Essex County Council
Environment and Climate Action



SCHOOLS' ADVICE PACK

Taking Action on Climate Change

Contents

Introduction 3

Key Changes for Schools from the Department for Education 4

Essex Schools Infolink – Climate and Sustainability 5

1. What Can I Do? 6

2. Framework for Action 10

School-wide Initiatives 10

Work with External Organisations 16

3. On the Way to School 18

4. In School and the Classroom 26

Teaching and Learning Resources 26

Extra-curricular Enrichment 29

Essex Teaching Awards 30

ClimACTivist Student Award Programme 30

Essex Libraries 31

Green Careers: Preparing Young People in Essex for a Changing World 32

Waste Prevention and the Circular Economy 37

Food Waste 41

Food and Food Production Education 42

Climate-friendly Meals 43

Water 44

Air Quality 45

5. Procurement 46

The Procurement Act 2023 (effective from 24th February 2025) 46

Construction Framework 2025 (CF25): What It Means for School Buildings 48

6. School Buildings: Energy Management, Retrofitting and Water Efficiency 50

Education Estates Strategy (2026): A Decade of National Renewal 50

Conserving Energy and Electricity 52

Energy Procurement Guidance 55

Renewable Energy Projects 55

Solar Panels 55

Reviewing Energy Use Before Considering Solar Panels 56

Community Energy Groups 56

Retrofitting 57

Water Efficiency 58

7. Outdoor Space 60

School Grounds 60

Trees 61

Flood Risk and Water Management 62

National Education Nature Park 65

School Gardens 66

8. Green Space and Green Initiatives Beyond School 74

Other Schools in your Community and School Networks 77

9. Funding Opportunities 78

10. Useful Teaching and Learning Resources 82

Conclusion 88

Annex One 89

> “Small changes undertaken together can have a lasting impact and often lead to new ways of thinking about how we live and work.”

Introduction

This is the third edition of the Climate Action Advice Pack for Schools. It collates key guidance, information, resources and funding support (where available) about the steps your school can take to tackle climate change and improve the environment.

This can help your school to become more sustainable and – in the process – save money, through actions such as improving energy efficiency.



Taking steps to reduce your school’s impact on the climate and environment is not as challenging as it may seem. There are many practical and cost-effective (often free!) changes you can make to help reduce your environmental impact and to ensure your school is operating sustainably.

Some of these changes can also produce positive benefits to the wellbeing and mental health of your students and staff. We have aimed to signpost only to free or low-cost initiatives and resources throughout this pack, as well as to schemes which can help your school to secure additional funding!

We all have a role to play. Small changes undertaken together can have a lasting impact and often lead to new ways of thinking about how we live and work. Protecting our environment will require change and proactive action from all of us and will be achieved through both big and small changes.

Alongside this resource for schools on climate change, Essex County Council has developed a guidance pack for residents, early years settings and another one for businesses. If you would like to read these documents, please visit the Sustainable Essex website.

Key Changes for Schools from the Department for Education

The Department for Education has set out a number of changes for schools from a sustainability perspective. Below are some of the key changes, but please do consult the rest of this document and the **Department for Education website** for further information.

1 Sustainability Leads (Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy)

Education settings, including all schools, colleges and other education settings should have a nominated sustainability lead. The aim of this is to help drive change, increase accountability and to provide a clear remit when it comes to developing and enacting sustainability initiatives. You can read more about the requirements surrounding sustainability leads, resources available and further guidance on page 12.

2 Climate Action Plan (Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy)

All schools should now develop a climate action plan, which details sustainability initiatives and your plans to progress and achieve them. The Department for Education has not produced a set template for a climate action plan, allowing schools to tailor these documents to meet their own specific needs and contexts. However, further advice – including potential templates – can be found on page 11.

3 The Curriculum and Assessment Review

The review made a number of recommendations to the government, which, in its **response**, stated that: '[the government] will take the opportunity to enhance the climate education content which is already present in the national curriculum, in the subjects of geography, science and citizenship. We will also include sustainability within the design and technology (D&T) programme of study and sustainable practices within the citizenship primary curriculum'.[1]

Furthermore, the government response recognised the value of extra-curricular participation. The government has made a commitment to 'set out a new core enrichment offer that every school and college, in every community, should aim to provide for all children – beyond the statutory curriculum... at a minimum, every school should deliver an enrichment offer which provides access to civic engagement; arts and culture; **nature, outdoor and adventure;** sport and physical activities; and developing wider life skills'.[2]

'Nature, outdoor and adventure' is one of the new five new benchmark categories and includes 'time outdoors, climate education and sustainability projects, gardening, residentials and camps'.[3] Notably, 'as set out in Ofsted's new inspection framework, pupils' access to opportunities that broaden their experiences and enable them to develop their talents and interests, is considered under personal development. **When Ofsted updates its inspection toolkits next year, it will take account of the new enrichment benchmarks'.[4]**

4 Education Estates Strategy: A decade of national renewal

A ten-year estates strategy from the Department for Education, with the aim of facilitating 'a shift to more proactive management, long-term strategic maintenance and renewal that prioritises condition need, risk and resilience alongside delivering high-quality new buildings where they are needed'.[5] There is a commitment of 'investment in education capital of £38 billion for 2025-26 to 2029-30... This supports delivery from 2025-26 to 2029-30 with long-term funding confirmed through to 2034-35 for capital maintenance funding for schools and colleges and the School Rebuilding Programme'.[6] Almost £3 billion per year by 2034-35 'in capital maintenance and renewal to improve the condition of the school and college estate and providing Responsible Bodies with greater certainty on their future maintenance funding to support planning' is expected.[7]

This is a significant strategy with supporting investment which will be central to the management of school buildings, helping to future-proof, save money and improve sustainability (including commitments to 'support solar and energy efficiency measures'[8] and to 'drive behaviour change needed to make our education estate more climate resilient').[9]

As this is a multi-year programme, leaders in schools should check with the Department for Education what support may be available to them and identify key deadlines they are required to meet.

Essex Schools Infolink – Climate and Sustainability

Essex County Council hosts a dedicated climate and sustainability portal on **Essex Schools Infolink**. This includes up-to-date tips, advice and guidance on steps schools can take to become more sustainable. With sections on climate action in school; sustainability lead support; and how climate action can be taken in schools (such as through sustainable travel, the development of school grounds and student networks and events), this online resource is continually updated.

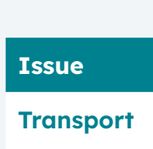


1. What Can I Do?

The below table aims to provide you with an overview of some key actions you can take at your school. More information can be found later in the pack. Please note this is **not an extensive list of actions you can take**.

Issue	Opportunity	Support	Page
Department for Education: Climate Action Plan & Sustainability Leads	• Align with DfE **strategy** • Embed climate action across school • Reduce carbon footprint • Save money	• **Let's Go Zero** offers templates, planning tools, one to one support and training regarding climate action in schools • **Climate Ambassadors** provide education settings in England access to free volunteer support to develop climate action plans • Essex Schools Infolink has a **dedicated page on support for sustainability leads** • **Register your school's sustainability lead with Essex County Council**	11 11 5 12
Climate Friendly Meals	• Reduce carbon footprint • Enhance the school food environment • Improve Food and Nutrition	• Explore sustainable catering certifications, tools and training with **Food for Life** • Get involved with the **Healthy Schools Programme** and develop a sustainable food and nutrition project	28 15
CPD & Carbon Literacy Training	• Develop teachers' knowledge and skills • Embed sustainability across the curriculum	• UCL offers **free** **Carbon Literacy training for teachers**	14
Energy	• Reduce carbon footprint • Save money (through reduced energy bills) • Future-proof your school site/energy supply	• Energy Efficiency Guide and Energy Action Template on **Essex Schools Infolink** to help you create an energy plan and annual review process • **Guidance on energy procurement** and the DfE's group energy contract • Advice and school visits from Let's Go Zero's **Advisors' Network** in relation to your carbon footprint • Work with a community energy group to get solar panels. Contact: **lowcarbon@essex.gov.uk** to engage with the community energy sector • The **free** **Count Your Carbon Calculator**, designed specifically for schools	52 55 13 54
Funding	• Receive additional support and funds for projects • Reduce your school's climate impact	• See the 'Funding Opportunities' section	78

Issue	Opportunity	Support	Page
Green Careers & Skills 	• Develop teachers' knowledge and understanding of green careers and skills • Support and inform students about the opportunities of pursuing a green career	• Email the **Essex Growth Agency** at Essex County Council for support with CPD for teachers and opportunities for young people: **GreatStart@essex.gov.uk** • Visit the **National Careers Service website** and **Education Hub** for green careers advice & opportunities • Visit the **Essex Opportunities Portal** and **Essex Green Skills Hub** for information on green and other careers and jobs	35
Outdoor Space 	• Improve biodiversity • Improve school environment • Free support and materials	• **Free** advice and training for schools to lead tree planting events. Contact: **environment@essex.gov.uk** • See the full list of organisations which offer free trees to schools in the 'Funding Opportunities' section • Discounted **compost bins and water butts** (with an Essex postcode) • Read the **School grounds: Developing nature-filled outdoor space for all**	61 78 62 60
Procurement 	• Improve your environmental practices • Save money	• Consider the **Buying for Schools** guidance • The Department for Education (DfE) provides an **approved framework agreement** to help your school buy goods and services, including from pre-approved suppliers	47 48
School Networks 	• Connect with climate ambassadors in schools across Essex	• Join the Essex Schools' Climate Action Network (ESCAN) and share ideas on best practice for climate action projects. Email: **Environment.ClimateCommunications@essex.gov.uk**	13

Issue	Opportunity	Support	Page
Transport 	• Reduce carbon footprint • Reduce traffic and pollution around schools, making roads safer • Help students, parents and colleagues to understand climate-friendly transport changes they can make	• Develop a School Travel Plan, and gain national accreditation – email the **travelplanteam@essex.gov.uk** for more info and **free support** • The air quality website – **Essex Air** – has a specific school zone section, with resources and toolkits available for teachers • Create a **clean air action plan**	19 24 45
Waste 	• Reduce waste produced at your school • Manage waste more efficiently • Find ways to reuse items which benefits your students, school and community	• Understand what waste is created and make a plan to reduce waste and recycle more. See **Busy Bins** and **Love Essex** for free guidance on waste audits • Set up a uniform swap or second-hand shop to reduce waste and help families with the cost of uniform • Reuse, recycle and upcycle through services such as **BatteryBack**; use **Return A Toner** or **The Ink Bin** to recycle empty printer cartridges	15 38 40
Water 	• Reduce water wastage and improve efficiency • Save money	• **Water Saving Calculator** by Thames Water • Discounted **water butts** from the Floods team (with an Essex postcode) • Essex **Water Strategy** and interactive '**Essex Water Your Future**' resource (developed with young people)	59 44

2. Framework for Action

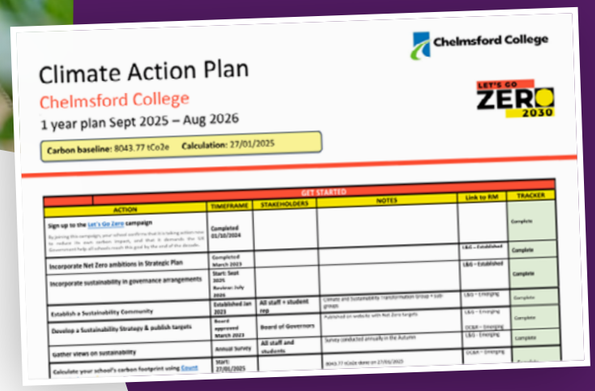
There are some important strategic steps your school can take to develop a framework for action to tackle climate change.



School-wide Initiatives

- **Climate Action Plans:** The Department for Education's (DfE) **Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy** sets out that, as of 2025, all schools should have a defined climate action plan. This will set out ambitions and commitments your school has made, with details of how to initiate, monitor and progress sustainability initiatives. This could include targets ranging from becoming a net zero school by a certain date to eliminating the use of single use plastics in classrooms and the canteen. Such an action plan will help to crystalise your aims and commitments.
- The DfE does not provide a set template for an action plan, providing flexibility for schools to develop tailored plans which take into account each school's unique context and priorities. However, the DfE advises that all climate action plans should include four key 'pillars':
    1. **Adaptation and resilience:** how your school or college is preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change, such as flooding, overheating and water scarcity;
    2. **Biodiversity and nature:** efforts to protect and enhance nature and wildlife within school or college grounds and its surroundings;
    3. **Climate education and green skills:** how learners are supported to understand climate change, sustainability, and develop relevant skills;
    4. **Decarbonisation and net zero:** actions to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, working towards net zero.

You can read more detailed guidance from the Department for Education on Gov.uk website.


