drawing of the school building, school grounds and site, aerial map of Moycullen, ordnance survey map of local area, more detailed maps of Ireland, Europe and the world; globe.

Visitors to the school, including parents/grandparents of pupils, from other countries; China, South Africa.

Visits and workshops from external professionals; ESB; Heritage in the school scheme staff;

In our school, we endeavour to develop the following two approaches in relation to our teaching of geography:

- Fieldwork and trails e.g. our village trail
- Mapwork

Linkage and Integration:

Linkage:

When we are studying the local environment, we will study both the natural and human environments and the effect one has on the other. When we are studying

distant places under the Human Environment strand, we also learn about the natural environments of these places. The strand Environmental Awareness and Care is by its nature, linked strongly with the other two strands.

Integration:

When teaching SESE subjects, we will explore possibilities to integrate the SESE subjects at all class levels. We will refer to the teacher guidelines in Geography, History and Science in order to choose topics or themes for SESE integration. In particular the use of environmental trails in Geography will complement the study of living things in Science while the strand of Environmental Awareness and Care is common to both curricula. The use of trails will also lead to the study of how places and features have been shaped by the actions of people in the past and so integrate naturally with Local Studies in History.

Opportunities that exist for integration with other subjects are:

- SPHE: the development of the child's sense of identity and citizenship
- Mathematics: the skills outlined in mapping and graphs
- Visual Arts: aesthetic awareness in the environments and making drawings
- Physical Education: outdoor and adventures activities
- SESE: using the local school environment:
 - for measuring and drawing to scale (internal and external school environment)
 - Using the Suaimhneas courtyard garden to integrate where possible with aspects of our geography plan as it develops.
- Language: discussion of ideas and relationships in Geography – the language of location, direction and position.

Multi-grade teaching:

The use of an integrated approach within the SESE and the broader curriculum facilitates blocks of time to be utilised in an efficient way and particularly useful in a multi class situation. Teachers must differentiate the work for the different ages by setting tasks for the older children that will demand more complexity in terms of content, process and outcome. We will provide resources for each class level so that they can work independently as another class level is being attended to.

Assessment:

As in all subject areas assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning of Geography. We as a staff have a common understanding of its purpose and the

ways in which progress of children in geography will be assessed, documented and reported. Assessment in geography in our school will fulfil the following roles:

- A diagnostic role – to identify areas of difficulty in order to respond to the needs of the child.
- A summative role – to establish the outcomes of learning after completing a unit of work.
- An evaluative role – to assist teachers in assessing their own practices, methodologies, approaches and resources.

We recognise that assessment techniques used in geography must seek to assess progress in:

- a) Children's *knowledge* of the environment and of the world
- b) Children's ability to use geographical *skills*
- c) Children's development of *attitudes*

The assessment tools we will use in Geography will include:

1. Teacher Observation
2. Teacher designed tasks and tests
3. Work samples
4. Pupil projects

Children with different needs:

It is important that all children experience a rounded environmental education. Geography plays a pivotal role in this education and so we will do our best to ensure that every child will have opportunities to engage in learning activities appropriate to their abilities.

- Teachers will use a mixture of whole-class teaching and group work, with different groups set tasks of various complexities
- Teachers use a variety of questioning techniques spanning from simple recall to more complex and analytical techniques so that all pupils have opportunities for success
- Map work is graded for the less able and the more able students

- Different ways of recording and communicating findings is encouraged: drawing, ICT, written records and oral reports
- All children benefit from active involvement in the environment so all are encouraged to participate in fieldwork
- The child with exceptional ability will be encouraged to undertake additional research and recording their geographical findings in a variety of ways
- Content, methods of recording and desired learning outcomes will be differentiated for children with general learning difficulties.

Equality of Participation and Access:

Equal opportunity will be given to boys and girls to access the geography curriculum

- Provision for children with physical difficulties will be made so that they can access the geography curriculum
- Children whose first language is not English will be supported in accessing the geography curriculum

The geography curriculum in our school allows children to learn of and come to value the diversity of peoples, cultures and societies in Ireland and throughout the wider world and so promote cultural awareness.

Timetable:

In keeping with the recommendations in the Primary Curriculum Introduction a minimum of two and a quarter hours per week is devoted to SESE in infant classes and a minimum of three hours for classes from 1st to 6th. One hour of this time will be spent on Geography. On occasion, time will be blocked as appropriate. This might occur when

- working on an integrated project
- exploring the local environment

Resources and ICT:

Resources:

- Use of the school and of the local area as a resource. (e.g. Water treatment plant in Moycullen; geography trails locally);
- Archaeology in the classroom—using the Heritage in the School scheme for field-trips;
- Guest Speakers eg; Concern; Trocaire; parents with knowledge of other countries e.g. Russia, Germany, Poland, USA;
- Environmentalists in the community will be asked to talk to children and share their knowledge with them – Link with the ‘Travel’ and other themes of Green School Project
- In order to create a map rich environment we intend to use a selection of the following resources for mapping:
 - Maps or plans of the classrooms
 - Map of our school
 - Ireland Wall Maps
 - Europe Wall Maps
 - World Wall Maps
 - Atlases
 - Ordnance Survey Map of locality
 - Globes
 - Aerial Photos
 - ICT—use of photostory for study of local buildings and local heritage;

ICT:

We have access to the internet so that we can use the web as a geographical resource. Use of the internet is governed by a user safety policy.

Individual teachers planning and Reporting:

Teachers will consult this policy for geography and the curriculum documents when they are drawing up their short and long term plans. Teachers will include all strands and strand units every year and will select objectives within the strand units each year. Where it is meaningful and suitable, geography will be taught in a thematic way to integrate with the other SESE subjects of history and science. Cuntais Mhiosúla will assist in recording work covered, in evaluating progress in geography and in informing future teaching and planning.

Staff Development

- Teachers will have access to reference books, resource materials and websites dealing with Geography. Staff will be encouraged to research and try out new approaches and methodologies.
- Teachers will be encouraged to attend courses on geography and to share information gathered at such courses with other staff members. (B.O.M. funding may be available.)

Parental Involvement

Parents have an important role to play as custodians of local knowledge that can be shared with their children as they explore the various aspects of the local environment. Parents are encouraged to help in the delivery of the geography programme by:

- a) Participating in interviews and surveys
- b) Helping out in supervision during fieldwork when/if needed
- c) Talking with children about their lives, work, social and leisure interests
- d) Speaking to classes about their experiences of working/living in other countries
- e) Participating in special days organised to celebrate the various nationalities in Scoil Mhuire; e.g. Russia day; U.S.A. day; Poland day etc. when cultural activities/foods/customs of that country are highlighted.

Parents, priests and missionaries from distant lands will be encouraged to share their heritage with the rest of the school if they so wish and if it is appropriate.

Community Links

- People in the local community who have an interest and knowledge in the environment will be invited to speak to children.
- The local library in Galway is a source of information for the children.
- The work of some national agencies relates to some aspects of the geography curriculum. We will access materials produced by these agencies specifically for schools.

Success Criteria

We will review this whole school plan for Geography in the future using the following criteria:

- How individual teacher preparation, planning and teaching reflects this plan
- How methodologies listed in this plan are working in the classroom
- Resources—adding additional resources as necessary to assist the delivery of this programme
- How well are geography concepts learnt by children
- How well are children's geographical skills progressing

Ratified by Board of Management on 18th March 2015

Signed:

Date:

This policy will be reviewed in March 2018.