

# SCHOOL CLIMATE ACTION GUIDE



TACKLING  
THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY  
TOGETHER IN SOUTHWARK

Southwark  
Council

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# Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this inspiring School Climate Action Guide.

Five years ago, Southwark Council declared a climate emergency. We set an ambitious target to become a carbon neutral borough by 2030.

This means reducing our own emissions. And it also means working with residents and others across the borough as they take action.

Sharing knowledge is a great starting point. But words are not enough. We will need time, money and the energy of all our people to make real and lasting changes.

Changes to our streets. To control and reduce pollution and greenhouse gases.

Changes to our buildings. To improve heat efficiency so we burn less carbon and use more solar.

Changes to enhance our parks, cycle lanes, and open spaces. So we can absorb more carbon and encourage healthy and sustainable transport, leisure and play.

Changes to tackle the funding gap. So our communities can start to heal our wounded environment, and prepare a healthy, sustainable future, free from the fear of climate catastrophe.

Schools are an essential part of this programme of change. They help to shape future generations. As some of our largest institutions, they can have a huge impact on our emissions.

Healthier and more active journeys to and from school. More energy-efficient buildings. Less wasteful and more sustainable food. Planting more. Boosting biodiversity. Greening tired urban spaces. And, above all, unlocking the genius of the next generation that will lead humanity out of this crisis. The role and responsibility of our schools could not be greater.

We created the Southwark Climate Action Schools network to start action now in the face of impending climate disaster.



***Cllr Jasmine Ali, Deputy  
Leader and Cabinet Member  
for Children, Education and  
Refugees***

And we mean business. By 2025, all schools are to have a dedicated climate lead and an action plan in place. With the time and resources of our busy schools already stretched, we hope this guide will help schools promote many different types of action.

The stakes could not be higher. We are sure our brilliant educators, leaders, parents and above all students will rise to this, the greatest of challenges.

# Introduction

Climate change is a change in the typical weather patterns over a long period of time. It is widely agreed that overall, the Earth is getting warmer. This rise in global temperature is sometimes called global warming. Human activity has accelerated this change, and urgent action needs to be taken.

In the UK, we are already experiencing the effects of climate change. For example, through increased temperatures and more extreme weather. As well as flooding and increases in food prices. These are already impacting Southwark's communities and children.

Southwark Council declared a climate emergency in March 2019. We set a target to do as much as we can to end our contribution to climate change by 2030. Schools play a key part in reaching that target.

There are many things schools can do to help, which are both direct and indirect. They can reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions. They can use their role to influence behaviours in schools and communities. They can also help adapt to changes in the climate. Creating a school climate action plan is an important first step.

To help shape this guide we gathered feedback from staff at schools in Southwark. We also held a workshop at St Michael's Catholic College in Bermondsey for 60 students, and a session with Southwark's Youth Parliament.

Council officers that work with schools on tackling climate change have also contributed. This has helped to add guidance on projects and opportunities which are specific to Southwark. This should help you to get your action plan ready.

## The importance of a school climate action plan

This guide has been created to help schools create a climate action plan. This will help to fulfil the requirement set by the Department for Education's (DfE) sustainability and climate change strategy for education.

The DfE strategy states that “By 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan”.

It also sets a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2037 across all education settings.

By creating a climate action plan, your school is taking the important first step to reach this target. It will also offer your school a number of other benefits. Such as:

- reduced energy bills. Using energy more efficiently can lower your schools' costs
- being more prepared. Your school will be better adapted to deal with the negative effects of climate change, such as overheating
- an opportunity for students and staff to understand more about green careers and skills
- improving your school's reputation. You can become a leading example by showing your school is taking climate action
- improved staff and student wellbeing

As part of the DfE requirements, all school climate action plans must include at least one action from these four key areas:

1. Decarbonisation
2. Adaptation and resilience
3. Biodiversity
4. Climate education and green careers

There are also plenty of other things your school can do and other areas where you can make a change. Many of these areas also overlap.

This guide and template will help schools to create a meaningful action plan that fulfils the DfE requirements for education settings. It does this by combining helpful guidance in one place and offering practical tips on how to carry out the plan.

# Making your climate action plan

For a successful climate action plan and to achieve your climate change goals, you will need to assemble and engage a diverse team. Appointing a sustainability lead who can help to coordinate is an important first step. It is also one of the DfE's requirements. Sustainability leadership could be one person or a group of people. It should have responsibility for the development and implementation of your climate action plan.

Climate change goals rely on contributions from:

- education staff
- operational staff who understand the technical aspects of your school site
- senior leadership team
- pupils and parents

Working together will help embed your climate action plan. It will also help to successfully incorporate these changes within your school.

## How to use this guide

In addition to this guide, we have developed a template for creating a climate action plan, which is ready to be completed for your school.