Chelmsford College

Climate Action Plan

Chelmsford College

1 year plan Sept 2025 – Aug 2026

Carbon baseline: 8043.77 tCo2e Calculation: 27/01/2025

LET'S GO ZERO 2030

GET STARTED

ACTION	TIMEFRAME	STAKEHOLDERS	NOTES	Link to RM	TRACKER
Sign up to the Let's Go Zero campaign	Completed 01/10/2024				Complete
Incorporate Net Zero ambitions in Strategic Plan	Completed March 2023			L&S - Established	Complete
Incorporate sustainability in governance arrangements	Start: Sept 2025 Review: July 2026			L&S - Established	Complete
Establish a Sustainability Community	Established Jan 2023	All staff + student rep	Climate and Sustainability Transformation Group + sub groups	L&S - Emerging	Complete
Develop a Sustainability Strategy & publish targets	Board approval March 2023	Board of Governors	Published on website with Net Zero targets	SCAP - Emerging L&S - Emerging	Complete
Gather views on sustainability	Annual Survey	All staff and students	Survey conducted annually in the Autumn	L&S - Emerging	Complete
Calculate your school's carbon footprint using Ecact	Start: 27/01/2025		8043.77 tCO2e done on 27/01/2025	CCAP - Emerging	

Case Study

Chelmsford College has **produced a climate action plan**, with the support of Let's Go Zero's template. The plan takes into account key measures, including: decarbonisation and energy efficiency; climate adaptation and resilience; biodiversity and green infrastructure; climate education, green skills and green careers; partnership and engagement; and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Other useful resources to consider while developing your climate action plan include:

- Let's Go Zero's **Climate Action Advisors** offer free advice to schools – including on climate action plans (and potential templates). (Department for Education supported partner).
- **National Education Nature Park** – Climate action plans – advice and guidance (Department for Education supported partner).
- **Climate Action Management Platform**
- **Climate Ambassadors** provide education settings in England access to free volunteer support to develop climate action plans.
- **Essex Schools Infolink – Climate and Sustainability**
- Friends of the Earth has developed a **Climate Action Plan for Schools** resource.
- **Sustainability Support for Education** has developed a list of resources available to support schools to produce a climate action plan.
- **Transform Our World** has developed a free online tool which helps schools identify key areas of action which could be included in a climate action plan.

- **Sustainability leads:** The Department for Education's **Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy** has stated that all schools should have a nominated member of staff serve as a sustainability lead. This will help to drive forward sustainability initiatives; define responsibilities; and provide a clear remit and accountability when it comes to implementing changes, particularly in relation to the development of a climate action plan (see above). The sustainability lead could be a member of the Senior Leadership Team or a member of staff who is particularly interested in the subject, but the DfE's best practice guidance advises that: 'when the lead is supported by a wider team, more opportunities are identified, and the impact is greater. By including educational (for example, teaching staff) and operational (for example, estates management and catering) expertise, this team can be particularly impactful. You may also benefit from bringing stakeholders such as learners into sustainability leadership roles too'.
  - You can **register your school's sustainability lead with Essex County Council**, which will allow you to receive news on networks, training and events, as well as details of new resources and funding schemes.
  - Essex Schools Infolink has a **dedicated page on support for sustainability leads**, including details of regular meetings.
  - Let's Go Zero's **Climate Action Advisors** offer free advice to schools – including for sustainability leads.
- Could your school **designate a governor with a specific remit for climate action and sustainability?**
- You may wish to **establish a climate committee or develop an existing climate group at school.** This provides students with an opportunity to voice concerns and share ideas about what your school can be doing to tackle climate change. It can work to develop initiatives, such as introducing incentives (e.g. badges, rewards, etc.) for students to take action or introducing **green school assemblies** with commendations for environment related achievements. You may also wish to involve teaching and other school staff, such as senior leaders, catering and site managers, to help young people express their concerns directly to those who can take action. In addition, you may wish to expand this committee to include members of the wider community (please see **page 76**).

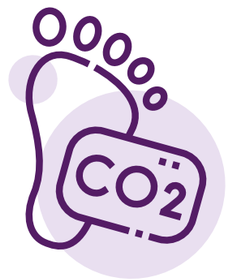


Case Study

At Thundersley Primary School in Benfleet, a group of student Sustainability Ambassadors are taking action on all things green. To become a Sustainability Ambassador, aspiring Year 5 students submit an application explaining their motivations for the role, before taking on responsibilities such as helping with litter picks and dropping sorted waste to the caretaker. An important responsibility of the ambassadors is to help organise the school's Winter Solstice celebration.

Mrs Tubbs, who oversees the Sustainability Ambassadors, said that the biennial school-wide event, which includes activities such as leaf identification and wreath-making, is a great opportunity to instil an 'appreciation of the Earth and to inspire students about their place within it and how they can help to protect the environment'. The enthusiastic Sustainability Ambassadors are at the heart of all things green at Thundersley and meet regularly. They have worked hard to embed positive climate and environment related actions at their school, which also includes a formal shadowing and training period, as they hand over to the new cohort of incoming Sustainability Ambassadors each year, proving that leadership and responsibility for sustainability at school can come from both staff and students.

- The **Essex Schools' Climate Action Network (ESCAN)** aims to bring together students and teachers from across Essex to share ideas in relation to climate action. Members of the network will become Essex Climate Ambassadors and meet virtually, sharing success stories of climate projects undertaken at their schools and learning from others. If you are interested in joining the network, please contact: **Environment.ClimateCommunications@essex.gov.uk**.
- Understand your **carbon footprint**. The **Count Your Carbon Calculator** is a **free** resource for schools, colleges and nurseries, which allows you to understand the sources of your carbon footprint. It also provides recommendations for steps you can take, to both reduce your impact on the environment and save money.
- Get **free support** and take action to reduce your carbon footprint and save money:
  - Let's Go Zero has a network of **Climate Action Advisors** who can visit your school **for free** and support efforts to reduce energy use and your wider carbon footprint, as well as explore options to upgrade existing buildings.
  - You can also independently work with site managers to understand your school's energy usage and implement behavioural changes to tackle energy bills and carbon emissions.
  - You can also download the free Energy Efficiency Guide and Energy Action Template from the **Energy in Schools portal** on Essex Schools Infolink website.



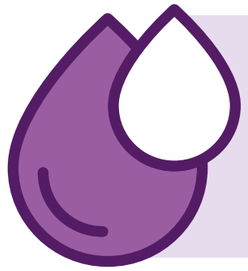
- Information about **good estate management for schools** can be found on the Department for Education's **website**.
- **Carbon Literacy training & CPD** can help teachers and other school staff to deepen their understanding of climate and environment discourse, as well as provide practical advice for action you can take in school. For instance, **UCL offers free training across a number of subject areas**.
- Include **climate action throughout the curriculum.**
  - For example, learning about the impacts of carbon emissions in science, through to persuasive writing exercises in English to influence politicians.
  - The Department for Education's **Curriculum and Assessment Review** (November 2025) has made recommendations to strengthen climate change and sustainability across areas of teaching, noting that: 'Given the significance of climate change for our society and the planet, it is crucial that young people benefit from an understanding of the climate crisis's causes, consequences and possible solutions and that they are empowered with the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive in tomorrow's industries and tackle the serious challenges facing our planet'.[10]
  - You can find out more about teaching and learning resources (including curriculum-aligned resources) on **pages 26** and **82**.



Engage with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) – PTAs often arrange key events (such as summer fetes and Christmas fairs), so initiatives such as reducing the use of plastic could be developed. PTAs also often fund play equipment. You could work together to develop a commitment to purchase only climate-friendly equipment.



- **Climate Anxiety** – For some young people, climate change and damage to the environment is not only of concern to them, but is extremely worrying. Many children now have access to unfiltered information online and this may only increase their anxiety. It is important to recognise that when speaking about climate change, you are **providing information which empowers young people to understand the facts and demonstrates that they can be part of the solution.** Ultimately, it is important to remain conscious that this level of worry will vary from child to child and that a tailored approach may be necessary. By forming a climate committee, holding green-themed assemblies and perhaps special Q&A climate sessions, you can provide a way for young people to **discuss their concerns openly with their peers, with guidance from teaching staff.**
  - **Essex Healthy Schools Programme** places an emphasis on improving the health and wellbeing of young people. The programme provides a strategic framework for schools to reflect on their provision and includes topics such as Food and Nutrition, PSHE, Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing and Pupil Voice. Climate change and the environment can be incorporated into a Healthy Schools project with a focus on emotional wellbeing. For any activity undertaken, schools can nominate themselves for a Healthy Schools Best Practice Award at an annual celebration event.
- Consider **how sustainable the journey to and from school is** (both for students and staff) – could walk to school weeks help to build momentum? You can read more about this in the 'On the Way to School' section on **page 18**.
- Instil environmental values into the staff code of conduct (e.g. printing double-sided and only when necessary). Could you consider what can be included in policies and practices, such as school values and ethos statements?
- **Waste** – Consider undertaking a waste audit to understand what waste you create and how you dispose of it. You can find free guidance on waste audits on **Busy Bins** and **Love Essex**. Please see the 'Waste Prevention and the Circular Economy' subheading on **page 37**.



Water – Could you conduct a water audit to understand your water needs and more effectively manage your use of water? This could help to save both money and water. See **page 44** for further information.

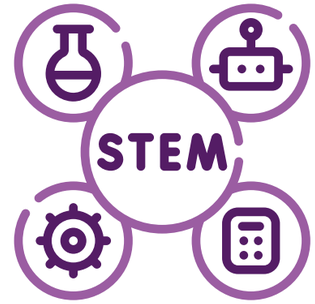


Work with External Organisations

Your school could consider working with external organisations to support your journey to becoming more sustainable, such as:

- The **Count Your Carbon Calculator** is a national, free resource to help schools, colleges and nurseries calculate their carbon footprints. The resource also makes recommendations for how to reduce that footprint, as well as how you can save money by doing so.
- **Eco Schools** help to inspire and empower pupils; raises environmental awareness; improves the school environment; creates financial savings. Schools can also access free resources and other advice.
- **Let's Go Zero** is a national campaign uniting teachers, pupils, parents and their schools as they all work together to be zero carbon by 2030. As a school, when you sign up to Let's Go Zero, you'll get free support from Climate Action Advisors on **setting your zero carbon targets and developing roadmaps for delivery.**
  - Let's Go Zero runs the **OVO Foundation Nature Prize**, where schools have the chance to win £500 in order to 'bring students closer to nature'. Previous projects which have received funding include: tree planting initiatives; vegetable growing; and boosting wildlife in school grounds.
  - Let's Go Zero also runs the **Climate Action Countdown** – a month of action held every year (June – July) – where a coalition of organisations help schools to take on a different daily activity linked to sustainability, and celebrate what schools across the UK are doing for climate and biodiversity.

- The Royal Society – **The Partnership Grants** scheme funds schools and colleges up to **£3,000 to work in partnership with STEM professionals** from academia or industry to run investigative STEM projects. The scheme runs annually and is open to both primary and secondary schools, including sixth form colleges. The **Tomorrow's Climate Scientists** is an extension to the Partnership Grants scheme, which funds schools specifically undertaking research into climate change and biodiversity topics. The Royal Society also provides teaching resources focusing on climate change and biodiversity.



Tesco Stronger Starts – provides grants of up to £1,500 to charities and community organisations (including schools), with priority given to projects that provide food and support to young people. This includes, but is not limited to: breakfast clubs; to buy equipment for outdoor or indoor activities; support for school clubs and developing food growing areas in schools.



3. On the Way to School

Transport is an important element for teachers and school staff to think about, both for themselves and for pupils.



Don't forget:

Changing the way you travel not only helps the environment, but can improve physical and mental health, as well as help to improve air quality around schools!

Consider transport links in your area, and how pupils and their families can choose the most **sustainable methods to travel** in their day-to-day life and when travelling to school.

We recognise that for most of us in Essex, a car is vital for our daily lives. However, perhaps there are some journeys where we could consider alternatives. Examples could include **walking, cycling, scooting, car sharing between households, public transport, or, if your school has it set up, park-and-stride.**

The average petrol car CO_2 emissions amount to 175.4g per mile, or a kilogram of CO_2 per 5.7 miles. Compare this to buses (42.6g per passenger per mile, or a kilo of CO_2 per 23.5 miles) or trains (56.0g per passenger per mile, or a kilo of CO_2 per 17.9 miles) and the difference is stark. If you walk, scoot or cycle to school, the footprint is zero.[11]

Given how rural parts of Essex are, car journeys are sometimes necessary, but it is worth considering how introducing **public transport** or **car sharing between different households** into your travel routine once or twice a week can make a real difference in terms of both reduced emissions and reduced costs of fuel, not to mention time saved through sharing. As a member of school staff, could you discuss with colleagues, friends and neighbours the possibility of car sharing as a means to make your way to and from work? For students, you could suggest to parents who have children at the same school to also consider car sharing. You can find out more about car sharing on the **Essex Highways website**, including details about the **Essex Car Share scheme**. This has been developed by Essex County Council and **Liftshare** as a free service which helps to match people who wish to car share for journeys around Essex. If you are driving, you can help to reduce your emissions by limiting 'idling' – if you turn your engine off when parked, you'll save emissions and money.



