



## Championing sustainability in West Sussex schools

### How can we work together towards a more sustainable future?

By Louise Downey, Sustainability Team Leader

#### The Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy



Education plays a critical role in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, an issue that young people consistently say is a top priority for them. In 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) published their [Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy](#), with the expectation for all education settings in England to have a sustainability lead and climate action plan in place by 2025. The Strategy sets out how the sector will reduce its environmental footprint and contribute to delivery of the UK Government's legally binding

commitment to achieve 'net-zero' carbon emissions by 2050. The DfE is currently refreshing and updating the strategy to build on progress made in the last three years and enable more schools to engage with the support available to them.

The DfE's vision is that the UK is the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030, aiming for:

- **Excellence in education and skills for a changing world:** preparing all young people for a world impacted by climate change through learning and practical experience.
- **Net zero:** reducing direct and indirect emissions from education and care buildings, driving innovation to meet legislative targets and providing opportunities for children and young people to engage practically in the transition to net zero.
- **Resilience to climate change:** adapting our education and care buildings and system to prepare for the effects of climate change.
- **A better environment for future generations:** enhancing biodiversity, improving air quality and increasing access to, and connection with, nature in and around education and care settings.

To achieve this vision, the Strategy describes a range of short, medium and longer-term actions that the sector needs to take. Key within this is the expectation that all education settings will have a designated sustainability lead and a climate action plan in place by 2025.



## What is a Climate Action Plan?

A climate action plan is a detailed plan, that is supported by the senior leadership team, to enable your education setting to start or progress sustainability initiatives. Each school should create a climate action plan that is unique and manageable for them. The climate action plan should cover these four main areas:

- **Decarbonisation:** calculating energy use and carbon emissions and taking actions to reduce them, such as improving insulation standards or switching to renewable electricity
- **Adaptation and resilience:** actions to reduce the risk of flooding and overheating, such as installing a rain garden or planting trees for shade
- **Biodiversity:** engaging with the National Education Nature Park, to map habitats on your school site and make improvements
- **Climate education and green careers:** embedding knowledge-rich and comprehensive teaching about climate change across subject areas, and providing training for teaching staff so they feel supported to provide this

## What does it mean to be a sustainability lead?

The DfE's expectation is for every setting to have a sustainability lead in place by 2025. What this means in practice is appointing a staff member, or a small group of staff, to coordinate and lead sustainability initiatives at your setting, supported by a ring-fenced budget. The sustainability lead should be part of, or report into, the school leadership team. Appointing a dedicated sustainability lead to drive long term sustainability efforts increases accountability and focus, ensures that sustainability remains a priority, streamlines collaboration and communication, and provides a single source of guidance on sustainable practices.

The sustainability lead and other school staff and governors may benefit from relevant [sustainability training](#) to build their awareness of sustainability challenges, particularly the risks posed by climate change. The Let's Go Zero campaign led by Ashden offers [free, accredited Carbon Literacy training](#) for school sustainability leads and other staff members, providing them with the knowledge, confidence and enthusiasm to guide their school in its climate journey. Eco-Schools has created the 5-part ['Climate Confident' video series](#) to help educators learn about climate change, embedding sustainability and taking action, eco-anxiety, and layering climate change across the curriculum.

For more information about sustainability in West Sussex schools and education settings, please email [sustainability@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:sustainability@westsussex.gov.uk).