

A guide to A Level Geography at Abingdon School

Geography is a dynamic, academic subject that is constantly evolving. The importance of Geography as a subject has never been greater, with climatic and demographic changes having significant global impacts, as well as the spatial connections that have enabled not just global trade to flourish but have encouraged the development of Low Income Countries worldwide. The Geography Department at Abingdon works hard to stay abreast of contemporary geographical issues, delivering lessons that are up-to-date and underpinned with high expectations and the most recent pedagogical ideas.

We are a large department of 8 teachers and a GIS specialist, with a range of experiences and expertise, including Oxbridge graduates, the Head of Sixth Form, Director of Partnerships as well as having staff with experience of working in other fields such as hydrology, banking and the army. The department staff are central to school life with many having roles outside of the department and all contributing to the Other Half in some way.

The department has three central objectives; to cultivate pupil interest in the wider world and encourage them to think like a global citizen; and to help boys draw links between and to evaluate the significance of different topics and concepts. The final objective links to geographical skills, one of which is GIS skills. GIS, or Geographic Information Systems, has become a key focus at university level and is beginning to trickle down into A Level and GCSE. Over the past few years the Geography Department at Abingdon has worked hard to integrate GIS into the curriculum, meaning we are one of the leading geography departments in the country with our own GIS suite and a dedicated GIS technician.

The increasingly popular Geography A Level follows the OCR specification. This includes two core topics; Earth's Life Support Systems and Changing Spaces, Making Places. Further to this boys study Glacial Environments, Trade in the Contemporary World and Power and Borders. These topics are examined in two papers; Physical Systems and Human Interactions. Both exams are 1hr 30minutes.

The third exam in the A Level series is titled 'Geographical Debates' and boys are tested on two main topics as well as testing their synoptic knowledge and understanding. Hazardous Earth and Disease Dilemmas are the two topics currently taught at Abingdon. This exam is 2hr 30minutes.

The examinations make up 80% of the A Level, with the final 20% taking the form of an Independent Investigation (sometimes referred to as the NEA – Non Examined Assessment). This coursework style project requires pupils to conduct four days of field studies (which is led by Abingdon Staff at a designated field studies centre in Wales). Based on their learning pupils will then design and undertake their own investigation into a topic of their choice (though it must link to the OCR specification) and produce a detailed write up of the investigation process and outcomes. This is marked and moderated by Abingdon staff before being externally moderated by the exam board.

Our results are excellent at both GCSE and A Level with 92% of a large cohort of A Level Geographers gaining A* - B in the 2019 examinations. At GCSE 57% gained a 9 in that same year, making us one of the largest, high performing Geography departments in the country. As such, we have a large number of pupils that go on to study Geography at A Level and recent destinations include Cambridge, Durham, Exeter, Newcastle and Birmingham. The significance of Geography in the wider world, and in a world constantly evolving, makes it a very popular choice for further study, and we aim to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful, not just in their academic studies but in later life.

A trip to Wales is a core aspect of the A Level and teaches valuable fieldwork skills, but alongside this we offer a range of trips to a plethora of locations on a rotational basis. Although trips are currently under review and limited by societal situations, we hope to continue to develop our offering of trips in 2021. Future trips may involve travel to the USA, Canada, the Middle East, Ireland, India and Iceland.

Geography is arguably the most diverse, applicable and multi-faceted discipline boys can study at Abingdon. It not only provides them with knowledge that covers aspects of economics, mathematics, biology, chemistry and sociology but it also provides pupils with evaluative, analytical and critical thinking skills.

For further information about studying Geography A Level at Abingdon School, please visit the academic page of the school website.