The National Travel Survey 2024: Travel to and from school indicates that 73% of primary school trips between one and two miles are undertaken by car, which has reduced in recent years.[12]

All schools in Essex have free access to **STARS**, which provides a Travel Plan Toolkit for schools. Woodville Primary School has been recognised with "Outstanding" accreditation for its travel plan (and was also named STARS' East of England Primary School of the Region 2021/22). Essex County Council can also provide free support and advice for developing bespoke travel plans for schools, as well as free access to all sorts of initiatives. If you have any queries, please contact **travelplanteam@essex.gov.uk**

There are a number of sustainable travel initiatives your school may wish to explore:

1. Walk more

- Introduce walk to school schemes (ensure parents are consulted). Examples include:
  - **Walk to School Week**
  - **Walking the School Run**
  - **WOW – the walk to school challenge** – A year-round active travel challenge, where pupils earn badges for walking, scooting or cycling.
- Or you could set up your own scheme, incentivising students by offering rewards and keeping a class-wide tally.
- Organise a 'walking bus', where students meet at a set location before walking together to school (with adult supervisors – the 'driver' and 'conductor' at either end). A free guide about setting up walking buses is available. Please contact **travelplanteam@essex.gov.uk**.
- Help students to create a cut-out 'bus', to carry on their walk to school.
- Consider how to keep active through broader, walking, jogging and running initiatives, such as **The Daily Mile.**

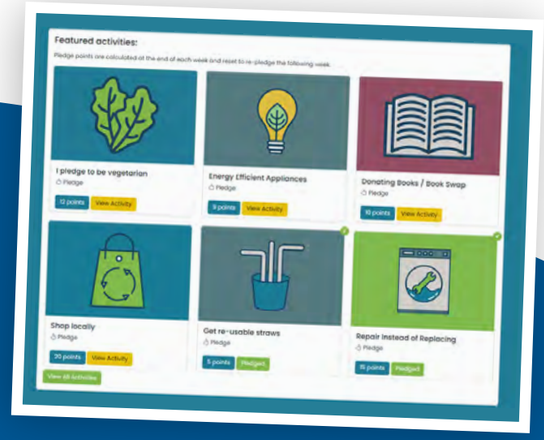


2. Cycle more

- Introduce cycle to school schemes (ensure parents are included). For example, you could consider a scheme such as **The Big Walk and Wheel (Walk Wheel Cycle Trust).**
- Combine with **free Bikeability cycle training.** Bikeability is the government approved cycle training programme that teaches practical cycling skills and builds confidence for riding on today's roads.
  - Essex County Council provides **free, fully funded cycle training to schools across the county.** With levels for juniors (Year 3+) and secondary students, for those who need to learn or would like a refresher. Adult cycle training is also available.
  - **Courses offered include:**
    - Level 1: Off road bike control and basic handling skills.
    - Level 1 & 2 (Combined): Begins off road, then progresses to riding safely on quiet local roads.
    - Level 3: Advanced skills for busier roads, complex junctions and route planning.
  - **Get Cycling** is a free government funded cycling programme that brings the benefits of cycling to your school. It equips teachers with the knowledge to teach cycle skills to Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage One students. Half a day's training for two staff per school is available.
  - **Bike Buses** – An eco-friendly, healthy and fun way for students to get to and from school. With the support and supervision of adults, a group of students on bikes (or a 'bike bus') designs a route (with stops for others to join) to get to and from school.
- For teachers and school staff: The **Cycle to Work scheme** allows staff to save money and spread the cost of buying a bike. Speak to your school to see if it is already part of a Cycle to Work scheme, and if not speak to the council's **Sustainable Travel Planning Team** about setting it up.
- Essex County Council encourages cycling for work, school or pleasure. Bikeability offers courses for those who want to cycle, ranging from 'Learn to Ride' to advanced level. Every school in Essex has the opportunity to have cycle training (across all ages and adult lessons for staff).
- Reward schemes for cycling and other active travel.
- Scooter training resources are also available for free, where school staff can teach their Key Stage 1 pupils how to ride their scooters safely and responsibly on the playground. Contact **travel.planteam@essex.gov.uk** to receive the free resources.

3. Get the kids involved

- **The Travel Essex website** contains information about public transport across the county, including services for getting to school, and the chance to download the TravelEssex app.
- The **Move With Us** campaign supports young people across Essex to become active and explore local opportunities through its activity finder. The campaign has **resources for schools** which are supporting the campaign.
- **Are students using public transport?** It is worth considering local bus and train provisions for getting to and from school. For instance, **Greater Anglia** offers discounted travel for some students.
- There are a number of 'gamification' apps which help make active travel fun for both young people and adults. You could consider the benefits of apps such as **Beat the Street**, **Street Tag** and **Go Jauntly**.



Case Study

In September 2023, Chelmsford College launched a new app for staff and students. Developed in-house, the 'Nexus' app is designed to connect the understanding of ways to reduce your own carbon footprint, with sustained behaviour change in return for tangible rewards.

Since then, nearly **100 staff and over 500 students have made pledges to adapt or change their behaviour in order to reduce their carbon footprint.** Pledges on the dashboard change weekly and contain information on why it's an important action and the CO_2 saving the individual can make by changing their behaviour.

Each pledge earns the individual points that accumulate over time and earn them digital badges from levels 1-4. They then become eligible for rewards that range from a free reusable drinking bottle made from recycled plastic from the sea, vouchers for sustainable shopping outlets, through to visits to 'green' projects in the region.

Students can also earn points as a collective within their class and compete against other classes on the leader board. This fosters a collaborative and team building ethos within their classes.

4. Park-and-Stride

- “Park-and-stride”, where families park their cars at an agreed location away from the school and walk the remaining distance.
- If you have to drive in, could you park elsewhere?
- Can you come to **agreements on school traffic with local businesses?**

Case Study

The Park and Stride initiative at Stanway Fiveways Primary School in Colchester was first developed in 2019 as part of the school’s wider efforts to reduce traffic congestion and encourage more sustainable travel. The idea emerged through discussions between school staff and the school’s Eco-Council, which had identified the volume of cars around the gates at drop-off and pick-up times as a key issue for safety, air quality and neighbourhood congestion.

To launch the initiative, the senior leadership team – in conjunction with the school governors – approached several nearby businesses to ask whether parents could use a number of their parking spaces at busy times and then walk the final few minutes to school. The response from local businesses was very positive, with several agreeing to take part. The school decided to go ahead with an offer from the local Co-op store. This business has a large car park and is only a few minutes’ walk from the school, using paths where pedestrians do not have to cross any roads. The school leadership felt that this was the safest and closest option.

Since introducing Park and Stride, parents and pupils have responded enthusiastically. The short walk has helped reduce congestion directly outside the school, improved safety around the gates, encouraged families to build a little extra activity into the school run and has promoted sustainable travel – reducing carbon emissions from cars.

- **3PR** is an Essex-wide mission to make school parking safer and less stressful for children, parents, teachers and residents. It helps everyone follow the three parking rules: Care, Consideration, Caution. Contact **schoolparking@chelmsford.gov.uk** to help get advisory no parking zones or park and stride sites formalised.

5. Rethinking School Trips

- When you are taking school trips, do you have to drive? Can you walk?
- If you have your own fleet of minibuses or other onsite vehicles, if and when these need to be replaced, consider **electric vehicles.**
  - **Workplace Charging Scheme:** schools are eligible to apply for a grant of up to £2,500 per socket to support the installation of electric vehicle charging points.
  - Grants are also available for some **low-emission vehicles.**



6. Other Resources

- Active Essex has produced an **Active Travel Toolkit for Schools.** Essex County Council is in the process of developing "**Safer Streets**", to explore what schools can do to promote active travel, improve air quality and reduce congestion outside schools.
- The **STEP tool**, where Essex County Council can tell you what the potential is for your school to switch to safer, greener, healthier modes of transport, and how much CO_2 you can save as a result.

The **Essex Car Share scheme** helps to match people across Essex who wish to make journeys by car sharing.

- The **HomeRun app**, measuring the carbon emissions from different journeys to school.
- **Air Quality:**
  - Transform Our World has developed a free **Clean Air for Schools Framework** resource. This is an online tool to help every school create a tailored clean air action plan to tackle air pollution in and around the school.
  - **Essex Air** provides information about air quality across the county, including how pollution impacts our health and what to do about it, as well as readings from live air quality monitors. It also has a School Zone section on its website, which includes lesson plans for primary and secondary school age children.
  - The Global Centre for Clean Air Research, University of Surrey, hosts resources and **guidance for schools** on how to mitigate children's exposure to traffic pollution in and around schools.
  - You can find more information and resources about indoor air quality on **page 45**.
- **The Active Travel Inspectors** scheme has been developed by Modeshift. The scheme aims to empower Key Stage 2 pupils to inspect their school neighbourhood, identifying ways to make walking, wheeling, and cycling easier and more enjoyable for school journeys. The Active Travel Inspectors resources are free for any school in England to access. To download the resources, a school needs to be registered with the Modeshift STARS scheme.
- The **Active Travel Ambassador (ATA) Programme** gives young people aged 11+ the confidence and skills to tackle the transport issues affecting their school. With support from a Modeshift ATA Coordinator and school staff, the ATA teams will research and develop behaviour change campaigns, focusing on active travel and road safety. Contact: **admin@modeshift.org.uk**.



Case Study

Great Baddow High School in Chelmsford took part in the Active Travel Ambassador scheme (developed by Modeshfit), with students exploring innovative ways to promote active travel to school. The student ambassadors pitched one of their ideas – the 'Golden Bike Lock' scheme – to a group of industry specialists. Impressed by the potential for the idea, the ambassadors were awarded funds to help implement it.

Each day, a bike or scooter in one of the school's bike sheds is double locked with a 'Golden Bike Lock' (a standard lock, spray-painted gold). At the end of the day, whoever finds the lock on their bike or scooter, goes to a member of staff who unlocks it and the student picks a reward token (at random) from the school's reward bag. Rewards range from a week-long 'skip the queue' lunch pass to a small monetary addition to the child's dinner card.

The scheme was announced by the Active Travel Ambassadors in assembly to great enthusiasm, with the students running out to check if their bike or scooter had been chosen! It has had a positive impact in helping to encourage and sustain children's interest in choosing sustainable travel methods to and from school.



4. In School and the Classroom

There are many small changes which can be made in school and the classroom. Over time, these will make a big difference to the overall impact we have on the climate.



Teaching and Learning Resources

The **Curriculum and Assessment Review** (Department for Education, November 2025) made a number of recommendations to the government, which, in its **response**, stated that: '[the government] will take the opportunity to enhance the climate education content which is already present in the national curriculum, in the subjects of geography, science and citizenship. We will also include sustainability within the design and technology (D&T) programme of study and sustainable practices within the citizenship primary curriculum'.[13] As such, it is important to be alert to both the current requirements, as well as the potential for strengthened climate change and sustainability teaching in the curriculum, in the future.

Previous **government ambitions** to deliver a 'world-leading climate change education through a model science curriculum' – including the introduction of a natural history GCSE – **were reiterated in 2025**, with the date of introduction to be confirmed. This new GCSE, together with the national curriculum changes, will mean that climate change and environment related teaching resources will become increasingly relevant.

There is a wealth of **resources available to support teaching** in relation to climate change across a number of subjects including geography, mathematics, science and food technology. Educational and environmental charities are increasingly producing resources linked to the national curriculum.

Case Study

Plastic Clever Schools has worked with schools across Essex, including Lift Westerings in Hockley, as part of the 2024 International Day of Action. Lift Westerings was a Beacon School for the event, taking part in sessions run by the Plastic Clever Schools team, organising litter-picking activities, and demonstrating their artistic skills in a creative challenge, for which they received an award. The Eco Club also met virtually with students in Barbados, sharing their actions and inspiration across continents. In 2025, Lift Westerings was awarded the **Plastic Clever Schools Action Fund** to continue its work further, launching an initiative to make reusable water bottles accessible to every student. The school used the grant to stock bottles in their NutMarket (school shop), where students can 'buy' them with their school currency – turning sustainability into a student-led solution that works for everyone.

Resources are diverse and cover topics such as plastics, healthy seas, the natural world, food production and consumption, energy conservation, waste management and carbon emissions. A list of teaching and learning resources is included on **page 82** of this pack. Below are a few examples you may wish to use in your school:

- **Plastic Clever Schools** empowers children and young people to take practical action on plastics while building climate and ocean literacy. It provides educators and students with free curriculum-aligned **resources**, professional development, and student-led action toolkits to help schools become Plastic Clever Schools, enabling them to drive local change and contribute to global sustainability goals. Plastic Clever Schools is an endorsed United Nations Ocean Decade Project, and their resources have received a 'Quality Climate Education' Mark from the Royal Meteorological Society. The organisation also offers an award of up to £500 to take action on plastic waste via its **Plastic Clever Schools Action Fund**.