To get started, please visit our [digital schools guide](#) locate the template. The template is split into different columns that you should fill in with information about the action you are intending to take.

To help you complete the template, it includes examples of action plan goals and the corresponding steps to achieve them. For ease, these examples have been divided by theme. The examples provided are to help inspire and generate ideas on the opportunities for your school. The list is not exhaustive. If you like the ideas and are committed to carrying them out, feel free to copy the information straight into your action plan.

Once you have completed your climate action plan we recommend you publish it on your school's website. We also recommend you review how you are getting on with delivering your plan once a year and update it as goals are met. This is a good opportunity to get pupils involved in this process.

## How to complete your climate action plan template

The climate action plan template has five columns to fill in. These are Goal, Action, Steps, Timeline and Resources.

Goal	Actions	Steps	Timeline for the action or expected completion date	Resources
Decarbonisation	Reduce carbon emissions in our buildings by changing the light bulbs to LED bulbs in each school building.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Undertake audit of the current situation and develop options to replace lightbulbs</li> <li>2. Purchase LED lights and replace existing lightbulbs</li> <li>3. Train staff to use the new lights and replace when necessary</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 months</li> <li>• End of 2024</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff involved: Operational staff, senior leadership team</li> <li>• Cost: £££</li> </ul>
Biodiversity				

Figure 1: An image of the table available in the climate action template

### Goal

This is the area of climate action that you will be addressing through the plan. It could include:

- establishing your baseline
- decarbonising
- biodiversity
- climate education and green careers
- resilience and adaptation
- active and sustainable travel
- air quality
- waste
- consumption and
- food
- any other relevant areas that you would like to include

More information on these areas is provided in the following sections of this guide.

## Actions

These are the activities that you will undertake within each goal. Make sure the action has a clear objective that can be achieved so that the goal can be met. For example, a decarbonisation action could be:

- reduce carbon emissions in our buildings by changing the light bulbs to LED bulbs in each school building

## Steps and tasks

These are the smaller steps or tasks that you will need to take to complete the action. How will you complete the action? What are the key steps that you will need to take?

## Timeline

Decide when you want to achieve the action. For example it could be by the end of year, in a certain term or in two years. Identify how long this action will take from start to finish and indicate when you will be carrying it out. Try to be specific with dates.

## Resources

Include in this section anything that you might need to meet the action. For example:

- who will be the lead?
- staff time required
- funding needed
- expertise needed

What will you need to carry this out? What expertise will you need to bring in? For example, the resources required for the action to change the light bulbs to LED bulbs would include the staff involved in the project and its cost.

## Additional columns

You will also see three additional columns in the table titled co-benefits, tools/resources/information and funding opportunities. These can be used to record:

- any extra benefits that result from this goal



- links to helpful tools, resources and information that will help you
- links to relevant funding opportunities for this goal

These three columns have been highlighted in green and are solely for your school's benefit. They will help you to complete the action and do not need to be included in your climate action plan.

# Establishing your school's carbon baseline

A useful first step is knowing what currently happens at your school. This means knowing your school's carbon emissions. It also means knowing how sustainably it operates at the moment. Understanding this context is important to make meaningful changes through your climate action plan.

You can start by collecting baseline data. This should include:

- how much energy your school buildings use
- your waste generation
- water usage
- how transport is used to get to and from the school

This baseline data can be used to calculate how much carbon is being emitted by the school and where you can reduce it.

This will show you the emissions which your daily activities and business operations create. From this, your school can gain a clearer understanding of its impact on the planet.

In the [Climate Action Plan Template](#), you can find example actions to establish your school's baseline. You can also find information on how to carry out those actions.

# Decarbonisation

A key part of a plan is reducing your carbon emissions. This is called decarbonisation. The goal is to do this entirely and become 'carbon neutral'. Carbon emissions are created by heating the school and using electricity which uses fossil fuels. Reducing them can be done by replacing fossil fuel energy sources with low-carbon ones.

Lowering emission can be done in different ways. You can:

- replace fossil fuels with low-carbon alternatives. Such as replacing gas boilers with heat pumps
- install renewable energy such as solar panels
- improve energy efficiency by upgrading lighting to LED lighting

These actions will also help your school reduce energy bills and improve air quality. There are a number of small and achievable actions your school can take in the first instance. Such as by making your school as energy efficient as possible. It is recommended that these actions are carried out before larger retrofit projects.

Make your school as energy efficient as possible by:

- turning the thermostat down
- using a building management system to control energy use and training staff on how to use it
- insulating the fabric of the building
- installing renewable energy such as solar panels
- replacing fossil fuel boilers with low-carbon alternatives such as heat pumps

# Biodiversity

A healthy ecosystem is one with a rich variety of habitat, plants, and species. This is what is meant by biodiversity. Healthy ecosystems help tackle climate change and help us be more resilient to the effects of climate change.

