

PORT·REGIS



Geography: the key to our future

Tom Murray
Head of Geography

After completing his history degree at Bath Spa University (BA Hons), Mr Murray started his teaching career at Exeter Cathedral School before moving to Port Regis. He has had many roles here, including tutor, houseparent and a teacher of geography, maths, English, history and RS. He has always had a passion for geography; he also enjoys travelling,

especially to South Africa and the USA. Whilst in the Lower Sixth at Canford, he had the privilege of going on an expedition where he worked with children in the Himalayas. This was the origin of his other passion, charities, and he now oversees our charitable work at Port Regis. Drawing on his geographical knowledge,

Mr Murray recently led a school assembly explaining to pupils the devastating impact the 2004 tsunami had on the people of Sri Lanka, and why we are aiming to raise £25,000 to enable our new charity The Foundation of Goodness, to refurbish Lahiru Pre-school.

Geography in today's world

“The study of geography is about more than just memorizing places on a map. It's about understanding the complexity of our world, appreciating the diversity of cultures that exists across continents. And in the end, it's about using all that knowledge to help bridge divides and bring people together.” Barack Obama

It is crucial that our young people grow up with an understanding of issues such as climate change, migration, environmental degradation, spatial epidemiology and inequalities. Our study of geography at Port Regis prioritises issues facing 21st Century

pupils, and we are fortunate to be able to draw on the knowledge and experience of our international community of students and their families, as well as our glorious Dorset location, when learning about our world. As a member of the Geographical Association and the Royal Geographical Society I regularly access their resources and Continuing Professional Development opportunities to ensure the department's teaching is relevant and up to date.

Geography at Port Regis is built around our pupils' natural curiosity about the world around them. The study of geography today is not limited by the time it takes textbooks to be published. The Internet provides us with opportunities to watch geographical events unfolding in real time, such as using webcam footage of Etna erupting in our study of volcanoes.

Globalisation and improving transport links mean that communication with people across the globe, and even carrying out virtual tours of distant places via Google Earth, are all possible in our lessons.

A geographical journey

In our Pre-Prep department geographical knowledge is developed through a cross-curricular approach. As pupils explore topics such as Water or The World Around Us they naturally develop their questioning and research skills, whilst coming to appreciate the diversity of our planet.

'Geography is the subject which holds the key to our future.'

Michael Palin

They make connections which perhaps we as adults would overlook. Did you know, for example, that the Dead Sea is as deep as the Eiffel Tower is tall? They see to the heart of issues and ask humbling questions such as 'How much pollution is in our oceans?'. This classroom-based research and discussion is complemented by trips into the local area and visits from guests and members of our own school community who teach them about global traditions. In the

Lower School, the study of local geography, and fieldwork set in our area, is used to reinforce the topic of local history. Research about farming is supported by visits to local farms, and the village of Shroton provides the opportunity for a study of local settlement and how settlements change over time.

We also study the wider world, with thematic studies of rainforests, polar regions and deserts being linked to class novels, with a focus on the impact of these environments and their ecosystems on their inhabitants. We actively encourage children to develop links between their learning about distant places and our local environment. When studying trees in the Amazon, for example, they step outside the Lower School and compare and contrast these with the ancient trees on our own golf course.

Co-curricular working

Geography is about making links, and this is exemplified by the cross-curricular nature of our work in Middle School. In D Form our study



of the River Ganges links with the RS topic of Hinduism. In C Form we work together with the history department, with our North America project complementing their study of the history of early America. In every year group the geography schemes of work ensure we have a balance between physical and human geography. Finding out why people live where they do, and how the world has changed over time, is important to help us understand where we are going next.

Common Entrance & Scholarships

The decision to withdraw from Common Entrance was made, as with history and RS, to allow the department to modernise our curriculum. Whilst still ensuring our schemes of work prepare pupils for geography in senior school, we now have the freedom to explore topics in greater depth and, crucially, provide more opportunities for fieldwork. Our B Form residential trip to Slapton Ley gives pupils the opportunity to study coastal erosion, rivers and explore how the events of WWII affected the area. In A Form the move away from Common Entrance has given us the opportunity to assess pupils using both a written exam and an extended fieldwork project.

Our Dorset topography provides the ideal material, with a study of the contrasting coastal environments of Durdle Door and Man O'War beach providing both a challenging opportunity for practical fieldwork and a very pleasurable expedition!

Some of our pupils study geography in greater depth as they prepare for academic scholarship exams. The nature of the subject means that there is great breadth, and this is one of the reasons why it is so appealing. Everything is covered, from the more traditional river and coastal landforms to understanding sustainability, gentrification and shoreditchification. Whilst we don't drift too far away from the topics covered by the other sets, we drill down more deeply into complex concepts and processes. Pupils learn to extract information which is hidden in resources such as models, data and photographs, and apply this in their work. Each senior school's scholarship paper is unique, but tasks include interpreting Ordnance Survey maps and answering challenging essay questions such as: 'There can be no such thing as sustainable economic development. Discuss.'



Our aim is to ensure that by the time our pupils leave Port Regis and move on to their senior schools, they will have a better understanding of the world around us, a real interest in and desire to learn more about our relationship with our environment, and a solid knowledge of the different cultures, traditions and places which make up our world.

Tom Murray
Head of Geography
tpjm@portregis.com