- **Essex Outdoors** (ECC) provides outdoor learning at its four centres across the county – with the aim of delivering an inspiring educational experience beyond the classroom. With offerings available to both primary and secondary schools, including forest schools, day trips and residential trips, Essex Outdoors emphasises the importance of learning through outdoor activity.
- **The Essex Wildlife Trust** offers schools, colleges and nurseries opportunities to visit its education facilities (with ten sites across Essex).
- **Food for Life** provides **information and resources** about food sustainability, farming, climate and nature. It also runs the **Food for Life Schools Award**, which provides a framework to teach children about food and where it comes from, aiming to enhance leadership, build community and transform dining environment.
- **Kids Against Plastic** – Action Academy is a free online youth empowerment course, which offers free skills training for young people focused on public speaking, video making, and writing for a purpose. It aims to help young people to develop key skills for changemaking, but also for their future careers.
- **Learning Outside the Classroom Providers** includes a list of organisations and sites which can support teaching and learning outside of the classroom, including in relation to the environment and sustainability.
- **The Ministry of Eco Education** provides free support for schools to embed sustainability across their existing curriculum. It gathers free resources and opportunities from hundreds of organisations across the education and sustainability space, developing them into a series of lessons aligned to the national curriculum.
- The **National Education Nature Park** has lots of resources to build climate action and sustainability into a number of curriculum areas and support the development of 'Green' and 'Essential' Skills for employability. Its **Green Skills Framework** in particular has clear links to the National Curriculum.







- **Schools' Sustainability Kits Competition (Essex County Council)** – In January 2026, Essex County Council launched a competition for schools to win a Schools' Sustainability Kit in the **Carbon Cutting Essex app**. Users of the app are able to donate the points which they are awarded on the app to help any school registered within the app to win a Schools' Sustainability Kit. These kits are full of educational items including, books, litter pickers and gardening kits, to help young people learn more about how they can help the local environment.

Extra-curricular Enrichment

There are many benefits to children taking part in extra-curricular activities, ranging from building a sense of school community and developing new skills, to enhancing learning. The **Government response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review** (November 2025), recognises the value of extra-curricular participation, stating:

'… the national curriculum is not the entirety of a school's curriculum, nor their whole offer to pupils. Evidence shows that extra-curricular enrichment participation is associated with higher educational achievement and positive outcomes in adulthood'.[14]

The Government has also included a commitment to 'set out a new core enrichment offer that every school and college, in every community, should aim to provide for all children – beyond the statutory curriculum… at a minimum, every school should deliver an enrichment offer which provides access to civic engagement; arts and culture; **nature, outdoor and adventure**; sport and physical activities; and developing wider life skills'.[15]

'Nature, outdoor and adventure' is one of the new five new benchmark categories and includes 'time outdoors, climate education and sustainability projects, gardening, residentials and camps'.[16]



Notably, 'as set out in Ofsted's new inspection framework, pupils' access to opportunities that broaden their experiences and enable them to develop their talents and interests, is considered under personal development. **When Ofsted updates its inspection toolkits… it will take account of the new enrichment benchmarks'.[17]**

Essex Teaching Awards

The annual **Essex Teaching Awards** provide an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the work of teachers and school staff across Essex.

Amongst the categories is the Climate and Sustainability Award, for Essex schools which demonstrate **'outstanding commitment to environmental sustainability and climate education'**. The award recognises 'initiatives that inspire learners and staff to take meaningful action towards a greener future, embedding sustainability into everyday practice and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility'.

You can find out more about the award – including nominations and key deadlines – on the Essex Teaching Awards **website** or email **teaching.awards@essex.gov.uk**.

ClimACTivist Student Award Programme

The ClimACTivist Student Award Programme is an Essex-wide initiative designed to support secondary school students in taking practical, meaningful action for the environment within their school and local community. Through a structured set of hands on sustainability activities across four pillars:

1. Outdoor Improvements
2. Physical Health & Wellbeing
3. Healthier Indoors
4. Learning

Students select and complete activities, record their progress, and receive recognition for their achievements. By completing activities in all four pillars, students can develop valuable skills, grow their confidence and leadership, and work towards **Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum awards**. The flexible design allows schools to tailor activities to their students and local context.

Schools will receive a resource pack, designed with and tested by schools, which includes practical tools, templates and guidance such as a teacher guidebook, an activity menu, and a student logbook. This is intended to help your school implement the programme easily and flexibly and can be adapted to suit your needs. The programme can be run through an existing eco or sustainability club or used to help establish one.

The programme is delivered in partnership with the University of East London, Essex Wildlife Trust, and is supported by Healthy Schools, Essex Outdoors, the Let's Go Zero Campaign, the National Education Nature Park, and ESCAN.

The scheme will be open to **all Essex secondary schools from September 2026**.

If your school would like to get involved or find out more, please email: **environment@essex.gov.uk**.

Case Study

The Wilderness Foundation is a charity which has its primary site in Britain based in Essex. The organisation offers nature-based outreach programmes and nature therapy camps, along with wilderness trails which enable adults and young people to explore unspoilt wild places. The Wilderness Foundation's CEO, Jo Roberts, is a member of the Essex Climate Action Commission.

Essex Libraries

Don't forget:

Essex Libraries offer access to more than one million books that you can borrow instead of buying; an easy and impactful way to help reduce your school's carbon footprint. Our collections include a wide range of age-appropriate fiction and nonfiction on climate change, sustainability, and protecting the environment, available both in our libraries and through our online library.

School staff can also sign up for **Teacher Membership**, giving you the freedom to borrow up to 25 books for 12 weeks, free from fees and fines. Most of our libraries can host **class visits**, helping pupils discover the joy of reading, learn about environmental topics, and sign up for their own library membership. Essex Libraries are here to support your school's learning, enrichment, and climate education while helping you make greener choices.

Teachers and students can also access eBooks and audiobooks from **BorrowBox**. They often feature 'green' categories', including those from the '**Love Essex, Go Green, Get Reading!**' list.



Green Careers: Preparing Young People in Essex for a Changing World

As Essex transitions toward a **sustainable, climate resilient and technology driven economy**, the world of work is changing rapidly. Today's pupils will enter a jobs market shaped by **clean growth, digital innovation, advanced technologies (including AI), and sustainability across every sector.**

Green careers are no longer limited to jobs "in nature". They now include a wide range of roles that help reduce carbon emissions, protect the environment, or support the UK's climate and energy transition. This includes emerging opportunities in digital, energy, engineering, construction, transport, agriculture, finance, and public services — all critical for Essex's future workforce.

Why Green Careers Matter in Essex

- It is expected that clean energy industries will be supporting **860,000 jobs across the UK** by 2030 (up from around 440,000 jobs in 2023).[18]
- The East of England is expected to see a high demand for 'direct clean energy jobs' of **approximately 55,000-60,000**.[19]
- Of the nearly 840,000 homes in Essex, **over 489,000 need to be made more energy efficient** — requiring thousands of skilled retrofitters, surveyors, heat pump engineers, insulation installers, project managers and digital technicians.[20]

It is expected that clean energy industries will be supporting

860,000

jobs across the UK by 2030

- Robotics and data skills are increasingly used to support climate solutions — from energy system modelling to agricultural optimisation and biodiversity monitoring.
- Local employers are already looking for workers with **green skills**, including carbon literacy, systems thinking, digital problem solving and technical sustainability knowledge.
- The largest projections of additional employment between 2025 and 2030 are for the Creative Industries, Digital and Technologies, Housebuilding, and Clean Energy Industries sectors… Employment between 2025 and 2030 is projected to need to increase the fastest in Clean Energy Industries (77%) and Housebuilding (42%).[21]

Green careers offer young people **stable employment, purpose driven work, competitive salaries and national skills shortages**, meaning high demand for decades to come.

What Are Green Skills?

Green skills include the knowledge, values and abilities needed to support the UK's transition to:

- **Net zero emissions**
- **Sustainable construction and buildings**
- **Clean growth and low carbon technologies**
- **Climate resilience (flood, water, nature recovery)**
- **Circular economy (reuse, repair, resource efficiency)**
- **Digital and AI-enabled environmental solutions**

Examples of green skills young people can develop in school:

- **Problem solving and critical thinking**
- **Creativity**
- **Digital literacy, coding and data analysis**
- **Understanding energy use and carbon footprints**
- **Knowledge of biodiversity, ecosystems, climate science**
- **Hands on skills (gardening, repair, design, prototyping)**
- **Teamwork, communication and leadership**

Examples of Future Green Jobs Relevant to Essex Pupils

Clean Energy & Engineering

- Solar and battery installation technicians
- Offshore wind engineers (particularly relevant to East Anglia)
- Electric vehicle (EV) and charging infrastructure technicians
- Heat pump engineers
- Hydrogen production/transportation specialists (emerging)
- Retrofit coordinators (PAS 2035/2038)
- Building surveyors specialising in energy efficiency
- Low carbon heating installers
- Insulation and ventilation specialists
- Digital construction technicians (BIM, scanning, modelling)

Construction & Retrofit (Growth Priority in Essex)

- Environmental monitoring specialists (using sensors, drones, GIS)
- Cybersecurity specialists for smart energy and transport systems
- Software developers working on climate solutions

Environment & Land Management

- Biodiversity officers
- Urban greening and landscape designers
- Agricultural technicians (using robotics, drones, precision tech)
- Water resource specialists (critical in water stressed Essex)

Curiosity Connections has information on Green Jobs in their **Inspire Green Futures** resources. This includes 48 role models in 12 green job 'families' and lesson resources for teachers.

Transport & Future Mobility

- EV maintenance engineers
- Public transport operations and planning

Digital, AI and Technology for Sustainability

- Data analysts and modellers
- AI and robotics technicians
- Active travel and urban design specialists
- Logistics planners using low carbon technologies

Circular Economy & Business

- Repair/refurbishment specialists
- Sustainable procurement officers
- Waste reduction and resource management roles
- Carbon accounting specialists

Policy, Education and Community Roles

- Sustainability leads
- Environmental educators
- Community climate officers
- Green finance and ESG roles in banking/ insurances

How Schools and Teachers Can Support Green Career Pathways

1. Embed green skills across the curriculum

Teachers can integrate sustainability, net zero and digital skills into:

- **Science:** energy systems, ecosystems, materials
- **Maths:** modelling, data, emissions calculation
- **English:** persuasive writing, future careers
- **Design & Tech (DT):** low carbon design, repair, prototyping
- **Geography:** climate impacts, global systems
- **PSHE/Careers:** pathways and labour market insights

2. Introduce students to local training, jobs and real employers

Schools can use:

- **Essex Green Skills Hub** – pathways into green industries
- **Essex Opportunities Portal** – local jobs, training, apprenticeships
- **Great Start Essex** – ECC's team supporting careers and skills in schools
  Contact: **GreatStart@essex.gov.uk**

The Essex Growth Agency team can support with:

- CPD for teaching staff
- Employer visits
- Workshops or assemblies
- Green careers events and fairs

3. Highlight routes into green careers

There are multiple pathways:

- **T Levels** (e.g., construction, digital, engineering, agriculture, environmental)
- **Apprenticeships** (retrofit, energy, transport, engineering)
- **A levels or vocational qualifications** in science, geography, digital, engineering
- **University degrees** in sustainability, environment, AI, engineering and more
- **Short courses and micro credentials** (e.g. Carbon Literacy)

4. Provide role models and real stories

Useful sources include:

- **This is Engineering** – young engineers doing climate and tech roles
- **Faces of Wind Energy** – insights into East of England wind careers
- **National Careers Service** – Green Careers
- Local case studies through **Essex Opportunities** & ECC partners

For Parents and Carers

Parents can support children by:

- Discussing how careers are changing due to climate and technology
- Encouraging curiosity in nature, engineering, technology or design
- Exploring local employer open days
- Using the Essex Green Skills Hub to look at future pathways
- Talking about sustainability at home (energy, travel, waste)

For Pupils and Students

You don't need to know your future career yet — but you can start exploring what interests you:

- Do you enjoy problem solving?
- Do you like nature and the outdoors?
- Are you curious about technology or robotics?
- Do you enjoy building, fixing or designing things?
- Do you care about the environment or helping others?

Green careers come in all shapes and sizes. Whether you're practical, creative, technical or academic, there is a role for you in the future net zero workforce.

Green careers are **highgrowth, futureproof and meaningful** — providing young people with stability and purpose.