Biodiversity can be increased by:

- expanding and re-greening spaces in your school; or
- enhancing existing green spaces

Increasing biodiversity within schools has many additional benefits. Green spaces offer learning opportunities like getting pupils and staff outside for lessons. Growing plants and being involved in gardening is proven to help confidence for students and increase skills and knowledge. Access to green space can also have a positive impact on the wellbeing and mental health of students and staff.

# Climate education and green careers

Climate education is vital for tackling climate change. Teaching young people about the causes and effects of climate change creates motivated people who are inspired to act.

Children play a key role in helping to share knowledge and change behaviours in communities. Participation and motivation from young people can help bring about change through climate work. Helping young people improve their understanding of climate change results in adults who are engaged and take action.

Climate change is a part of the national curriculum for science and geography. However, it affects all areas of all our lives so it should not be limited to just these subjects. This is particularly important as geography is no longer compulsory beyond Key Stage 3. Student feedback has also shown an eagerness to learn more about climate change beyond the confines of the curriculum. There are a number of ways climate can be embedded easily in other subjects.

Green careers relate to jobs and career pathways within areas tackling climate change. As we work towards our net zero goals, there are more opportunities and roles within this field. Green skills are vital, and demand for them is increasing.

This is because new green technologies are being developed and more sustainable practices are being adopted throughout society. Green skills can be defined as “the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a society which reduces the impact of human activity on the environment.” Green careers and education can help young people prepare for roles in sustainability.

The transition to a carbon neutral society will see a need for more green skills in a number of sectors. Such as:

- power generation
- construction
- waste and resources

To meet this demand, education and vocational pathways need to be advertised and supported. A greater understanding of the roles and opportunities is needed amongst students and educators to help guide students.

# Resilience and adaptation

We are already experiencing the effects of climate change and need to be ready for these and future changes. Resilience and adaptation is about how we do this.

Resilience refers to how schools can cope with and recover from disruptions caused by climate change. This means continuing to operate whilst ensuring safety and wellbeing during climate events.

Adaptation is about how we change to cope with current and future climate impacts. This could relate to school practices, processes or infrastructure. For schools it means new measures to help climate change. Such as higher temperatures or increased rainfall and flooding.

In London, climate change is making issues like overheating, flooding, and water scarcity worse. This is due to rising temperatures, intense rainfall, and water stress. The extreme weather seen in summer 2022, such as 40°C heatwaves, floods, and droughts, will become more common. These impacts are made worse by:

- the urban heat island effect where buildings and roads absorb and re-emit the sun's heat more than natural landscapes
- surfaces that don't allow fluid to flow through which makes flooding worse
- a growing and dense population which means we have high water demand
- social inequalities

This means London's buildings, infrastructure, environment and schools are increasingly under strain.

This means that resilience and adaptation in schools is very important. Measures can protect the safety, wellbeing, and continued education of students and staff.

The key climate hazards affecting schools include heat risk, flooding, and water scarcity.

## Heat risk

This is having more intense and more common heatwaves. This can cause:

- physical heat stress
- worse air quality
- dehydration
- worse learning environments

## Flooding

Heavy rainfall and storms can lead to flash flooding. This can disrupt school operations and damage infrastructure.

## Water scarcity

Droughts and reduced rainfall can limit the availability of water. This can affect your school's hygiene, sanitation, and safety.

## Climate vulnerability

Climate vulnerability is a term used to describe how grave the impacts of climate change will be on someone or something. This can be applied to children, staff, buildings, schools, or communities. It is created by looking at social and physical conditions as well as what resources are available.

Children are more vulnerable to climate change impacts. Especially the very young and those with special needs or pre-existing health conditions. They rely on adults for guidance and may struggle to respond quickly to extreme weather. This can disrupt their learning and health.

For example, high indoor temperatures can worsen students' wellbeing and cognitive performance. As climate change gets worse, schools must plan to ensure the safety, health, and education of students and staff. Resilience and adaptation measures can reduce the costs of these in the long-term. Such as through maintenance costs and energy use.

# Active and sustainable travel

Active and sustainable travel is about making journeys in ways that are sustainable and healthier. The aim is to shift away from unnecessary car journeys and towards more active and environmentally friendly travel. This could be through cycling, walking or by taking public transport.

Active and sustainable travel can have lots of benefits. Such as reducing travel costs, improving health and wellbeing, improving air quality and improving safety outside schools.

Schools have an important role to play in active and sustainable travel. By helping to provide the skills and improving the confidence of students and their care-givers. This could be through things such as cycle skills training and safer active travel environments like school streets. With these actions schools can help to change behaviour and reduce car use.

