



Creating a Student-led Climate Action Plan

A resource guide for school staff and leadership

Students Organising for Sustainability UK
November 2025





Welcome!

This guide is here to support you and your team create your very own student-led Climate Action Plan (CAP). It is suited to members of staff across all departments and/or to those who may have been newly appointed as Sustainability Lead.

Developed with input from 24 schools across the UK, this booklet is packed with simple and effective ideas for climate action, resources, and real-life case studies. We hope this guide helps your school community to take an active role in climate action.

Thank You

This guide has been made possible through the Green Schools Revolution project, a three-year project launched in January 2023, hosted by SOS UK and funded by the #iwill Fund. We have supported secondary school pupils and beyond to green their schools as part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy. Students have developed whole-school Climate Action Plans, created Wilding Plans to bring nature back to their school grounds, and delivered Teach the Teacher sessions to help integrate climate education into the curriculum.

The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £66 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.



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The Basics

What is a Climate Action Plan?

A Climate Action Plan (CAP) is a working document for school settings to capture, track and manage the actions needed to reduce environmental impact across different areas. From 2025, every school in England is required to have a Climate Action Plan in place under the Department for Education's Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy.

What is a Student-led Climate Action Plan?

75% of students want their school or college to do more to tackle climate change¹, and yet we know that teachers are often working at full capacity, with limited time to take on additional initiatives. A student-led Climate Action Plan (CAP) offers a practical way for students to take ownership and be part of the meaningful change they want to see.

A Student-led Climate Action Plan gets your students meaningfully involved throughout the whole process. From mind-mapping initial ideas, carrying out actions and tracking progress, it is a chance for students to develop green skills like leadership, teamwork and communication.

¹ Students Organising for Sustainability (2025). [Learning for the Future](#), pg 24

How to use this Resource Guide

This guide is organised around the four key themes from the Department for Education's Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy: **Climate Education and Green Jobs, Decarbonisation, Biodiversity and Nature, and Climate Adaptation and Resilience.**

Students should play an active role in developing and leading actions for each of these four pillars as part of the Climate Action Plan.

Theme Title

Sub Category

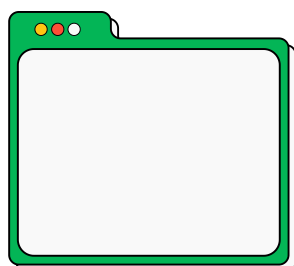
01. Example action: taken from student-led Climate Action Plans



Free Resource Link: to support thematic action points



Student voice tip



Case Study

An example of inspiring sustainability action from our 24 schools, reflecting work within and beyond the Green Schools Revolution programme.

Climate Education and Green Jobs

Education and Careers

The climate emergency affects every subject, although **fewer than 20% of students say they've learnt about climate change beyond Science and Geography**². These actions demonstrate student ideas that creatively include more climate education within a stretched timetable.

01. Sustainability drop down day: All subjects link lessons to climate action
02. Using assemblies/form time to introduce climate based discussion
03. Learning from local experts



90% of student respondents think its important for all students to learn about climate change³



84% of student respondents want to learn what they can do to help stop climate change during their time at school⁴



[Teach The Future: Curriculum for a changing planet](#)



[UCL: Teaching for sustainable futures](#)



[Young Climate Warriors: climate change assemblies \(Primary\)](#)

^{2,3,4} Students Organising for Sustainability (2025). [Learning for the Future](#), pg 17, pg 8, pg 19

Leadership and Governance

Making sustainability a priority across leadership means involving governors, senior leadership teams, and student leaders. This is a great way to embed it in school culture and standard procedures.



Engage with student leadership when updating policy documents

- 04. Add sustainability as standing item on the Governors' meeting schedule
- 05. Add sustainability to staff role descriptions
- 06. Promote green leadership opportunities for students in school
- 07. Find ways to include students in engaging with your local council

“It’s uplifting to see students wanting to be ambassadors for a Climate Action Plan Project and realising we can do more because of the students’ engagement.”

Teaching Staff
Trinity Academy St Edwards, Yorkshire

“Taking part in Climate Action has helped me see that, even as students, we can make a difference when we all work together as 350 students taking part!”

Student
XP Gateshead, North East



National Governance Association: Greener Governance



National Education Nature Park: Green Skills

Decarbonisation



[Build Carbon Literacy knowledge with free training from Let's Go Zero](#)

Energy

36% of the UK public sector's building emissions comes from schools and universities⁵. Increasing student knowledge on decarbonisation and supporting them to form energy saving actions could be one of the most impactful areas to lead on climate action.

01

Encourage student led activities to monitor school energy usage



[Count your Carbon: full scope Carbon Calculator for education settings](#)



[Energy Sparks: Student-led energy saving programmes and activities](#)

Infrastructure

02.

Install bike sheds

03.

Switch to motion sensor and LED lighting

04.