Young people in Essex today will help shape:

- The way we power our homes
- The food we eat
- The technology we rely on
- The cities we live in
- The natural world we protect

Local and National Resources for Schools

- **Department for Education's Education Hub – Green Jobs Explained**
- **Essex Green Skills Hub** – pathways for young people and adults
- **Essex Schools Climate Action Network (ESCAN)**
- **Essex Opportunities** – apprenticeships, jobs, courses
- **Essex Year of Opportunity website** – join a young person (Roxie) as she explores various potential career paths and learns about the essential skills required, including for 'green jobs' (such as in renewable energy)
- **National Careers Service** – **Green Careers**
- **Great Start Essex (ECC)** – green careers & CPD – **GreatStart@essex.gov.uk**

Waste Prevention and the Circular Economy

Waste prevention, reuse, and recycling can help tackle climate change by making better use of **natural resources**, saving **energy** and ultimately **reducing greenhouse gas emissions.**

The waste hierarchy rates waste management by what is best for the environment. There are a number of ways your school can use the waste hierarchy to reduce its waste:

Prevention:

- Consider waste prevention and the steps which can be taken to **stop waste being produced in the first place.**
- Lots of schools now have branded water bottles with their school logo on – this will encourage sustainable use of materials.
- You could also think about **composting, promoting litterless lunches, eliminating bottled water or becoming paper free.**
- Provide **different types of bins for different waste** in the classroom and educate students about which rubbish goes where if it cannot be prevented.
- Speak to suppliers to see if regularly delivered items can be provided with less packaging.
- Include plastic-free requirements in agreements with contractors.
- Visit the **Keep Britain Tidy** website for ideas and activities to reduce waste.
- Help your school subscribe to the circular economy, which emphasises reuse to minimise waste. Essex County Council was the lead partner in **The BLUEPRINT Project**, which offers **free resources** on the circular economy and examples of activities carried out by schools in England.
- **Love Essex** offers waste prevention advice, including information about cloth nappies, food waste, home composting, reusable period products, single-use plastics and more.

Could you consider setting up your own student-led **Eco Refill shop**? More than 50 shops have been supported by the Essex Year of Opportunity. Email **essex.yearofopportunity@essex.gov.uk** to register your interest.



Reuse:

- **School uniforms:**
  - For school uniforms (if applicable), avoid uniforms imported from far afield. You might also wish to consider ways you can **reuse and recycle school uniforms**.
  - Could a second-hand uniform shop work at your school? This could be run by volunteers at home time, with proceeds being reinvested – perhaps into climate change initiatives. A number of schools host second hand uniform shops via the PTA.
  - Second-hand school uniform shops can often raise funds, which can be reinvested into the school, donated or ring-fenced for certain causes (such as sustainability initiatives or student wellbeing funds).
  - Consider your school's online presence: a number of second-hand school uniform shops and swaps are organised via social media pages.

Case Study

Great Baddow High School in Chelmsford hosts a **Pre-Loved Uniform Shop**. The school works with an online company (**Uniformd**), which hosts the shop and manages all of the ordering and payments. The school checks the quality of all items before putting them on the site and charges about a quarter of the retail price.

In almost three years, Great Baddow High School has (after website commission/charges) made several thousand pounds for its student wellbeing fund and saved thousands of clothing items from being thrown away.

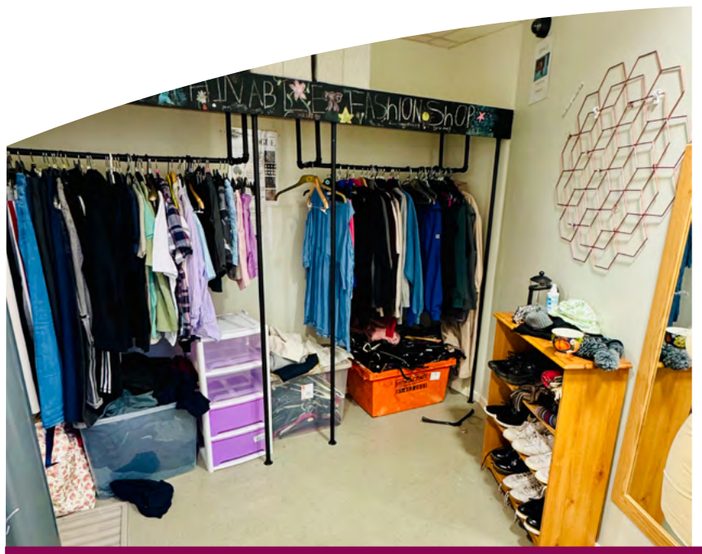
Case Study

The King Edmund School in Rochford hosts an on-site shop called the '**King Edmund Pre-Loved Shop**'. All proceeds raised from the sale of uniforms are given to local food bank charities.

- You could also consider collection services for donating used uniforms to. A number of these services will also pay for used uniforms. You may wish to consider collections services such as: **LMB**, **Bag2School** or **Essex Textiles**.
- **Free School Uniforms** helps to provide school uniforms to children. It is open to everyone across Essex.
- **Love Essex** has compiled a list of second-hand school uniform banks across Essex, which offer free or low-cost items of uniform.
- **Uniformd** offers low-cost or free second-hand school uniforms. It has a search function which allows users to search for uniforms by school.
- **Uniformerly** is an award-winning online school uniform marketplace for schools, PTAs and parents to sell or donate items of school uniform.

Case Study

Some schools, such as The King John School in Benfleet, have social media pages where items of school uniform can be swapped, sold or given away for free. Could an online presence – such as Facebook group – help your recycling and reuse efforts, whilst saving parents money?





Case Study

Chelmsford College students launched an innovative sustainable fashion shop that promotes environmental responsibility while developing valuable enterprise skills. The initiative encourages students and staff to donate unwanted clothes and accessories, which are then sorted, upcycled, and re-gifted for free to learners as part of a circular economy model. Through hands on experience, students explore sustainable fashion principles, learning how to repair, restyle, and creatively repurpose garments to extend their lifespan and reduce waste.

The project provides real world retail experience, from stock management and visual merchandising, to customer service and pricing strategy. Students take ownership of the shop's operations, collaborating across courses such as art, business, and vocational programmes. The shop has quickly become a vibrant hub on campus, raising awareness of ethical consumption and inspiring peers to make more sustainable choices. By combining creativity, entrepreneurship, and environmental action, the project empowers learners to drive meaningful change in the fashion industry.

Recycling:

- Speak to your local council or waste collection contractor to see what services they can provide to enable your school to recycle more effectively.
- Read the advice from **Love Essex** on reducing waste in schools, which includes resources on reuse and repair, recycling, and food waste reduction.
- Litter picking – both within schools and in the community (please see **page 76** for more information).
- Consider opportunities to hold school talks/assemblies with external speakers.
- Consider ways to upcycle and recycle no longer in use or unused classroom equipment and to reduce waste. For example, could classroom, tables and other equipment which are being replaced be donated to charity?
- Become a **Terracycle** collection point for recycling.
- Set up a battery collection box at your school with **BatteryBack**.
- Sign up to **Return A Toner** or **The Ink Bin** to recycle your empty printer cartridges.
- Find recycling ideas and posters by visiting **Recycle Now Schools**.
- All schools are now expected to have a **Climate Action Plan** in place (please see **page 10** for more information). Consider how these waste prevention and reduction ideas could help your school reach its climate objectives
- Plastic Clever Schools offers an award of up to £500 to take action on plastic waste via its **Plastic Clever Schools Action Fund**.





Food Waste

Food waste is a problem across many parts of our society, causing a significant financial and environmental cost to the UK.

Schools can play an important role in reducing food waste, as well as potentially being recipients of food donations to help prevent food from being wasted. WRAP (a climate action NGO) estimates that **total food waste arising in the UK is 10.2 million tonnes** (based on data for 2021 and 2022). [22]

Your school may wish to consider:

- **Building a relationship with local supermarkets** to access food which would otherwise go to waste. Many supermarkets have community engagement teams which work to make sure food that cannot be sold before its expiration date is donated to good causes. For example, Aldi has partnered with Neighbourly **to donate surplus food to local organisations**, including food for school clubs.
- Buying from and/or **working with local businesses and food suppliers**. This has the potential to reduce carbon emissions from long haulage journeys and refrigerated storage. It may also provide opportunities for children to learn about the journey of food from harvest and production to reaching their plate. Sustainability and nutrition are an important aspect of broader climate and wellbeing knowledge.
- With **Simpler Recycling regulations** now in place, schools have a duty to ensure that food waste is **collected separately** from recycling and general waste. Getting food waste out of the general rubbish ensures it can be recycled. It will also help save your school money by reducing the number of general waste collections needed. It is worth speaking to your waste contractor/collector about the options available.
- Undertake a **food waste audit** to see what is being wasted and to raise awareness throughout school (students and staff). This could be part of a whole school waste audit, including waste produced in classes, school lunches and school events. See **Busy Bins** and the **World Wildlife Fund** for guidance on conducting waste audits, as well as broader advice from **Love Essex** on waste management in schools.

Food and Food Production Education

We know it is important to eat a balanced diet, but how sustainable is our food?

How we produce our food and manage our school meals present opportunities to improve environmental impact and carbon emissions in supply chains, as well as to consider the health implications of what we eat.

One activity that could be undertaken in class is research into the sustainability of some of the meals which feature in the school canteen.

Resources and activities you may wish to consider include:

- **Annual Essex Schools Food & Farming Day** – Organised by the Essex Agricultural Society for school children aged 8-11 to find out first-hand how their food is produced, the role of farmers and about jobs in the industry.
- **Barleylands Schools** – Offers school visits aligned to the national curriculum. Primarily focused on food, farming and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) delivery, with tailored visits to meet other subject needs, such as History and English, also available. Its guided tour emphasises outdoor learning and interaction with animals.
- **Data Education in Schools** – Lesson plans, presentations and other teaching resources (with links to the curriculum) in relation to food and food sustainability.
- **Food – A Fact of Life** – Collates teaching and learning resources in relation to sustainable, healthy food.
- Food Production Calculators (environmental and carbon impacts etc.)
  - BBC – **Climate Change Food Calculator**
  - **Food Miles Calculator** – A tool which helps to calculate how far food has travelled before it reaches the consumer.
  - **My Emissions** – Provides a free food carbon footprint calculator.
- **Go Compare** – Energy Cost Calculator (comparative costs for different appliances).
- **School Food Matters** – Offers advice, resources and fully funded food education programmes to schools.
- **TastEd** - A sensory food education programme for primary schools to support children to enjoy their fruits and vegetables.
- **The Country Trust** – Offers school trips to local farms and resources for primary aged children to understand the food cycle. The Country Trust works primarily with disadvantaged children. You can find out more about their criteria here.
- **Tesco Stronger Starts** – Provides grants of up to £1,500 to charities and community organisations (including schools), with priority given to projects that provide food and support to young people. This includes, but is not limited to: breakfast clubs; to buy equipment for outdoor or indoor activities; support for school clubs; and developing food growing areas in schools.

Climate-friendly Meals

Thinking about the types of food we eat and where they come from is an important means to tackle climate change.

Simple steps, such as increasing vegetarian and locally sourced options, which have a lower carbon footprint, will reduce the climate impact of your diet. Choosing local, smaller-scale producers makes a big difference on how the land is treated and maintained. Their impact on the environment is far less than that of larger scale, international food supply chains. As well as supporting your health and local economy, you might get to know local producers and get tips on how to prepare seasonal foods.

You may wish to consider resources such as **Food for Life's advice for caterers**. Food for Life offers a range of certifications, tools and training to help caterers adopt more sustainable and healthy food practices.

Some schools have introduced **'climate friendly' meal days**. These often include vegetarian/ plant-based options and meals sourced from local produce.

Case Study

Five schools in Essex (Mayflower Primary School, Harwich; St Osyth Primary School, St Osyth; Prettygate Primary School, Colchester; Millfields Primary School, Wivenhoe; Elmstead Primary School, Elmstead Market) have planted food forests in their school grounds. A food forest is an area of purposely designed edible woodland and typically contains a variety of indigenous trees, bushes and groundcover plants. Each of the food forests is approximately 100m² in size but a food forest can be anything from 5m² upwards. To create one costs approximately £15/m², plus £500 for design and set-up. The project was delivered by The East Anglia Permaculture Association and was funded by **NINEVEH Charitable Trust** and **Essex County Council**.

