

(1) GETTING STARTED (v3)



Saving Creation
Diocese of Leeds

There is a much quoted saying 'The longest journey starts with a single step. Sometimes it is that first step that can be the hardest. Once we take that step, everything flows from there. So, here are some suggestions for possible actions to get started. You don't need to do every step. Just pick the actions that will help you get started.

ACTION 1 → DECIDE TO TAKE ACTION

This might sound like a simple step but it is a crucial one. There will be frustrations, costs and challenge in the journey of making your school Carbon Net Zero. It will also take time to achieve. You and your school will need to be committed to the journey and all that it will involve.

Who do you need to convince?

- (a) **Yourself & other leaders** – *nobody can bring about real change on their own. To take effective action, you will need a school wide approach.*
- (b) **Your governors** – *whilst some small changes can bring about real change, there will also be big decisions to make and some cost involved along the way. Therefore, your board of governors will need to be in support of the journey.*
- (c) **Your school's parents & local community** – *Making real progress will involve changes in behaviour. Some of this will have to come from families. Getting parents and the community on board, especially those where managing the day to day is already challenging, will help this.*
- (d) **Your pupils** – *It might seem strange to you that pupils are last on this list. This, however, is because many of them will already be convinced that tackling climate change should be a high priority. It is increasingly noted as one of the greatest worries of children and young people today. Even so, anything we can do to make them more informed about the subject will help them direct their 'pupil power' with the greatest effectiveness to drive this agenda in school, families and communities.*

How do you do this?

- **Find out about the need for action** – *There are plenty of accessible sources now that can help you make the case for taking environmental action. Here are just a few of the many places to look:*
 - [10 reasons we should all care about climate change - WWF](#)
 - [Why fighting climate change is so urgent - EDF](#)
 - [Climate change explained – UK Gov](#)
 - [Climate Change – The facts - BBC](#)
 - [Climate Change - Greenpeace](#)
 - [Five Reasons we need to act now on climate change – National Geographic](#)
 - [Goal 13 – Climate Action - UN](#)

You could also check out [Wicked Weather Watch](#), a website aimed at bringing climate change to life for pupils and teachers through workshops, talks and direct contact with those who have personally witnessed climate change in the Polar Regions.



For those that enjoy podcasts, there are plenty that can help you build your understanding of Climate issues in an easy way. There are often many back issues to help you consider particular topics that interest you. One to start with, from a schools' perspective, is:

- Sustainable(ish) – They have a number of episodes talking specifically about schools
 - Episode 174 – 'Climate Action help for Schools – with Jo Pettifer from Let's Go Zero'
 - Episode 133 – Youth Climate Action with the UK schools Sustainability Network
 - Episode 130 – More Climate Education Good Stuff with Paula Malone
 - Episode 117 – Transforming Education with the Ministry of Eco Education
 - Episode 98 – Eco Schools

Some other good ones to consider are:

- The Climate Question
- How to Save Our Planet
- Sustainababble
- The Climate POD
- **Listen to your pupils** – a [2020 study](#) by Savanta-ComRes for the BBC showed that 4 out of 5 children and young people surveyed said that climate change was a worry to them. 19% even admitted having bad dreams about it! Giving your pupils a voice about their worries can be a great way of convincing stakeholders to get engaged with this issue. You could do this in many ways – do your own survey of pupil views and concerns about climate change, invite some pupils to discuss the matter with leadership and governors, get a group of pupils to make a video about their concerns. Once people see the magnitude of the worry it brings to children and young people, many will be convinced to take action.
- **Recognise the other benefits** – as a school, there are many benefits that can come from taking environmental action, even without thinking about the positive impact on the planet. Reducing energy waste and costs will save the school budget some money. Taking action as a school can help reduce pupil anxiety about the issue, which can lead to better pupil well-being and so better outcomes. Reducing the number of pupils travelling to school by car can in turn reduce the number of grumbling letters from local residents about the traffic or parking problems at the beginning and end of the school day. Getting pupils engaged in taking action around climate change can be a great opportunity for personal development and can be shown as evidence of social action and courageous advocacy. Acting together as a school can increase school cohesion and, if you draw in others, connection to the local community. Being a trailblazer for the climate can enhance the reputation of the school and create an area of excellence that others will recognise. These and other direct benefits can help make a case for action.