Southwark council recommends all schools within the borough sign up to [Transport for London's \(TfL\) Travel for Life Programme](#). It provides:

- easy steps for reducing carbon emissions through travel
- information on how to get involved
- awards to recognise success

Primary schools can sign up to [TfL Explorers](#) and secondary schools can sign up to [TfL Pioneers](#).

# Air quality

Air quality determines how much pollution is in the air. Pollution has a huge impact on our health. London Air's research found that toxic air leads to the premature deaths of 9,400 Londoners each year. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of low air quality as well as those with existing heart and respiratory conditions. For children, poor air quality can lead to an increase of respiratory and heart conditions. It can also affect brain and lung development.

Air quality can be improved by making actions that relate to climate change. This includes:

- reducing the amount of fossil fuels that are burned for heating
- moving to renewable energy sources like solar and wind
- swapping car journeys for active and sustainable methods like cycling
- planting more trees and increasing biodiversity

# Waste consumption and recycling

As a society, we are consuming more and more. The result of this is an increase in waste. The items we consume produce a large amount of carbon emissions throughout their lives.

Decomposing waste also produces large amounts of carbon dioxide. It also creates other greenhouse gases like methane which have a direct impact on climate change.

Waste that is not properly disposed of can cause pollution and harm natural habitats and biodiversity.

This means that reducing waste and reducing our consumption of goods is key to helping to tackle climate change. This can be done by encouraging people to reduce, reuse, recycle and repair. Only buying what we need can also help to prevent climate change. Schools can play a key role in changing these behaviours by leading by example and teaching about it. This isn't just among students, but also within your wider communities.



# Food

The food we eat, grow, and buy has a big impact on how we reduce emissions and adapt to climate change.

12% of greenhouse emissions in the UK are from farming. Across the globe, how we grow, make and move around food leads to 50% of biodiversity loss and around 30% of carbon emissions. These impacts are mostly from the farming of animals and the use of machinery in farms.

How schools find, buy and manage school meals is a big opportunity to address climate change.

Making school food more sustainable is good for the environment. It can also save schools money, reduce food waste and support your students to eat healthier food. Key actions schools can take are set out below.

## Introducing sustainability standards in food procurement

Such as:

- introducing a meat-free day every week, using 'plant-powered' meals
- substituting some meat with other proteins like lentils. This also has financial and nutritional benefits
- using more locally grown produce, seeking out local suppliers
- minimising food packaging and choosing more sustainable options with less plastic
- introducing higher welfare meat. For example 'Red Tractor' certified
- offering seasonal menus

## Promote healthy and sustainable diets

Such as:

- encouraging children to eat more vegetables and fruit. This should include two portions per meal

## Provide greener energy sources for kitchens

Such as

- moving to renewable energy sources for cooking and preparing food

## Tailor school meals for students and staff

Such as:

- remove or improve any meals which are not popular with staff and students

## Connecting with others

Such as:

- connecting with local community growing groups

Schools can contact the council for support on sustainable school food by [emailing the council](#).

# Putting your climate plan into action

Hopefully the above has provided a guide to creating an effective climate action plan. This plan will result in simple, positive steps being taken by your school.

Once you have decided which actions you will take and committed resources to this, we recommend publishing your climate action plan on your school's website. The benefit of publishing your plan is that it holds you accountable and ensures you take the actions that you have pledged to take.

It is also an opportunity to highlight what your school has achieved and showcase your school as a leading example tackling climate change. You may wish to identify when you will provide an update on delivering your plan. For example, this could be at the end of every school year, and you may wish to involve pupils or organise an assembly on it.

If you require any further information or support, you can get in contact with the council by [emailing the council](#).

## Climate action advisors

For further support with your climate action plan, [Let's Go Zero Climate Action Advisors](#) are now in place across the whole of England. They can deliver a free support programme to all schools, colleges and nurseries across England.

They offer schools a trusted expert on:

- taking quick wins to reduce energy use and wider carbon impact
- retrofitting a school. Including options, routes to funding, priorities and next steps
- using government and private funding options
- accelerating strategic sustainability across multi academy trusts
- bringing together local and national organisations and projects who can help schools act
- connecting with other local schools to share ideas
- advising schools on their climate action plans

They also work very closely with councils to ensure the best support is offered to schools.

# Southwark schools climate change newsletter

At Southwark Council, our teams work hard with schools to deliver climate change projects. This ranges from tree planting to solar panels to skills centres for green careers. To help more schools get involved in these opportunities we have created a newsletter to provide the latest climate change information and opportunities for your school in one place.

The newsletter will be available to those in the Southwark Climate Action Schools Network. Network members will receive the newsletter and relevant information on support, funding, and opportunities as well as cross partnership opportunities with other schools. To join the network please [email us](#).

## Further resources

### Climate jargon buster

- [Southwark Climate Collective Jargon Buster](#)

### Climate Action Advisors - Lets Go Zero

- [Lets Go Zero climate action advisors](#).