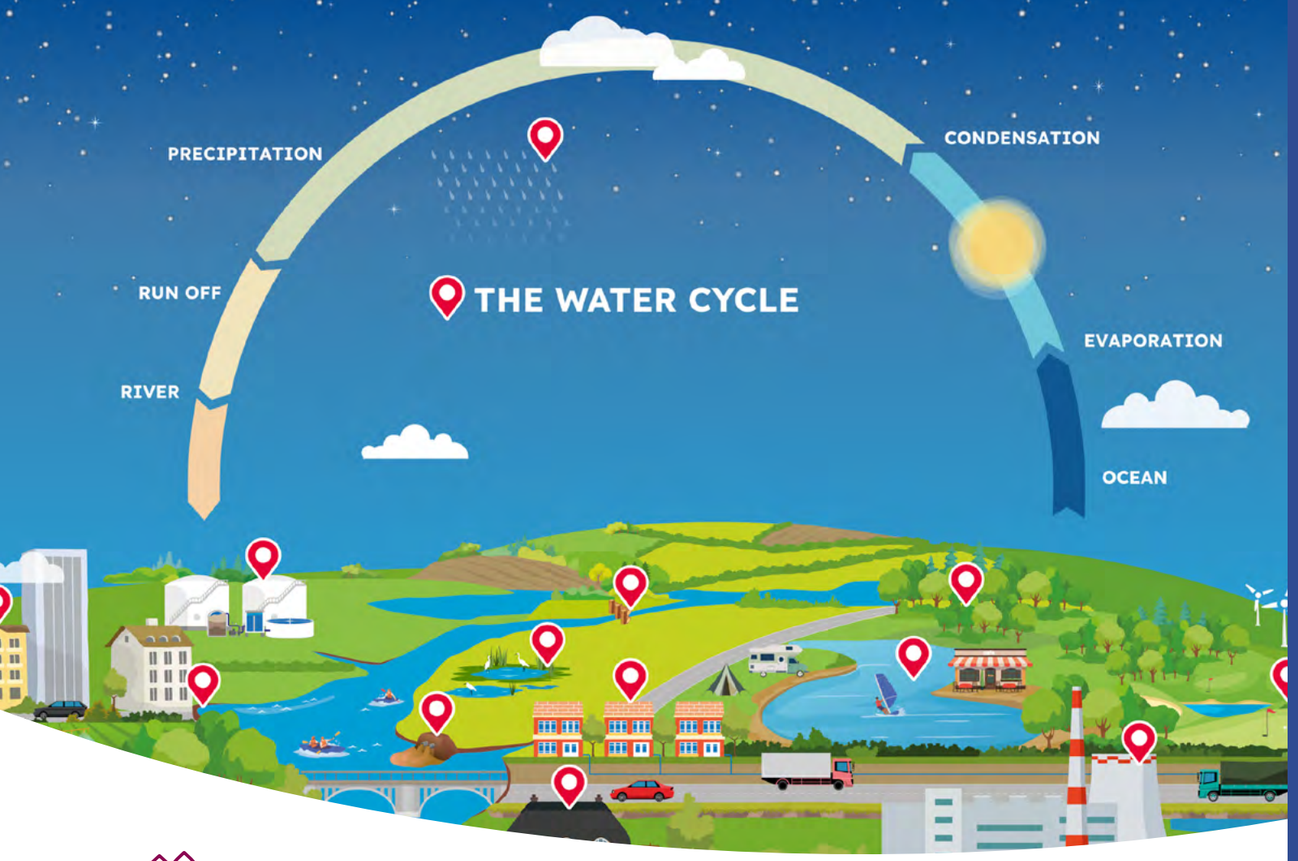
Case Study

The Essex School Meals Advisory Service (ESMAS) has been recognised by **ProVeg UK** with a Bronze Award for its menu. This achievement acknowledges the positive steps the Essex School Meals Advisory Service (ESMAS) is taking to make its menus healthier for children and the planet. By using these menus, schools are making a significant difference to reduce their carbon footprint, whilst providing healthy meals to children.

Whilst developing its menus, the ESMAS took into account:

- Aimed to reduce the amount of meat on the menus, including by adapting recipes to include pulses, vegetables or other alternatives.
- Reducing carbon footprint by:
  - Sourcing local food supplies
  - Using seasonal vegetables and fruit in recipes
  - Reducing the number of documents sent to schools
- Removed all single-use plastics from price lists, with alternatives available for purchase (such as Vegware, Bagasse plates/cups, paper straws and wooden cutlery). The ESMAS has also worked with suppliers which can assist with re-usable dessert pots.

Find out more about The Essex School Meals Advisory Service by completing this **form** or emailing **school.meals@essex.gov.uk**



Water

In March 2024, Essex County Council launched the **Water Strategy for Essex**, alongside the **Essex Water – Your Future online explorer tool**.

This free interactive tool was created in partnership with the Young Essex Assembly and includes videos explaining the water challenges in Essex and what we can all do to help save water.

All Essex based water supply companies also provide free teaching resources which explore the water cycle.

- Affinity Water – **Get Water Smart** (for schools and pupils). Includes water-saving curriculum resources and lesson toolkit.
- Anglian Water – **Schools' portal.** Includes **primary age resources; secondary age resources; online STEM lessons; school water audit resource; Sustainable Drainage System for Schools (SuDS) resource pack;** and a free **one hour virtual session for KS2 on the water cycle.**
- Essex & Suffolk Water – Working with schools **portal.** Includes water-related **curriculum links;** school **visits to water treatment sites;** and **speakers who can come to your school. The Ripple Effect** provides quizzes, worksheets, interactive games and assembly planning support.
- **Thames Water** – includes resources and online talks about the water cycle
- You can also find out more about the Essex water challenges using the interactive website **www.essexwateryourfuture.co.uk.**

Air Quality

Air quality both inside and outside of school can have a number of effects, including on pupils' health and attention levels.

- The **SAMHE** (Schools' Air quality Monitoring for Health and Education) research project investigated air quality in schools nationally and provided the technology and educational resources to **enable schools to understand their own indoor air quality.** While funding for the initial project has come to an end, there are still a number of valuable resources available, including:
  - **SAMHE's Teacher Resource Pack**
  - **Improving Air Quality in UK Schools Evidence**
  - **SAMHE Outputs** – Summaries of all reports and research papers related to the SAMHE project
- CoSchools – **Classroom High-Efficiency Particulate Air Filter (CHEPA) Calculator** – A free tool which enables schools to calculate how using a HEPA filter in a particular classroom would affect air quality and reduce energy use
- Transform Our World has developed a free **Clean Air for Schools Framework** resource. This is an online tool to help every school create a tailored clean air action plan to tackle air pollution in and around the school.
- **Essex Air** provides information about air quality across the county, including how pollution impacts our health and what to do about it, as well as readings from live air quality monitors. It also has a **School Zone** section on its website, which includes lesson plans for primary and secondary school age children.
- The Global Centre for Clean Air Research, University of Surrey, hosts resources and **guidance for schools** on how to mitigate children's exposure to traffic pollution in and around schools.
- It might not seem obvious, but **air quality is better walking alongside the road than it is in the car.** This is because air inside the car has passed through a lot to get to you, in a very small space, whereas outside, you are in the open air.



5. Procurement

Procurement is a significant element of a school's business operations. From school meals to energy and site maintenance, there are many considerations when it comes to procuring goods and services for schools, including sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

The Procurement Act 2023 (effective from 24th February 2025)

What's Changed?

The **Procurement Act 2023** replaced European Union rules which the UK previously subscribed to before leaving the EU. The Act is designed to help schools 'buy smarter', by taking into account the best overall value for pupils, the environment and the local community, rather than solely the lowest cost.

In short: **price still matters, but so does quality, sustainability and social impact.**

Key Changes Schools Need to Know

1. Best Value, Not Just Lowest Price

Procurement decisions now use Most Advantageous Tender (MAT), instead of focusing mainly on price.

This means schools can:

- Give weight to quality, environmental impact and social value
- Choose suppliers which support carbon reduction, fair practices and long-term value
- Move away from 'cheapest wins', if it is not the best outcome for the school

2. Sustainability Is a National Priority

The **National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS)** sets out what the government expects from public buying.

For schools, this means:

- Sustainability and climate action are now core expectations
- Procurement should support net zero, resilience and responsible spending
- Buying decisions can directly support local and national climate goals

3. More Flexible Ways to Buy

New procurement routes — including the **Competitive Flexible Procedure** — give schools more freedom.

This allows schools to:

- Shape procurements around their specific needs
- Build in environmental and energy requirements from the start
- Consider sustainability across the whole lifecycle, not just upfront cost

4. Greater Transparency

For contracts of **£30,000 and above**, schools must publish more information.

This helps to:

- Improve accountability
- Make spending more transparent
- Supports better reporting on sustainability and climate impact

Helpful Tools and Support for Schools

- **Transforming Public Procurement (TPP) training**
- The Department for Education's '**Buying for Schools**' guidance (updated October 2025) offers:
  - **Free e-learning** on the Procurement Act and best practice
  - **Approved frameworks** (with sustainability and circular economy principles embedded) for:
    - Catering
    - Energy and utilities
    - Leasing and facilities
    - LED lighting

Construction Framework 2025 (CF25): What It Means for School Buildings

The new **Department for Education Construction Framework 2025** **(CF25)** puts sustainability at the heart of school design. Schools can access the CF25 for construction and refurbishment projects by contacting the Department for Education (DfE) directly to gain access, as it is a closed, pre-qualified framework for public bodies, including academies and local authorities. It runs for six years from 2026.

What schools can expect:

- **New schools must be net zero in operation**
  - Lower carbon emissions
  - Lower energy bills over time
- **Limits on embodied carbon**
  - Encourages sustainable materials and construction methods
- **Designed for climate resilience**[23]
  - Better protection from overheating and flooding
  - Increased solar power
  - More green space
- **High-performance standards encouraged**
  - Better air quality and thermal comfort
  - **Passivhaus**-style buildings
  - Very low energy use
- **Better learning environments**
  - Green spaces that support wellbeing, focus and attainment
  - Natural daylight
  - Views of nature

In simple terms: CF25 helps turn school buildings into healthy, low-cost, future-ready places to learn.

You can also find advice on how to develop school grounds in the guide, **'School grounds: Developing nature-filled outdoor spaces for all'.**





Training and Digital Support

- **Free training** for school leads, via the **Government Commercial College**
- **The Procurement Pathway digital tool** – helps schools to:
  - Run compliant procurements
  - Build in sustainability
  - Make confident, strategic decisions

At the end of this document (Annex One), you can find a table which includes a list of **actions your school can take when engaging with suppliers**, in order to help embed sustainability, alongside cost-effectiveness.

6. School Buildings: Energy Management, Retrofitting and Water Efficiency



Effective management of energy can play a vital role in reducing carbon emissions.

In addition, this can lead to other benefits such as cost-savings and future-proofing your premises through improved technology and/or infrastructure. You can read more about **good estate management for schools** on the Department for Education website, as well as **guidance for schools on energy efficiency.**

Education Estates Strategy (2026): A Decade of National Renewal

A ten-year **estates strategy from the Department for Education**, with the aim of facilitating 'a shift to more proactive management, long-term strategic maintenance and renewal that prioritises condition need, risk and resilience alongside delivering high-quality new buildings where they are needed'.[24] There is a commitment of 'investment in education capital of £38 billion for 2025-26 to 2029-30… This supports delivery from 2025-26 to 2029-30 with long-term funding confirmed through to 2034-35 for capital maintenance funding for schools and colleges and the School Rebuilding Programme'.[25] Almost £3 billion per year by 2034-35 'in capital maintenance and renewal to improve the condition of the school and college estate and providing Responsible Bodies with greater certainty on their future maintenance funding to support planning' is expected.[26]

There is a commitment of investment in education capital of **£38 billion for 2025-26 to 2029-30**

This is a significant strategy with supporting investment which will be central to the management of school buildings, helping to future-proof, save money and improve sustainability (including commitments to 'support solar and energy efficiency measures'[27] and to 'drive behaviour change needed to make our education estate more climate resilient'[28]).

As this is a multi-year programme, leaders in schools should check with the Department for Education what support may be available to them and identify key deadlines they are required to meet.

Conserving Energy and Electricity

Essex County Council's Facilities Management Team has visited more than 100 maintained schools to carry out detailed energy audits.

These audits support schools in identifying opportunities to reduce carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency across their sites. Capacity is now limited, but maintained schools are invited to register in case resources become available. Please email: **schoolenergyteam@essex.gov.uk**.

The team has expanded its support beyond maintained schools to all education settings by developing the **Energy Efficiency Guide** and **Energy Action Template** (which can be downloaded from the **Energy in Schools portal** on Essex Schools Infolink website).



The guide helps schools to improve energy efficiency, reduce costs, and support climate action through a simple five-step process for creating an energy action plan. Schools can select from pre-written actions, adapt them, or add their own, and priority actions identified can be built into the school's wider climate action plan.

The actions included serve as best-practice recommendations for reducing energy use, supported by real examples from schools. They cover key areas such as plant rooms and Building Management Systems (BMS), lighting, kitchens, windows, and building fabric. Reviewing these sections can help schools identify inefficiencies that may be easily overlooked during day-to-day operations.

Many of the actions included in the new Energy Efficiency Guide and Energy Action Template are low or zero cost.

Small operational changes can reduce energy use and carbon emissions, as well as lead to financial savings for schools. The examples that follow show how a few simple steps, many of which are already written into the guide for schools to use, can deliver noticeable results.

