GEOGRAPHY: PROGRESSION OF VOCABULARY

Bredbury Green Primary School | Nursery–Year 6 curriculum companion

Purpose and principles

This document sits alongside the school's Progression of Geography documentation. It identifies a carefully selected set of Tier 2 academic vocabulary and Tier 3 geographical/topic-specific vocabulary for explicit teaching, use and retrieval. It is a planning aid, not a list to teach in one lesson: teachers should prioritise the words most important to each unit and revisit them deliberately.

Tier 2 vocabulary comprises high-utility words that help pupils describe, compare, explain and reason across the curriculum (for example, compare, influence, pattern and consequence). Tier 3 vocabulary names geographical features, processes, places, tools or ideas (for example, biome, tectonic plate, contour and settlement). Some words can function differently depending on context.

Progression is shown through increasing precision and independence: pupils first encounter and explain words in accessible local and global contexts; they then retrieve them, connect them across places and processes and use them to explain geographical relationships. Retrieval suggestions are opportunities to plan into teaching, not additional content requirements. The sequence below follows the topics and end points in the school's curriculum. Nursery and Reception are suggested EYFS foundations added to bridge into the Year 1 curriculum; the supplied Geography progression itself begins in Year 1.

Whole-school conceptual vocabulary

Concept	Early language (EY-Y2)	Developing language (Y3–6)	Retrieval thread
Place and location	place, near, far, local, country	location, region, national, global, hemisphere	Use across every unit: Where is it? What is it like? How is its location connected to its characteristics?
Human and physical geography	people, building, road, river, hill	human feature, physical feature, settlement, landform, environment	Revisit from Y1; progress from identifying features to explaining

			relationships between environments and human activity.
Similarity, difference and pattern	same, different, compare, group	similarity, contrast, pattern, distribution, relationship	Compare local, national and global places and explain patterns rather than simply spotting differences.
Process and change	change, happen, shape, affect	process, formation, erosion, tectonic, adaptation, consequence	Move from describing what happens to explaining how physical processes shape landscapes and affect people.
Environment and interdependence	weather, plants, animals, people	climate, biome, ecosystem, vegetation, agriculture, trade	Connect climate and physical geography to plants, animals, settlements, work and trade.
Mapping and enquiry	map, key, symbol, direction	atlas, scale, contour, cartographer, grid reference, data	Build from simple maps and compass directions to selecting mapping tools and using them to investigate and explain places.

Vocabulary progression by year group and unit

The lists below are suggested priority vocabulary, not exhaustive glossaries. Tier allocation is a teaching aid rather than a fixed label: for example, 'settlement' is topic-specific in early geography but becomes a recurring disciplinary term across the curriculum. Teach meanings in context and revisit them in speech, fieldwork, map work, reading and writing.

Nursery | Foundations for Place and Position (WellComm focus)

EYFS emphasis: Communication and Language / Understanding the World

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
same, different, near, far, inside, outside, above, below, next to, between	home, school, road, shop, park, map, weather, land, water

Retrieval and progression: Prioritise spoken language through first-hand experiences, play, stories, walks and WellComm-style concept work. Repeatedly rehearse positional and comparative language in meaningful contexts: where an object or place is, what is near or far, and what is the same or different. Name familiar local features and notice simple weather. These words become the language base for Reception route, map, place and environment vocabulary.

Reception | Our Place and the Wider World

EYFS emphasis: Understanding the World / Communication and Language

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific

compare, describe, similar, different, near, far, direction, change	local, place, route, map, key, country, world, land, sea, weather, season, environment, feature

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve Nursery positional and comparison language when describing routes and familiar places. Use simple maps and representations of the immediate environment, talk about similarities and differences between places, and connect daily weather and seasonal change to what children observe. This deliberately prepares pupils for Year 1 map and compass language, human and physical features, the UK, continents and oceans without pre-teaching the full Year 1 vocabulary.