ACTION 2 **MAKE A COMMITMENT & MAKE IT PUBLIC**

The saying "The way to hell is paved with good intentions" is one that school leaders know well. There are so many demands on school that it needs determination and focus, not just good intentions, to bring things to fruition. It is those things that we see as most important that we prioritise and those things to which we have a public commitment that we make sure get done. In the real world, you will have much more chance of getting things done and seeing them through if you have told people that you are going to do them.

These are some suggestions of ways to do this:

- **Make achieving carbon net zero part of your strategic planning, including actions within your school development plan** – many schools have long term aspects to their strategic planning as well as shorter term goals. By including it on your strategic and development planning you are showing the school's genuine commitment to this aim. You are also forcing your school leadership to think and plan strategically to achieve this goal and ensuring regular accountability for action being taken. Remember, the diocesan target for carbon net zero is 2030, so there is time to bring about change. But we are all much more likely to hit that target if we start now.

- **Join the 'Let's Go Zero' Campaign** – *This is a brilliant national campaign, supported by a wide range of organisations, which is fast gathering pace.*

"Let's Go Zero is the national campaign uniting teachers, pupils, parents and their schools as they all work together to be carbon zero by 2030.

From Inverness to Plymouth, Liverpool to Brighton, school leaders are standing alongside students and taking action to tackle the climate crisis. Every school that signs up is pledging to work towards a more sustainable future while calling for much-needed government support to help all schools reach their carbon zero goals. By raising our voices together, we are showing the overwhelming support for zero carbon schools up and down the UK. Together we're harnessing the power of schools and young people to drive change and spark climate action in communities across the country, reducing emissions, increasing biodiversity and safeguarding our planet for future generations.

Let's go for ambition. Let's go for working together. Let's go zero."

Check out their website and join the campaign. There are many suggestions of ways to get involved and take action.



- **Make the 'Greener Governance Pledge'**

In 2021 the National Governance Association launched their [Greener Governance Campaign](#). As part of this, governing boards are encouraged to make a pledge to take action.

Greener Governance Pledge

As part of the campaign we are asking every governing board to join the Greener Governance Pledge to:

- reduce carbon emissions at your school or trust
- put your school's or trust's contribution to environmental sustainability on the agenda
- ensure a climate action plan is developed to make this happen

- **Declare a climate emergency** – *Whilst words without actions can be just a meaningless gesture, the words we use can also be powerful motivators for action. Many organisations, including local authorities, educational institutions and even countries are declaring a climate emergency to recognise that action needs to be taken urgently to address this problem. By declaring (or 'recognising') a climate emergency, you are demonstrating that this is a priority for your organisation and committing to taking action to address it.*

[How to declare a climate emergency for your school or college](#) – National Education Union

ACTION 3 → **GET ADVICE & SUPPORT**

There are organisations that can offer advice getting started and beginning to take action. For example:



[Let's Go Zero](#) are rolling out the [Climate Action Advisers](#) across the country this year. Climate Action Advisors are independent experts, who will soon be offering free support for schools, colleges, and nurseries across England. They can suggest practical, affordable actions for schools of any size – even those that are just starting their sustainability journey. They will not be up and running in the north until August 2024, but you can register interest now.

[The Green School Project](#) enable schools to embed climate education into lessons and become more sustainable through a range of training, support, and resources. By registering for free you will be able to access a coordinator guide, information and activities you can do with pupils about the climate crisis, as well as guidance on how to run projects such as energy saving, youth activism, wildlife, food, waste and more.



[You can also get advice from our diocesan School Buildings team and you link diocesan adviser](#)

ACTION 4 → **CREATE AN ECO-COUNCIL or ECO-CHAMPIONS**

Often, for things to get done, they need some passionate people driving them forward. Having Eco-Champions or a school Eco-Council, made up of people who are passionate about making a difference will help to get things done. Here are some things to consider when developing an Eco-Council or Eco-Champions:

- **Make sure you involve pupils, including giving them opportunities to lead** – As we have said, climate change is a huge concern for many pupils. Greta Thunberg has shown the impact young people can have on this issue and many have been inspired by her actions and words. It will not be hard to find pupils who are keen to get involved and drive forward the environmental agenda in school.
- **It cannot be only pupils** – Whilst a lot of energy, enthusiasm and ideas can come from the pupils, there will also be many areas in which adult input will improve effectiveness. Representation from leadership will help smooth decision making processes. Getting passionate staff, governors and parents involved will also show that it is the whole school community that is on this journey.
- **It is not their job to bring about change** – It can be easy, once a group like an Eco-Council is created, to hand over responsibility for getting things done to them. This is tempting when school leaders are naturally very busy but can lead to difficulties. Many changes that need to be made will be whole school actions that require leadership decisions and direction. Your Eco-Champions can provide the energy and drive, but it has to continue to be everyone's goal to bring about change.