Case Study: Gas/Heating Fuel Savings



St Peter's Church of England Primary School in Coggeshall implemented a series of operational changes, including:

- Introducing a holiday programme to reduce energy use during school closures
- Removing an unnecessary Sunday hot water schedule – previously unnoticed due to lack of Building Management System review
- Adjusting boiler run times by delaying the start by one hour and bringing the end time forward by one hour

These actions **reduced the school's gas consumption by 40%, saving £1,909 over two winter months.**

These actions **reduced the school's gas consumption by**

40%

Case Study: Electricity Savings



Oakfield Primary School in Wickford made several targeted changes to reduce electricity use, including:

- Delaying the switch-on time for kitchen hot cupboards – previously switched on at 7:30am when staff arrived
- Reviewing refrigeration needs and removing three unnecessary units
- Introducing energy and window-management policies
- Applying a defrosting schedule, with one unit switched off for 10 weeks, reducing costs by 19%

These measures **reduced the school's electricity consumption by 24%, generating annual savings of £16,106.**

These actions **reduced the school's electricity consumption by**

24%



The **Count Your Carbon Calculator** is a free, specially designed tool which can help you to **understand your school's carbon footprint.** Designed for schools, colleges and nurseries, the tool takes into account the specificities of education establishments, which other carbon calculators do not. The calculator can help you to understand your carbon footprint, provide recommendations on **how you can reduce it** and ultimately, help to **save your school money** by improving efficiency and future-proofing your school site. You can watch a short explainer video about the Count Your Carbon calculator **here**.

Let's Go Zero also has a network of **Climate Action Advisors**, who can visit your school **for free** and support efforts to reduce energy use and your wider carbon footprint, as well as explore options to upgrade existing buildings.

Your school may wish to consider joining or working with larger energy projects, including some of the below:

- **Points4Planet** is a social enterprise organisation, which works with schools and local authorities to help reduce their carbon emissions. An innovative meter system allows schools to monitor their energy usage and to make effective decisions to reduce their carbon footprints. Points4Planet aims to engage with as many schools as it can and to encourage young people to be 'agents of change'.
- **Community Energy** – there has been a significant number of schools and community energy groups working together across the UK to commission renewable energy installations. Since 2021, many community energy groups have been established in Essex and these local groups are keen to help schools install solar panels, reduce their energy bills and assist them on their sustainability journey. Please contact **lowcarbon@essex.gov.uk** for further information.

Energy Procurement Guidance

The Facilities Management Team has launched a page that provides **guidance to support schools when renewing their energy contracts**. The guidance includes information on using brokers and understanding the different routes available when renewing energy contracts. It also explains the **Department for Education's (DfE) Energy for Schools service**, which is procured through Crown Commercial Service. The page sets out how schools can access free support through the DfE's **Get Help Buying for Schools** service, helping them understand their options and make informed decisions.

You can read more about procurement in schools on page 46.

Renewable Energy Projects

Solar Panels

Schools that are exploring ways to reduce their reliance on grid electricity may wish to consider the feasibility of installing solar panels (sometimes referred to as solar PV – photovoltaic).

Essex County Council has supported the installation of roof and ground mounted solar panels at 35 school sites, providing a combined installed capacity of 1,572 kW.



These systems help schools **reduce their reliance on grid electricity, lower carbon emissions** and **manage long-term energy costs.**

Information about renewable energy, including guidance for schools with existing solar PV systems, is available on the **Renewable Energy** page.

Key points to consider include:

- The condition and structural capacity of the roof
- The available space for equipment such as inverters
- Whether the school's electrical infrastructure can support a new system

Installers will usually advise on requirements such as fuse upgrades, consumer unit capacity and any permissions needed from the Distribution Network Operator.

Reviewing Energy Use Before Considering Solar Panels

Before investing in solar panels, schools should also review their current energy use. Reducing unnecessary consumption and improving controls will help ensure that any future system is correctly sized and delivers the greatest benefit.

Schools can access **free support** through the Department for Education's **Get Help Buying for Schools** service, which provides compliant procurement support for a wide range of goods and services. The service includes a dedicated **Energy category** with an option for **Education Decarbonisation**, which may be helpful for schools considering solar PV or wider low-carbon upgrades.

The service also offers support with energy procurement, bill validation and cost recovery, LED lighting, catering equipment, and other common school purchases. Schools in the early stages, or those seeking general advice before obtaining quotes, can request free initial support by completing the **online form**. A procurement specialist will respond and provide tailored guidance.

Any 'works' undertaken in community and voluntary controlled schools may require Essex County Council approval before they start. Guidance is available **here**. The first form will be LLC1, which requires project details, quotes and a site plan. Schools can contact **infrastructure.delivery@essex.gov.uk** if they need help completing the forms.

Case Study

Milldene Primary School in Tiptree installed a 49.92 kW solar PV system in December 2021 through the PSDS1 School PV programme. From installation to the end of 2025, **the panels generated 138,990 kWh of electricity, saving an estimated 32.8 tonnes of CO_2. Essex County Council estimates the energy generated is worth in the region of £15,000.**

Community Energy Groups

You may wish to consider joining a **community energy group**, where residents, schools and businesses can work together to commission renewable energy installations. Please see **page 54** for more information. We know that securing funding can be an obstacle to these more ambitious plans to tackle climate change. As a starting point, it is worth considering how solar and wind could be incorporated into new build structures at school, or during the refurbishment of existing buildings. Please see the **Essex Schools Infolink** website for more information.

Retrofitting

Retrofitting refers to the addition of new components, technology or features to a building, in order to reduce carbon emissions and increase efficiency. This may include the introduction of improved insulation or the fitting of new windows.

Essex County Council has supported a wide range of retrofit projects across maintained schools through successful Salix funding bids, mainly via the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. This includes heat decarbonisation works that are complete or planned in ten schools, alongside solar PV installations and window replacement programmes.

Works typically involve replacing end-of-life gas or oil plant with low-carbon alternatives such as air source heat pumps, supported by fabric improvements and energy efficiency measures. Across all Salix-funded applications, school and core projects combined are expected to **save an estimated 1,471.77 tonnes of CO_2 emissions every year**.

Schools seeking to progress retrofit works should refer to the Renewable Energy Projects subheading on **page 55**, which outlines the support available through the Department for Education's Get Help Buying for Schools service, including the **Education Decarbonisation** procurement route

The **Let's Go Zero** campaign, referenced on **pages 11** and **16**, also provides free support from Climate Action Advisors and can help schools identify and access funding opportunities.

Case Study

Kingswood Primary School and Nursery in Basildon completed a decarbonisation project supported by a successful Salix bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS3A). The project included installing solar panels, upgrading insulation and windows, replacing fluorescent lighting with LEDs and introducing air source heat pumps. The school fully disconnected from gas in December 2023.

In the first year post-project, the school purchased 136,434 kWh of electricity from the grid and used no gas. This compares with 503,063 kWh of combined gas and electricity use in the year before the project, representing a 73% reduction.

New builds and expansions of school buildings also offer opportunities to **embed new technology and good practice, which lead to a reduction in emissions.** There is extensive guidance for planning officers, agents and designers in the Essex Design Guide.

Since 2021, all new school buildings being commissioned by Essex County Council are designed to be net zero in operation, including three new primary schools that were opened for September 2024 (Limebrook Way Primary School; Beaulieu Park Primary School; and Chapel Hill Primary School). ECC will continue to commission only net zero schools, demonstrating a commitment to building for the future.



The water use reduction target is 9% from 2019/20 levels by 2038 and a reduction of 15% by 2050.

Water Efficiency

Essex is classified as a seriously water stressed area and could experience water shortages of nearly 150 million litres per day if we don't take action.

The Waterwise **UK Water Efficiency Strategy** explains that the largest water efficiency savings could be made in existing non-household organisations, including schools. Being water efficient means understanding water needs, using as little as possible and avoiding water waste.

Key steps schools can take to save water and improve water efficiency include:

- Conducting a water audit – consider **Anglian Water's School Water Audit Guide**
- Tackling leakage
- Installing smart meters
- Creating a water-saving culture in school (both amongst staff and students)
- Speak directly to your water retailer or supplier to find out how you can make your school more water efficient
- Look out for **new water efficiency labels**, which will feature on household goods, including toilets, sinks and dishwashers

An accredited **Water Literacy Programme** is now available to promote understanding of the environmental impact of water scarcity and the positive changes individuals can introduce to improve water efficiency in their own organisation.

The **National Framework for Water Resources** highlights the water use reduction target of **9% from 2019/20 levels by 2038** and a reduction of **15% by 2050.**

You can find out more about water management from the UK Government's **'Good estate management for schools'** and the Department for Education's **'Buying for Schools'.** Please also see Procurement section on **page 46**.

Within the government's **Plan for Water**, there is a target to reduce non-household (for example, schools') water use by 9% by 31st March 2038. There is also a commitment to work with **Ofwat** to ensure the water industry can play a central role in retrofitting water efficient products. The latest National Framework for Water Resources 2025 acknowledges that support is needed for non-household sectors to become more water efficient. This will include delivering water efficiency audits and advice, the roll out of smart meters.

You can use the **Water Saving Calculator** by Thames Water to find out how much you could save. And saving water can help save on energy bills too. Other tools, such as Waterwise's **Water Impact Widget**, can help you to understand your water usage and water efficiency.

Schools are also able to switch their water retailer and can use the Open Water website for further advice, ensure to ask retailers about their water efficiency support.

A leaky toilet can cost £200 per year

A leaky toilet can waste on average 215 litres of water per day, costing around £200 per year.[29]

Whilst leaks are cheap and easy to fix, check with your water retailer whether they can offer any help to identify and fix leaks

A small 3mm diameter stream from one running cold tap can waste 330,000 litres per year, which could mean an annual saving of £580.[31]

A 15-litre urinal flushed on a timing device every 10 minutes would use 800,000 litres.[30]

Reducing the amount of water we use is an immediate action we should all take to reduce pressure on our future water resources.



7. Outdoor Space

School Grounds

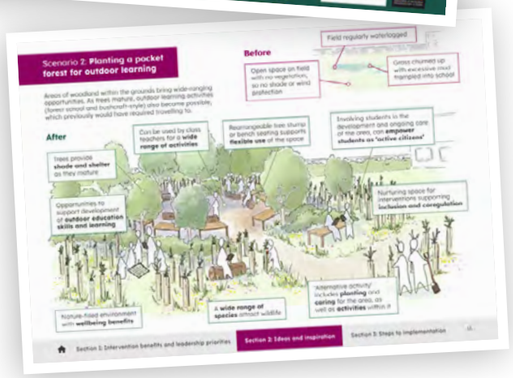
Developing your school grounds can offer a host of potential benefits: improving biodiversity; building climate resilience by reducing risks from flooding and overheating; and improving student wellbeing. But what steps can be taken?

Essex County Council has developed a guide, **School grounds: Developing nature-filled outdoor space for all**. The resource aims to support school leaders across Essex to explore the ways in which they can develop their school grounds into nature-filled spaces.



The guide is structured into three sections:

1. Intervention benefits – A brief overview linking the benefits of interventions to wider leadership priorities, particularly inclusion, wellbeing and personal development
2. Ideas and inspiration – A range of six practical scenarios to inspire and stimulate ideas. These include a pocket forest, nature area, food growing space and opportunities to turn 'grey to green'
3. Steps to implementation – An overview of advice, funding, and support to enable steps towards implementation



While the guide is aimed particularly at secondary school leaders, elements of its advice can be implemented across a variety of education settings. A standalone guide for primary schools will be published in 2026.

Funding for schools (between £500 – £2,000) is available from The Essex Local Nature Partnership's **LNP Community Fund**. This is a funding opportunity designed to empower communities to take action in Essex for nature. Projects eligible for funding may focus on:

- Linking habitats to improve ecological connectivity
- Enhancing biodiversity through habitat creation or restoration
- Improving access to green spaces for local communities
- Connecting people with nature, especially underrepresented or disadvantaged groups
- Protecting or improving existing valuable habitats
- Enhancing urban nature (e.g., green roofs, pocket parks, vertical gardens)
- Projects should seek to align with the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** (LNRS)

Trees

Trees play a vital role in capturing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it; providing 'green shielding' to prevent overheating; and improving biodiversity. They are a central component of outdoor spaces – and can be incorporated into playgrounds and other parts of school grounds – to help combat climate change. The next section of this pack provides ideas, signposting to resources and potential schemes your school could join in relation to tree planting and green spaces. **The Woodland Trust** offers **free trees for schools** and communities. You can also make enquiries about tree planting to the ECC team at **environment@essex.gov.uk**. You can find out more about tree management in Essex in the **Tree Management Plan and Tree Management Statements**.

You can find out more about organisations which offer free trees/ grant support to schools in the 'Funding Opportunities' section on **page 78**.



Case Study

Each year, Darlinghurst Academy in Leigh-on-Sea, works with the **Southend Forest Project** and **Trustlinks** to plant trees. This helps to improve biodiversity in school grounds, as well as reduce air pollutions and support science and outdoor learning opportunities.