Year 1 | The World

Curriculum strand: Processes

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
locate, identify, describe, direction	continent, ocean, Equator, North Pole, South Pole, aerial view

Retrieval and progression: Secure continent and ocean alongside map and globe. Retrieve human/physical feature vocabulary from Bredbury and use compass directions to describe where features are located. Revisit Equator and global location in Y3 The Globe and Y6 Galapagos.

Year 1 | Bredbury

Curriculum strand: Environment

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
familiar, recognise, describe, local	human feature, physical feature, map, key, symbol, Bredbury

Retrieval and progression: Use the immediate locality to secure the distinction between human and physical features. Retrieve map, key and directional language in every later place study; revisit Bredbury when comparing Chiang Mai and Stockport in Y2.

Year 1 | The UK and Bredbury

Curriculum strand: Place

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
compare, location, direction, national	United Kingdom, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, compass, north, east, south, west

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve local place vocabulary from Bredbury and locate it within England and the UK. Revisit UK countries in Y2, then connect national location to UK mountains and rivers in Y4–5.

Year 2 | Chiang Mai and Stockport

Curriculum strand: Environment

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
similarity, difference, activity, compare, location	Chiang Mai, Stockport, human geography, physical geography, settlement, capital

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve Bredbury's human and physical features and UK location. Compare rather than list features, using because to explain differences in human activity. Revisit settlement and comparison in every later regional study.

Year 2 | The UK

Curriculum strand: Place

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
locate, label, affect, activity, surrounding	capital city, country, sea, settlement, human geography, physical geography

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve UK countries, compass directions, map keys and symbols from Y1. Explain how physical and human geography affects settlements and activities. Revisit UK place knowledge in Y4 Mountains and Y5 Mountains and Rivers.

Year 3 | The Globe

Curriculum strand: Processes

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
influence, location, describe, identify, global	hemisphere, Equator, Northern Hemisphere, Southern Hemisphere, globe, atlas, climate

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve continents, oceans, poles and Equator from Y1. Develop from locating to describing position using hemispheres. Use atlas and globe routinely when locating later biomes, tectonic regions, Iceland and the Galapagos.

Year 3 | Biomes

Curriculum strand: Place

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
influence, affect, pattern, environment, activity	biome, land biome, aquatic biome, temperate deciduous forest, climate, vegetation

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve climate and global location from The Globe. Explain links between biome, plants, animals and human activity. Revisit biome and vegetation vocabulary in Y5 Amazon Rainforest and Y6 Iceland and Galapagos.

Year 4 | Volcanoes

Curriculum strand: Processes

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
form, influence, affect, shape, process	volcano, eruption, magma, lava, crater, active volcano, tectonic plate

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve landform, settlement and human activity. Explain how volcanic processes shape land and affect settlements, trade and agriculture. Revisit and deepen tectonic vocabulary in Y5 Earthquakes and Y6 Iceland.

Year 4 | The Amazon River

Curriculum strand: Environment

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
affect, compare, similarity, difference, influence	river, source, mouth, tributary, channel, Amazon River, River Goyt

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve physical feature, settlement, trade and agriculture. Compare the Amazon with a local river using shared river vocabulary. Revisit river systems in Y5 Mountains and Rivers of the UK and the Amazon rainforest.

Year 4 | Mountains of the UK

Curriculum strand: Place

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
influence, represent, affect, formation, activity	mountain, mountain range, summit, slope, contour, cartographer, climate

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve UK location and physical features. Link mountain formation and climate to settlement, trade and agriculture; introduce how cartographers represent relief. Revisit contour and mountain vocabulary in Y5.

Year 5 | Earthquakes

Curriculum strand: Processes

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
measure, consequence, influence, affect, adapt	earthquake, tectonic plate, fault, epicentre, magnitude, seismic, Alaska, California

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve volcanic processes and tectonic plates from Y4. Compare how tectonic activity affects settlements, trade and agriculture in different locations. Revisit combined volcanic and earthquake processes in Y6 Iceland.

