

How to become your school's Net Zero Heroes

10 steps to help you form your sustainability leadership team and create a Climate Action Plan.



Introduction

By 2025, schools are expected to have a dedicated sustainability lead - or a team of sustainability leads - and a Climate Action Plan, mapping out their sustainability journey.

For many schools, this is daunting. From restraints on time and resource, to a lack of confidence in their 'climate literacy', many schools don't feel ready to meet this expectation.

This guide aims to alleviate those fears and reservations by outlining 10 simple and realistic steps that schools can take. From forming your 'squad' to enlisting pupil power, we'll outline what you can do and how you can do it, linking to some great resources and guides.

Remember, taking the first step is always the hardest. But once you do, you'll be running in no time!



1. Form your 'sustainability squad'

No matter how amazing or passionate they might be, one person alone cannot lead your school to net zero. You need a team of people who can bring insight and influence in the areas that count.

We suggest enlisting...

- your business manager
- site or operations manager
- caretaker
- canteen manager
- a governor
- an SLT sponsor
- and your Eco-Schools pupil Eco-Committee.

This group can make changes in key carbon-emitting areas or influence policy and behaviour across your school community. Meet regularly, share resource and plan holistically.

If you're part of a multi academy trust, you may have a group sustainability lead or be able to collaborate across schools, sharing resource and knowledge.

Set your squad!



2. Become 'carbon literate'

Don't worry, you don't need to be an expert!

But a basic understanding of climate change, carbon emissions and sustainability will give you a good grounding to start taking action. This is called 'carbon literacy'.

Here's 2 short videos to introduce the basics:

- [Climate Confident: The basics of Climate Change](#)
- [BBC News - Your Carbon Footprint Explained](#)

If you have the resource, staff training might be a good option. The [Carbon Literacy Project](#) is just one of the great organisations out there that are producing accessible and clear carbon literacy training courses.



3. Get SLT buy-in

Time and resource often dictates any new developments in a school. So, if you haven't already, getting Senior Leadership Team buy-in is key.

But how do you do this?

Episode 2 of our 'Climate Confident' video series features some great arguments, aimed at SLTs, to prompt support for your sustainability journey.

If you've completed a carbon footprint calculation with Count Your Carbon, you can download a free summary report. This is written in clear and simple language and designed to be shared with your various stakeholders. This will provide some clarity and direction around your school's carbon emissions, which might just be the nudge that breaks the inertia.

Other key points of persuasion might be...

- Sustainable changes can be cost-effective. For example, using less energy means lower energy bills!
- You don't need to become net-zero overnight. Your first initiatives can be realistic and cheap, and then grow over time in scale and cost.
- Remind your SLTs that all schools will be expected to have a Sustainability Team or Lead, plus a Climate Action Plan, over the next few years. The school doesn't want to get caught out, so there's no better time to start the process than now!



4. Set your benchmark

Understanding how sustainable your school currently is - and in which areas - will help you to prioritise action and set milestones and timelines.

If you're doing Eco-Schools, Step 2 prompts you to complete our free pupil-led 'Environmental Review' checklist.

This will help you to reflect on your site, policies, operations and curriculum. It's a great way to identify environmental initiatives already taking place in your school, areas for improvement, and opportunities for quick eco-wins.

Go one step further with [Count Your Carbon](#). Our free, full scope, schools carbon footprint calculator helps you to understand your carbon emissions across 11 operational areas and produces a report containing a selection of next-step recommendations that can go straight into your Climate Action Plan.

COUNT YOUR CARBON



5. Get outside help

From the [Barker Associates](#) to [RAFT](#), there are lots of great organisations out there that can provide expert support.

They can work with you to explore different areas of your operations, identify short and long-term solutions and help you to find funding streams for larger infrastructure changes.

Our friends Let's Go Zero have just launched their [Climate Action Advisors](#). The Advisors are independent experts, who offer free support for schools, colleges, and nurseries across England. They can suggest practical, affordable actions for schools of any size.



6. Empower your pupils

If you're looking to make your school a greener, cleaner place, then why not include your most important people in the process - pupils!

Pupils can help you to make your school more sustainable in many ways.