ACTION 5 **FIND YOUR STARTING POSITION**

Eco-Schools have created the nation's first free, full scope carbon emissions calculator built specifically for schools and other educational establishments. It has been created in collaboration with educators to be simple and effective to use. It leads you through the process, inputting a range of information to help calculate your position. You can get pupils involved in gathering and inputting the information too. If you can't find a specific piece of information for your school, there is even the facility to use an average figure for similar schools instead. At the end of the process, the system can produce an action plan of the areas in which you can begin to work on to impact your carbon emissions. Having calculated your starting point, you have something against which to judge your successes later down the line.

Eco-Schools even offer free training on how you can use it, once you are registered.

[To find out more, including a short video summary, follow this link.](#)



ACTION 6 **MAKE A PLAN**

Good leaders know that planning hugely improves the impact of any actions that arise from it. Taking time to think and plan can make sure that time and effort are best used. It will mean that problems are addressed strategically, at the right pace for change and in a way that best ensures their success.

Every school has its own way of planning change and development. These can work just as well in bringing about environmental change. However, here are some suggestions of how to support this planning:

Seven Steps

- > Step 1 Eco-Committee
- > Step 2 Environmental Review
- > Step 3 Action Plan
- > Step 4 Curriculum Links
- > Step 5 Informing and Involving
- > Step 6 Monitoring and Evaluation
- > Step 7 Eco-Code
- > Green Flag Assessment

- **Eco Schools** – The Eco-Schools programme started in England in 1994 but now has a global reach. It is an awards scheme for schools, encouraging co-ordinated environmental action. One of its great strengths is that it lays out a path for planning and taking action with its '7 Step' approach. Schools work through the approach, which guides them towards taking effective action. Importantly, one of the first steps is to undertake a whole school environmental review to target your efforts. From this comes action planning followed by action and monitoring, with lots of guidance along the way. Whilst the seven steps are the same for Primary and Secondary phases, the guidance on implementation for the seven phases is different and appropriate to the age of the students in school. One thing that appeals to many schools is that working through the process is a way of achieving external accreditation through the Eco-Schools Green Flag Award scheme.





- [Transform Our World](#) – This is a great website with a Schools Climate Action Planner as one of its tools. You can enter some simple details about the school and it will suggest a variety of actions you can select to be part of your plan. It is a brilliantly simple way of getting started with a plan and tracking the progress you are making. You can watch a useful YouTube video that shows you how the Action Planner works by following this link: <https://youtu.be/xWTehZZB0wE>



- **A Step by Step approach** – the diocesan education team is developing this Saving Creation toolkit to help schools take action. It is made up of a series of Action Sheets to support schools in planning how to move towards carbon net zero. This is the first of those sheets. Each Action Sheet will look at a different ‘big ticket’ area of environmental impact for schools. Each will suggest actions that can be taken and will offer links to organisations that can help you achieve them. In time the list of action sheets will include:

- **Getting Started**
- **Action on Energy**
- **Action on Travel**
- **Action on Food**
- **Action on Consumption**
- **Action on Grounds**
- **Action on Learning**

To help schools get started there is also a **School Review Tool**, which helps you establish your starting point and track progress on the actions you are taking.

- **Climate Action Plan & Sustainability Leadership** – In the “[Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy for Education](#)”, the government states that, by 2025 every school will have nominated a [sustainability lead and have put in place a Climate Action Plan](#).

The stated aims of these are to:

- increase the confidence and expertise of your leadership team, staff, learners, and students in understanding climate change and how positive change can be achieved
- create a culture that prioritises sustainability
- share effective practice with other education settings and develop a peer-to-peer learning network
- use data to identify and prioritise action
- improve energy and water efficiency
- calculate your carbon emissions and identify ways to reduce them
- reduce operating costs
- increase resilience and start adapting to the impacts of climate change
- enhance biodiversity
- help learners develop skills and knowledge which help them to contribute to sustainability and climate change in their lives and future jobs
- bring together related actions and plans, such as your School Travel Plan, and Waste Management Plan for a cohesive approach

This toolkit can be used to identify possible actions on your Climate Action Plan. Organisations like Let’s Go Zero offer free support in writing your plan.