

## Progress of school education through Geopark Studies in the Itoigawa Global Geopark

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Geoparks are parks where visitors can learn about the relationship between mankind and the earth, but they are also part of a movement to develop sustainable regional societies. Education is regarded as one of the most important elements of the Geopark Movement which includes a system to foster the human resources that will manage our sustainable society in future. Itoigawa has begun to construct a sustainable regional society since Global Geopark certification in 2009. The Itoigawa City Board of Education recognized the important role of the Geopark in school education and has included a Geopark Studies program within the compulsory education (elementary and junior high school) curriculum. The first action was to establish a new education plan called the Unified Education Policy for Children Aged 0 through 18 in 2009 in which Geopark Studies was first introduced. Since then, the City Board of Education's continuing support of Geopark Studies has provided the following results: (1) Number of staff member of the Science Education Center has been increased and a Geopark Department has been established in the Itoigawa Teachers Organization's Society of Education Research. (2) Training programs (outdoor and indoor) have been held by these organizations and the Itoigawa Geopark Council, showing educators how geoparks can be used for classroom education. (3) City-wide Geopark Studies Conferences have been held to give students a chance to share what they have learned. (4) Supplementary textbooks for grades 3 through 9 have been published and distributed by various editorial boards, providing invaluable resources for the study of earth science and history as well as regional culture. (5) Geosites have been equipped with information panels and leaflets which cater to school education. (6) The Geopark has become a valuable tool in the teaching of disaster prevention, with a local elementary school receiving national and prefectural awards for its efforts. (7) Every first Wednesday of each month has been set as the geo school lunch date which features regional cuisine made with local ingredients to allow students to learn the relation of Itoigawa's land, cuisine and local produce. (8) And finally, an exchange program has begun for elementary and junior high school students with Itoigawa's Sister Geopark in Hong Kong.

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