Draft proof windows and doors

05.

Explore school retrofitting

⁵ Department for Education (2023). [Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy](#).

Travel and Transport

Encouraging active and sustainable travel, like walking, cycling, or using public transport, reduces emissions, helps create safer streets, and improves student wellbeing. The actions below reflect how students have asked their schools to act across their Climate Action Plans.

- 06. Provide public transport maps
- 07. Provide cycling safety courses
- 08. Aim to limit vehicle activity around the school to decrease air pollution

“There are things we can all do that actually make a difference ...it's not just things we have to wait until we are older to do. We have a say....we can do things ourselves!”

Student
Worle Community School, Somerset

Students at **Worle Community School** were keen to focus on sustainable transport actions to build on their existing bike sheds.

Their Climate Action Plan includes ideas for a **bike loan scheme, more bikeability courses and developing cycle maps.**



Living Streets: WOW the walk to school challenge



Bikeability: Organise free cycle safety training



Take part in Clean Air Day 2026

Biodiversity and Nature

Natural Environment



Support students to develop ideas for the Climate Action Plan through National Education Nature Park Habitat Mapping.

01. Sign up to the National Education Nature Park
02. Create bird boxes/ bug hotels and introduce no-mowing zones
03. Have an indoor plant competition between form groups or classes

Caption: Students at **The King Alfred School** head outside to survey the old school pond, with plans to focus their biodiversity actions on restoring it.

“The CAP and Wilding projects have really helped students to come out of their shell and given them ideas on how they can make a difference in their school and community. It’s been easy for me to facilitate their ideas.”

Teaching Staff

The King Alfred School, Somerset



[Woodland Trust: tree tools and free trees for schools](#)



[RHS: School gardening resources](#)

Water

You may have come across the term **SuDS**, these are **Sustainable Drainage Systems** and are different ways to manage rainwater. SuDS can help reduce flood risk, filter pollutants, create wildlife-friendly spaces and reduce the need for mains water.

04. Install a rain garden

05. Have a water butt to collect rainwater for gardening



National Education Nature Park: collecting water



Students at St John Fisher receive a reusable water bottle for their time at Secondary school, encouraging them to refill!

Food

06. Include more plant-based school meals options

07. Introduce a seasonal menu and aim to work with local suppliers

08. Install composting systems for food waste



Meat Free Mondays: Participate in a plant-based catering initiative



RHS: Composting for schools



Climate Adaption and Resilience

Equality and Diversity

Different communities and groups feel the effects of climate change differently. Understanding climate justice supports students to develop ideas and actions that are inclusive of the whole school community.

01. Create multi-faith spaces in school
02. Audit outdoor spaces to make them accessible for every student
03. Celebrate sustainability awareness events during timetabled hours

Wellbeing

Feeling worried or scared about climate change, also called climate anxiety, is common amongst young people. **64% of students say they would like to learn how to deal with these feelings in school⁶.**

04. Include wellbeing activities before and after lessons on climate change
05. Increase lesson time outside
06. Introduce a positive climate news board
07. Host a climate cafe



[Force of Nature: Climate Anxiety Discussion Guide](#)

⁶ Students Organising for Sustainability (2025). [Learning for the Future](#), pg 21

Community

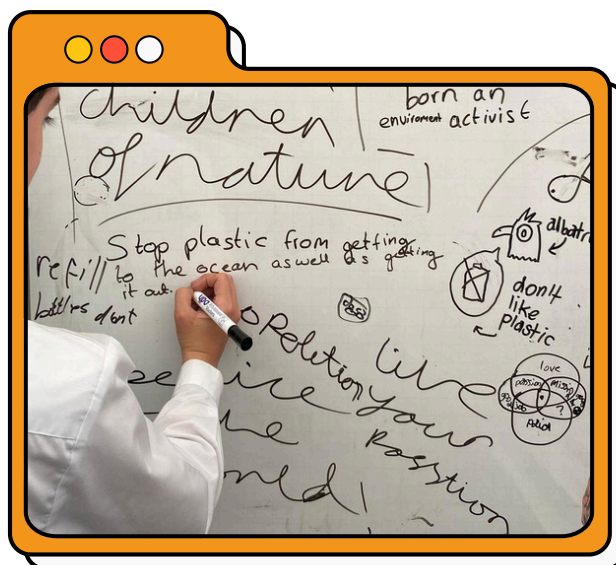
Involving the wider school and local community in your school Climate Action Plan helps to broaden your impact and support your students to feel more connected locally.

08. Shared outdoor seating areas in nature
09. Create a second-hand school uniform swap shop
10. Sustainability mornings and plant-based taster sessions

Caption: Students at **Clevedon School** took part in a multimedia workshop with their local charity, City to Sea. They enjoyed a mixture of creative activities, including a song about protecting nature which they linked with local environmental issues.