Year 5 | The Amazon Rainforest

Curriculum strand: Environment

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific

environment, influence, adapt, relationship, affect	rainforest, vegetation layer, emergent layer, canopy, understorey, forest floor, Amazon Basin

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve biome, climate and Amazon River vocabulary from Y3–4. Explain relationships between vegetation, environment, settlements, agriculture and trade. Revisit vegetation belts, ecosystems and adaptation in Y6 Galapagos.

Year 5 | Mountains and Rivers of the UK

Curriculum strand: Place

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
region, shape, influence, pattern, over time	mountain range, river system, source, tributary, mouth, contour, settlement

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve UK countries, Y4 mountain formation and river features. Locate major features accurately and explain how they have shaped regions and human activity over time. Use map scale, symbols and contour vocabulary in geographical explanations.

Year 6 | Iceland

Curriculum strand: Processes

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
process, relationship, adapt, consequence, landscape	tectonics, tectonic plate, plate boundary, volcanic activity, earthquake, biome, geothermal, Iceland

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve volcanoes (Y4), earthquakes (Y5), biomes (Y3) and settlement. Combine these concepts to explain how interacting natural processes shape Iceland's landscape, environment and human activity.

Year 6 | The Galapagos Islands

Curriculum strand: Environment

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: geographical / topic-specific
adaptation, relationship, contrast, influence, environment	Galapagos Islands, archipelago, ecosystem, climate zone, biome, vegetation belt, adaptation

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve Equator and global location, biomes, climate and vegetation from Y1–5. Explain how island location and environment influence ecosystems and human activity, and compare agriculture, trade and settlements with the UK.

Suggested retrieval routines

- **Every lesson: 2-minute retrieval:** Ask pupils to recall 2–3 previously taught words, give a definition or example, and use one in a spoken geographical sentence.
- **Beginning of each new unit:** Revisit 3–5 relevant words from earlier learning. Use a map, globe, photograph, fieldwork observation, diagram or comparison prompt rather than relying only on a word list.
- **Within a unit:** Return to key vocabulary after a delay. Ask pupils to locate, explain, sort, contrast or apply words to a new place or geographical example.
- **Across year groups:** Use the retrieval links in each unit to reconnect learning. Re-teach meanings where needed; do not assume that previous exposure means secure knowledge.
- **End of unit:** Check whether pupils can define the word, recognise it in geographical context, use it accurately and explain its relationship to another geographical concept.

What progression should look like

- Nursery: Develop functional spoken language for position, comparison and familiar places, with a WellComm-informed focus on concepts such as in/on/under, near/far, same/different and everyday environmental vocabulary. Reception: Extend this into language for maps, routes, place, land/sea, weather, seasons and simple comparison, creating a bridge into formal geographical vocabulary in Year 1.
- **Years 1–2:** Recognise, name and locate familiar and national features; use simple maps, keys and compass directions; compare places using increasingly precise human and physical geography vocabulary.
- **Years 3–4:** Use precise vocabulary for global location, climate, biomes and physical processes; describe patterns and begin to explain relationships between landforms, environments and human activity using maps and atlases.
- **Years 5–6:** Select geographical vocabulary independently to analyse cause-and-effect relationships, compare regions, explain adaptation and consequences, and connect physical processes with settlement, trade, agriculture and environmental characteristics.

Implementation notes

- Prioritise a small number of essential words for secure learning rather than expecting pupils to memorise every term listed.
- Explicitly teach pronunciation, pupil-friendly meaning, examples and non-examples; display vocabulary in context and expect pupils to use it in discussion, fieldwork, map work and writing.
- Revisit the same conceptual words across places and processes, but deepen their meaning as contexts become more complex.
- Use formative assessment to identify whether pupils can recognise, explain, retrieve and apply vocabulary—not simply repeat a definition.
- This document is based on the uploaded Progression of Geography. It does not add new geography units; suggested vocabulary and retrieval links are an accompanying interpretation for planning.