

GA Geography Quality Marks

Happy Birthday PGQM!

Since its launch in 2006, 224 primary schools have been awarded the GA's Primary Geography Quality Mark (PGQM). The award, seen as a key strategy for raising the quality of geography in primary schools, provides teachers with a framework to make a real difference to their geography lessons. Schools who achieve the award are recognised for their excellent, lively and innovative geography. Here, teacher and *GA Magazine* editor **Anthony Barlow** discusses the celebrations on 16 February 2011 for the Award's fifth birthday.

What is the collective noun for Primary Geography Quality Mark-winning schools? I've wrestled with that one for a while and will have to leave it hanging. Suffice it to say, the schools that I met for the PGQM birthday celebrations on a bright February day were loud, proud and very enthusiastic about the geography going on in their schools, like few others I have come across. Is it the Quality Mark that has made them like this, or has it just confirmed already excellent practice? Again, I will leave that for others to answer. What I do know is that I felt

truly privileged to be able to work with the friendly and engaged pupils from nine of the award-winning schools on just one small part of their great geography journey. And it was about journeys that I chose to theme my workshop that day...

Our first activity was making 'talk strings'. Pupils attached sticky notes with their thoughts on what they love and hate about geography to lengths of string. The children were very clear cut about this – as was I! Outed as shopping centre- and beach-phobic, and declared a mountain and forest lover, the pupils soon were chatting avidly about their own personal geographies.

Our next task was to create a picture of Sheffield, an area unfamiliar to most of the pupils. To familiarise them we played Sheffield geography bingo. The cards had images rather than numbers, and pupils had to mark off what they saw in promotional films about the city sourced from You Tube. This is a great way to build up pupils' language and knowledge about places and develop their critical faculties about how popular places can be presented. The pupils soon found out that Sheffield is a place surrounded by hills, that it has numerous rivers and that you can walk in a national park, rock climb and ski in the morning while still finding time to shop, eat and catch a film in the afternoon!

The pupils' final challenge was to design a



Anthony Barlow works with pupils to find out more about their journeys to Sheffield for the PGQM celebrations.

t-shirt representing the journey they had taken that day and why they love geography so much. They also had time to design a map of their journey, thinking about the different modes of transport, signs and symbols and people and places they had come across. A couple of truly busy hours!

As a Quality-Mark winning school ourselves, we know how difficult it is to develop a distinctive, enriching and rewarding geography curriculum. What struck me about these schools though was that they weren't the sort with nature and 'fieldwork-made-easy' on their doorstep; instead, they were like any of thousands of other schools whose mark of quality is the leadership of the teachers, headteachers and governors who see the value of a broad-based experiential curriculum. One abiding memory is the amazed faces of the pupils from two schools listening to their peers from a London school. When they described their school's location near to an open-air lido, there was a deep connection made over the specialness of their place!

From speaking with staff and pupils from many of the schools who participated, they got a great deal from every session that day, so a huge thanks should go to everyone who took part and made it such a success. Thanks also to the Yorkshire and Clydesdale Bank who donated £400 towards the event and to TTS, Wildgoose, Scholastic and the Royal Meteorological Society who donated prizes for the goody bags.



Sheffield Lord Mayor Alan Law, GA staff and teachers and pupils from award-winning schools met on 16 February 2011 to celebrate five years of the GA's Primary Geography Quality Mark.



Making t-shirts about geographical journeys.

For more information about the PGQM go to www.geography.org.uk/ey/primary/primaryqualitymark