- They are your greatest advocates for climate action, able to influence their peers in a way that few adults can.
- They can be your 'eyes on the ground', identifying areas of school life where sustainable change needs to happen.
- They can be agents of change, modelling good eco-behaviours, from plant-based eating to recycling.
- They can inspire action outside of the school gates, inspiring friends, family and your local community.

Enlisting pupils and giving them agency can also be hugely beneficial to their development and wellbeing.

- Positive action can help relieve 'eco-anxiety', a growing concern in young people.
- It can help them to develop their 'green skills'.
- It helps them to develop confidence and grow their leadership skills.
- It establishes a sense of pride in their school.

The Eco-Schools programme provides a proven framework for delivering a pupil-led programme of eco-projects that involve your entire school community.

Each November, the Cut Your Carbon campaign challenges pupils to deliver fun, carbon-cutting actions at home with friends and family, spreading their influence.

7. Green your curriculum

Currently, climate change and sustainability is only featured on the National Curriculum in a few small areas. Don't let this be a barrier to covering it in your teaching. After all it will be a prevalent factor across all areas of life and society in the years to come. By addressing it, you're prepping your pupils for the future.

Climate change and sustainability can be layered into many core and secondary topics in creative ways, often providing real world context. For example, writing activities in English can use climate change as a subject. Data handling in Maths might look at temperature change since the Industrial Revolution.

There are many great sources of ideas and lesson plans to help you hit the ground running and save time.

Step 4 of the [Eco-Schools programme](#) is all about integrating eco-links into your curriculum and registered Eco-Schools can access a free resource with 100 lesson plan ideas. You can also check out the following great ideas/sources of eco-themed learning:

- [Climate confident, episode 5](#)
- [Twinkl](#)
- [WWF](#)
- [Friends of the Earth](#)



8. Make sustainability a core part of school life

Sustainability doesn't need to be considered as an add-on. You can make it second nature across practices and behaviours with some practical adjustments and simple additions.

- Add sustainability to your public facing values and mission.
- Include it as a regular agenda point in all staff meetings.
- Make sustainability a factor when choosing new suppliers - are they eco-friendly?
- Switch to a green bank and pension provider.
- Appoint sustainability champions at the various levels of your school, from year leads to a pupil in each form.
- Make it a core element of pupil facing communication, from your assemblies to daily form updates.
- Allocate time and resource to your 'sustainability squad' and your pupil eco-committee.
- Make sustainability visible - from clearly labelled recycling bins to traffic light systems on lights and devices.



9. Make your Climate Action Plan SMART

You've set your squad, you've established your benchmark and you have a list of ideas that can be implemented across school. Now it's time to create your Climate Action Plan.

The DfE will issue guidance for creating Climate Action Plans but there won't be one 'cover-all' template. Schools are too varied, with bespoke factors at each site.

However, there are commonalities that can map across all plans. It's might help to present your plan in a table, with variations on the following titles across your top row:

- **Action area** (ie. 'energy', 'curriculum' or 'school policy')
- **Action** - keep this realistic and achievable (ie. install motion sensor lighting, add climate change to topic teaching, implement a 'no flight' policy for school trips)
- **Action Lead** - who is responsible for this action?
- **Support team** - who will support the delivery of this action?
- **Resource** - what is needed to deliver this action? If you don't have this resource, how will you get it?
- **Delivery Year** - think of your climate action plan across 5 years and note which year you'll do this action.
- **Aim** - what is the desired outcome or output of this action?
- **Monitoring method** - what are the key signs of success and how will you measure them?

Don't try to pack too much into your climate action plan at first. Make it a 'live document' that can be added to and amended. School life can be frantic, so some flexibility is sensible!

Don't forget, a calculation on Count Your Carbon will give you a wealth or carbon-cutting recommendations, and registered Eco-Schools can access a free list of 100 actions to improve your sustainability across site, infrastructure, policy and curriculum.

10. Celebrate your actions!

It's important to approach climate change and sustainability with a proactive and positive mindset. This models the right attitude to peers and pupils and inspires further action and support.

When you deliver a sustainable success, shout about it!

- Discuss it in assemblies and form meetings.
- Add it to your newsletter and website updates.
- Post on social media.

Make the world know that you and your pupils are proud of your actions and soon, everyone else will be too.

