

# Teaching matters

Articles and opinions on primary teaching, with tips and ideas for the classroom

## Using maps in the classroom



"I've always been fascinated by maps and cartography. A map tells you where you've been, where you are, and where you're going — in a sense it's three tenses in one." (Film director Peter Greenaway in Film Comment, May/June 1990)

Maps are intriguing. Most people have, at some stage or other, spent a lot of time staring at maps. A map can tell you about several features or characteristics at once and can convey information with a few simple images and very few words.

Scoilnet continues to license Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) maps and makes them available free to schools and teachers through the maps.scoilnet.ie website. While the service was originally developed to support the post-primary geography curriculum, more and more primary teachers are now using the OSi maps to engage pupils in understanding both the natural and the human environment of their locality – the sense of place and space as prescribed in the curriculum.

The OSi Map Viewer available through Scoilnet had a re-design last year and the interface, while more modern looking, contains a number of features designed specifically for classroom use:

- A choice of six different maps, including a basic OS map, aerial maps, discovery maps, historical maps from the mid-19th and 20th centuries.
- A draw and measure tool to allow pupils to measure distances or area.

- An elevation profile tool that enables the pupil to view a profile of the elevation height along a route between two or more points.
- A swipe and spotlight widget that allows pupils to compare two maps that are stacked on top of each other.

### Developing effective practice

Learning about maps and map work should be active, practical and involve regular map use. Maps can be a resource for most topics across the SESE geography curriculum and can also be used for history while the skills developed will also build numeracy adeptness – but the scope for use across the curriculum is really endless!

Mark Boggins, a teacher at Holy Family NS in Rathcoole, features in a support video created by PDST Technology in Education to show how he uses Scoilnet Maps in his classroom. In the video, the maps activity is one of five different station activities – some paper-based, some technology-based – which all support the development of mapping concepts and geographical investigation skills. The lesson integrates numeracy as well as other curricular areas, like history, English and even religion. His concluding remarks should convince other teachers about the worth of engaging with Scoilnet Maps.

"To me anything in the classroom that can draw their attention immediately is a great tool. Through experience I find the

children like using it and have asked to use it again after using it the first time."

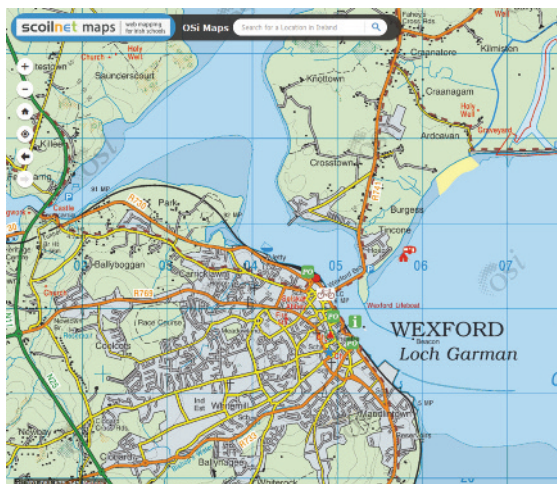
### Three suggested starter activities

The maps and tools available on Scoilnet Maps can be effectively used for any class from first/second upwards so the following ideas could be adjusted accordingly:

- Zoom in to your local area (note scale) and use the map switcher to move between the OSi map and the aerial photo. What features can be seen? View the discovery map and see how local features are represented.
- Use the map switcher to compare your locality and how it has changed over time. The Cassini six inch map (1930s), The Historic six inch map (1829-1842) and both are only available when viewed at 1:10,000. How have humans altered the landscape? Use the swipe and spotlight widget at the bottom of the interface for maximum impact.
- Use the draw and measure widget measure the distance from the school to a local landmark. Compare different routes.

The OSi maps are openly available within the schools broadband network and teachers can access remotely by using a Scoilnet account. A teachers' zone contains lesson plans and worksheets. [www.maps.scoilnet.ie](http://www.maps.scoilnet.ie)

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Left: Discovery Map of Wexford town and area. Discovery maps were originally designed for tourist and leisure activities.

Right: Historical map of Wexford town dating from the 1830s.