“The kids LOVED it! This multi-media approach went down well with students as it was something a little different and out of the ordinary!”

Teaching Staff
Clevedon School, Somerset



[Great Big Green Week: Community Action to tackle Climate Change](#)



[Keep Briton Tidy: Great Big School Clean](#)

Setting up a Climate Action Plan



[Download the SOS UK Climate Action Plan Template](#)

There is no ‘right way’ to design a Climate Action Plan. Your school could use a Word document, Excel spreadsheet or a shared digital platform. Treat your Climate Action Plan **as a live document**, something that evolves as your actions develop.

We recommend a simple table format as a clear way to keep Climate Action Plans organised, collaborative, and easy to update.

The downloadable Excel template at the top of this page is laid out with the below headings to help you get started.

Selected Action	Name the specific action your group will take
Student Ideas	Capture the suggestions and quotes from your students
Resources	Link any materials needed to carry out each action
Staff	Note the school staff or external partners who will support
Information	Include more detail, such as research, audits and/or policies
Theme	Group the action by the themes explored through this guide
SDG	Link the action to a UN Sustainable Development Goal
Progress	Columns to check-in throughout the year

Visual Climate Action Plans

A Visual Climate Action Plan helps to bring your school's sustainability journey to life. Whilst your main Climate Action Plan might sit in an Excel sheet or document, a visual version makes those same actions more engaging and accessible for the whole school community to engage with.

When students see their own ideas displayed, it sends a strong message that their voices are taken seriously. This recognition can also lead to wider participation in Climate Action across your school setting.



Ask students to create a visualisation of the school's climate actions



[Download the SOS UK Visual Climate Action Plan Template](#)

Caption: Students at **XP Gateshead** worked together to consider how to lay out their Visual Climate Action Plan for the wider school community.

“This important and authentic work will have a direct impact on the carbon footprint of our school and so will leave a legacy long after our student leaders have left the school. Our students are learning that they are important because they do work that matters.”

Teaching Staff

XP Gateshead, North East



Photo Credit: Gateshead Council



Support Available



Sustainability Support for Education

Sustainability Support for Education offers suggested actions paired with quality-assured resources. You can also filter these so you only see suggestions that are relevant to your setting, how far you've progressed already, estate, and more.



Climate Ambassadors

The Climate Ambassadors scheme exists to provide free expertise and support to nurseries, schools and colleges to develop and deliver impactful climate action plans.



National Education Nature Park

National Education Nature Park is a free programme for all schools, nurseries and colleges in England that inspires confidence in children and young people to make a positive difference to both their own and to nature's future. Through a curriculum-linked programme, educators and learners follow a five-step process to transform their sites for both people and wildlife, creating a network of green spaces that form the National Education Nature Park.



Let's Go Zero: Climate Action Advisors

As part of the Let's Go Zero campaign, Climate Action Advisors support schools looking to become zero carbon, by giving free and tailored advice to help schools green their buildings, transport, menus and more.



Pilot School Examples

A huge thank you to our partner schools, students, and teachers for their countless ideas and energy that have made the student-led Climate Action Plan project possible. Their practical input in our priority regions have helped to inform this resource.

Great Yarmouth

Cliff Park Ormiston Academy
Secondary (academy sponsor led)
| Climate Action Plan |

East Norfolk Sixth Form College
FE (academy 16-19 converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

Lynn Grove Academy
Secondary (academy converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

Plymouth

Devonport High School for Boys
Secondary Grammar
(academy converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

Hele's School
Secondary (academy converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

Kings School Plymouth
Primary (independent)
| Climate Action Plan |

Plymstock School
Secondary (academy converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

North East

XP Gateshead
Secondary (free school)
| Climate Action Plan |

North West

Cartmel Priory CfE School
Secondary (voluntary aided)
| Climate Action Plan |

Saddleworth School
Secondary (community school)
| Climate Action Plan |

St Bede's Catholic High School
Secondary (voluntary aided)
| Climate Action Plan |

St John Fisher Catholic High School
Secondary (voluntary aided)
| Climate Action Plan |

St Mary's Catholic High School
Secondary (voluntary aided)
| Climate Action Plan |

The East Manchester Academy
Secondary (academy sponsor led)
| Climate Action Plan |

Somerset

Chilton Trinity
Secondary (academy converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

Clevedon School
Secondary (academy converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

The Kind Alfred School
Secondary (academy sponsor led)
| Climate Action Plan |

Worle Community School
Secondary (academy sponsor led)
| Climate Action Plan |

Southampton

Compass School
KS1 - KS4 (alternative provision)
| Climate Action Plan |

The Polygon School
Foundation special school
| Climate Action Plan |

Upper Shirley High School
Secondary (academy converter)
| Climate Action Plan |

Yorkshire and the Humber

Trinity Academy St Edward's
Secondary (free school)
| Climate Action Plan |