

T1299 Geography Department Management Policies

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Introduction: To be successful, a Geography department needs...

...a rational approach to its work - a set of beliefs and ideas which express the views of the head of department and the staff in the department. This is the starting point of the Geography Department Management Policy. It is the Geography department's own vision of Geography in the school. As such it is the Geography department's most valuable resource.

From this vision come the aims of the department specified in a more functional form. Aims need to be achievable and need to cover such issues as:

- How the day to day actions of teachers reflect the vision of the department.
- The department's approach to change and improvement.
- The department's approach to teaching and learning.
- Working practices within the department.
- The special issue of discipline and behaviour.
- Financing the vision.

In this way we cover the aims, principles, responsibilities and procedures through which the vision is to be achieved. Thus we express not only what we want to achieve, and how we want to get there, but also give a framework for everything that happens in the department.

Why departments should develop their own policy statements:

- The school may lag behind the department in its drive into the 21st century and the department should not be held back by a lack of vision or intent elsewhere.
- Geography is so central to our future that it must forge out certain issues for itself.
- The process of establishing what we do is a valuable staff development process.
- Without the management policies there is no final measure of what happens (or what is supposed to happen) in the department.
- It provides a consistency of purpose and practice within the department as a whole.

The process of developing policies should give everyone:

- An opportunity to contribute to the debate about the beliefs and philosophy on which the department is based.
- Ownership of the consensus view about the strategies adopted to achieve the vision.
- An opportunity to re-appraise his/her own practice in light of the vision.
- The opportunity for teachers to bow out gracefully if they are not happy with the vision.

In order to be useable the policy document should:

- Be practical, giving clear guidance on what is and what is not in keeping with department thinking.
- Be clear and accessible, written in simple language which avoids jargon.
- Be realistic and achievable.
- Be easy to evaluate.
- Be easy to change/modify and adapt.
- Be understandable at once by those from other departments, school managers, OFSTED, governors, the LEA and other interested parties.

In order to facilitate the development of this document it is provided in photocopiable format for sharing throughout the department, and on disk for amendment and development.

Statement 1. The approach to Geography in school.

This is a Geography department management policy which will be of use to any school Geography department which acknowledges four factors:

- That school departments are the engines that drive the school.
- That Geography is a subject of fundamental importance in contemporary education.
- That the way we teach Geography is evolving and changing because the world is changing at ever faster rates.
- That what the Geography department is doing is highly complex and requires more than a mission statement with a few pages of bullet points. Bullet points are helpful, but explanations and detail are crucial also.

Until just five years ago it was widely believed that there were good schools, average schools and failing schools. Now we know that this simplification is not the case. A good school will include some departments that are failing. Failing schools will, despite their failure, include some excellent departments.

A good school is one in which the majority of departments are doing well. An excellent school is one in which all departments are doing well. School improvement, school success and school failure works primarily at the departmental level.

In the past 30 years we have learned a lot about how a good department works. In preparing the series of which this book is a part, we visited a large number of schools and looked at the work of a number of departments. We also studied numerous OFSTED reports and eventually drew up our list of what excellent Geography departments look like.

To us, there is a range of criteria and factors to which the very best Geography departments aspire. Where the views, expectations and practices of such departments form the basis of the management policy of a Geography department, then quality teaching and learning will follow.

It is our view that the policies in this book:

- Will work in all situations no matter how beleaguered the school.
- Can be implemented in any Geography department.
- Cost nothing to implement.
- Bring about improvements quickly.

- Have beneficial side effects such as reducing staff stress while increasing learning outcomes.

As teachers seeking to make schooling relevant to the pupils we teach, we recognise a new world, radically different from that faced by our colleagues 30 years ago:

- The traditional two parent family with one at work and one at home is now in a minority.
- Ever increasing numbers of pupils are brought up in poverty - the underclass does exist.
- Poverty and destitution among young people is increasing, especially in urban areas. Thus as things stand some of our pupils will have nothing to look forward to on leaving school.
- Drinking and drug taking are inexorably on the increase.
- Crime is a major worry for our society.
- The nature of work is changing. It is likely that many of our pupils will undertake work of a type we have never experienced, such as teleworking, experience long term unemployment or create their own work. Computer controlled Call Centres now employ more people in the UK than the motor industry.
- In this new world to avoid the underclass young people will need initiative, creativity and a feel for survival in the post-industrial society, which is less well defined, more fluid, more market driven than now.
- In this scenario teachers need to be leaders into the new society and none more so than Geography teachers.
- We are not in the teaching business, nor the Geography business, but in the business of helping young people make the most sense of the rest of their lives through the tool of Geography.

Overall we are moving to a learning centred model in which the student is the performer, the teacher is the coach. It is the role of the department to offer new leaderships and empower the pupils for the future.