These are community events, where parents, pupils and the wider community are invited to participate. **Hundreds of trees have been planted since 2023.**

Flood Risk and Water Management

Across Essex, around 200,000 properties in Essex at risk of flooding from surface water, rivers or the sea.[32]

Climate change is forecast to result in more frequent, heavier rainfall in winter. This will increase the frequency and severity of surface water flooding, particularly in urban areas.[33] More frequent storms will also increase coastal flooding risk. Therefore, local flooding is set to become more of a reality for those at risk, as our existing drains and watercourses will not always be able to cope. It is important that you know your school's flood risk and some of the simple steps you can take to help reduce this.

You can search by postcode to identify your flood risk with a tool from Essex County Council.

You can help to mitigate your flood risk through effective land use and green infrastructure solutions. Planting trees can reap many environmental rewards, not least reducing your flood risk through absorption of excess water. There are a number of schemes and resources available to support this, including advice for tree planting (see **page 61**).

The **guide for school grounds** (mentioned above) also incorporates considerations to strengthen green infrastructure and build climate resilience, for example by minimising flood risk.

Some initiatives you may wish to consider include:

- **Developing rain gardens** – a rain garden is a sunken area in the landscape that collects surface water and allows it to soak into the ground. Planted with grasses and flowering perennials, rain gardens can be a cost effective and attractive way to reduce surface water flooding issues and control runoff from your property. They generally only hold water during and after a rainfall event and are largely dry otherwise. See the latest **Weather Wise Gardens** guide for useful hints and tips.
- Water butts are a great way to manage water on school premises and can be used to store water for purposes such as watering school gardens. You can get a **discounted water butt** when buying in an Essex postcode.
- **Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)** – are an important means of managing water. These may include using permeable building materials; 'green roofs', whereby roofs have plants and other foliage incorporated into them to absorb rainwater; or SuDS planters, which capture water from roofs and funnel them down into planters.
  - **Understanding where water collects in your school** – it is worth working with site managers to understand where water pools after it rains, so you can identify where flood reduction measures would be of most value.



Case Study: Sustainable Drainage and Green Infrastructure in Essex Schools (2025/26)

Essex County Council's **Sustainable Drainage and Green Infrastructure in Schools** programme (2025/26) has helped to deliver climate resilient improvements across six school sites. The project has installed a diverse range of multifunctional and accessible Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and Green Infrastructure (GI) features designed to manage surface water, enhance biodiversity, and create engaging learning environments.

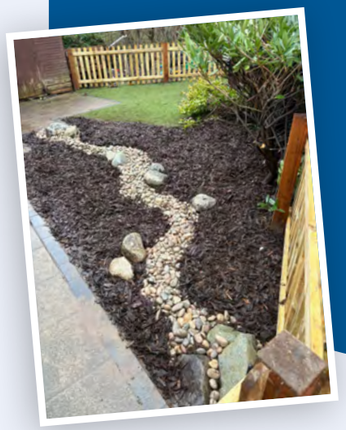
These interventions reduce on site flood risk while also providing significant wellbeing, educational, and environmental benefits for students, staff, and the wider school community.

Project Highlights



St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Braintree

A key feature at St Michael's is the newly constructed bioswale, which are vegetated shallow landscaped channels designed to manage stormwater runoff by slowing and filtering and infiltrating. With its carefully selected planting and enhanced storage capacity, the bioswale slows surface water flows, reduces local flood risk, and improves both water and air quality on the school grounds. It also serves as a visible teaching tool, helping children understand natural drainage processes.



Hilltop Infant and Junior School, Wickford

At Hilltop, multiple rain gardens, SuDS planters, and a bespoke living wall box (which is a vertical structure, partially or completely covered with vegetation) have been installed across the site. These features intercept and store rainfall close to where it lands, reducing runoff entering the sewer network. In addition to managing water more sustainably, the planting delivers environmental benefits such as improved air quality, increased biodiversity, and enhanced outdoor spaces for learning and play.

Has your school previously been flooded? Essex County Council would like to hear from you to explore possible support and funding opportunities. Please contact **floods@essex.gov.uk**.

Water shortages and water quality are also something we should be concerned about. **The Water Strategy for Essex** (2024) shows that the county will experience a shortage of 147.5 million litres of water every day by 2050, if nothing is done. This is a result of climate change, population growth and the need to leave water in our environment. Essex's water quality is also less than average when compared with the rest of the country, with only 5% of the county's streams meeting 'good' ecological status or near natural conditions. Find out more about the Essex water challenges using the interactive website, **Essex Water Your Future**.





National Education Nature Park

The National Education Nature Park offers children and young people the opportunity to take hands-on action to improve biodiversity and tackle climate change. It is a free scheme, which is open to nurseries, schools and colleges.

Led by the Natural History Museum and Royal Horticultural Society, the Department for Education funded scheme invites young people to improve their school site and support nature. This is achieved through mapping on-site outdoor spaces, recording biodiversity and developing actionable plans to improve biodiversity, such as building habitats, raingardens or ponds. Through this, pupils will have an opportunity to take part in community science, biodiversity monitoring and data analysis, learning important skills for the future.

Students will record their data on a national online map, which will document the progress the project is making to restore habitats and protect wildlife in England.

You can sign-up to join the National Education Nature Park here.

More information about the scheme (including an **explainer video**) is available from the **Natural History Museum**, **Royal Horticultural Society** and **Department for Education.** You can also visit the National Education Nature Park and Climate Action Awards **website** for further information.

The National Education Nature Park website also offers a library of curriculum-aligned teaching resources, which can be filtered by key stage, as well as a range of webinars and events throughout the year.

Funding: **limited grant funding** from the Department for Education is available to schools which meet certain criteria. A list of these schools, including those in Essex, can be found **here.**

The National Education Nature Park website also offers a library of **curriculum-aligned teaching resources,** which can be filtered by key stage.



School Gardens

Grow your own vegetables, plant trees and teach children about gardening.

According to the **Soil Association**, gardening in school brings benefits to everyone, improving health and wellbeing, better levels of attention in class, higher achievement and stronger links with the local community. There are lots of small and manageable steps you can take to develop school gardens, including:

Funding

- **Funding** for schools (between £500 – £2,000) is available from **The Essex Local Nature Partnership's LNP Community Fund**. All projects seeking funding must deliver meaningful environmental benefits.
- **The Ernest Cook Trust** – The Outdoor Essentials Grant offers grants of between £500 (for primary and special schools) and £1,000 (for secondary schools) to UK state-funded schools 'to remove barriers and enable pupils to connect to nature and learn outdoors'.
- **Learning through Landscapes** – An outdoor learning and play charity which offers free **outdoor lesson resources** and **Local School Nature Grants** to schools and early years settings. Grants of up to £500 are available, with schools able to pick items from an online product catalogue, ranging from den building kits and motion activated wildlife cameras, through to online learning courses for staff and seed kits.

- **National Lottery Community Fund**
  - **Climate Action Fund – Energy and Climate** (£500,000 – £1,500,000)
    This funding aims to inspire and support communities across the UK to address the energy and climate crisis. The projects being funding should show how communities can address climate change while tackling the energy challenges through community-led climate action. Schools can apply for this fund, providing that the project benefits and involves the wider local community.
  - **Climate Action Fund – Food Systems** (£2,500,000 – £7,000,000)
    Funding for projects that strengthen food systems and reduce food insecurity for people and communities. Schools can apply for this fund, but you must be part of a partnership, and the project must benefit and involve the wider local community.
  - **National Lottery Awards for All England** – Environment (£300 – £20,000)
    This fund supports community-led projects that improve the environment and help people to connect with and enjoy nature where they live. Projects must meet one of the following priorities:
    - Help people connect with and care for nature in their area
    - Make a positive difference to the environment
    Schools can apply for this fund, providing that the project benefits the wider local community.

You can find a full list of funding opportunities on page 78.



Case Study

St Osyth Church of England Primary School in Clacton has created a productive food forest where pupils grow apples, cherries, rhubarb and strawberries, sharing produce with the local community and using it to teach responsibility and sustainable eating.



Develop vegetable patches

Schools can make the most of fruit and vegetables grown on-site by incorporating them into food technology lessons, cooking clubs, tasting sessions and **wider curriculum activities**. This can help pupils to learn about nutrition, sustainability and food provenance. Many Essex schools are already doing this as part of wider environmental projects.



Case Study

Chigwell School has developed a Sustainability Garden, where pupils of all ages worked together with staff and each other to plant a variety of fruits, vegetables and herbs.

- You could contact local garden centres and supermarkets to see if they are willing to **donate seed packets.**
- Some businesses – such as B&Q – run schemes such as the **Community Re-Use Programme**, where organisations, such as schools, can apply to receive free items such as plant pots and trays and end of line stock.
- **Use school-grown fruit and vegetables in school meals.** This will also reduce the need to buy pre-packaged (often with plastic) salads.
- **Use fruit and vegetables in classes, clubs and other initiatives:**
  - **Food Technology:** Fresh produce can be used for recipe development and cooking assessments, reducing bought-in ingredients.
  - **Science Lessons:** Can be used for studying plant biology, soil health, decomposition, nutrition, food preservation, microbial growth, or climate impacts on crops or carbon footprint and pollinator studies.
  - **Enterprise and School Market Projects:** Pupils can sell surplus produce at a small weekly or seasonal stall – teaching budgeting, marketing, and enterprise skills.
  - **Tasting Sessions & Healthy Eating Workshops:** Let pupils try foods they may not have eaten before; ideal for KS1 sensory exploration or KS2/KS3 nutrition education. Or use produce for harvest festivals or open evenings.
  - **Composting Initiatives:** Any inedible parts can feed school compost systems – closing the loop and teaching waste reduction.

- **Is there an area on your school premises that could be repurposed to sow seeds for rewilding?** Not only does this provide children with an opportunity to interact with nature, but can also improve biodiversity on your school site. This offers a wealth of potential opportunities for exploring eco systems – such as bird and butterfly counts – which can often be linked to the curriculum or eco clubs.



As part of the BBC's **The Regenerators** and **The Green Planet**, you can learn **how to make seedballs** to attract birds and improve biodiversity in school grounds.

Case Study

Chelmsford College has transformed learning for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) through its imaginative Secret Garden restoration project. The once overgrown space has been brought back to life by learners themselves, who developed new skills while taking ownership of the garden's renewal. Working alongside staff, students cleared pathways, rebuilt planting areas, and designed features that encourage wildlife, helping them explore concepts of nature, biodiversity, and environmental responsibility in a hands on way.

At the heart of the garden is an outdoor classroom, providing a calm, sensory rich space where students can learn surrounded by nature. Newly built vegetable beds give learners the opportunity to grow produce from seed to harvest, supporting independence, teamwork, and practical life skills. The project has not only revitalised the garden but also inspired confidence, resilience, and pride among SEND learners, demonstrating the power of inclusive, experiential education.



Beekeeping – Education and Advice





- The **British Beekeepers Association** (BBA) offers support and advice on the steps necessary **for schools to keep bees on site**. The organisation also provides information on how schools can become more **bee friendly** and invites primary schools to become a **'Friend of the Honey Bee'**. The BBA's education resources include curriculum aligned **teaching materials** for key stages 1 and 2, as well as additional ideas for **integrating bees into the curriculum**. Schools which would like to arrange for a beekeeper to visit can contact their local branch using the details from the BBKA **'Find Beekeeping Near You'** map.

The bees most at risk are wild bees and providing a bee-friendly environment, such as pollinator friendly plants and bee nesting sites, is really important.







Case Study

Southend High School for Boys has been awarded '**Beacon School**' status by the British Beekeepers' Association. The accolade is awarded to schools which demonstrate sustained best practice in beekeeping and apiculture acting as Centres of Excellence in the provision of on-site school apiaries and bee clubs.

Students have achieved the national recognition – held by only a handful of schools – after managing hives on-site, developing their beekeeping skills and knowledge and even selling their own honey (with some of the money being made being donated to charity). As well as supporting biodiversity and pollinators, the presence of bees on-site has also influenced learning and development more broadly, including with frames being constructed in design and technology and classroom discussions about how to best manage the finances of the club.

One student said that the bee club helps to foster 'a connection with nature, a connection so vital yet seemingly consigned to the past. Climate change won't be solved by perfunctory reports, but by passionate individuals that have the determination to solve it, that can only be obtained through first-hand experiences with nature. Bee society doesn't just show us on a presentation why we need to save the planet, it demonstrates the insects that we need to protect – this connection and understanding is ultimately what will triumph in our battle to preserve Earth'.

- The Rural Community Council of Essex runs a **BEE Good competition**, which supports schools to grow their own food whilst creating bee-friendly habitats.

Case Study

Students at **Dedham Church of England Primary School** in Colchester have been caring for a bee garden, with flowers and plants to attract bees to the area. This is vital to support the wellbeing of wild bees as pollinators and key components of local biodiversity.

- Schools can also enhance biodiversity by **creating bug and insect hotels** using reclaimed materials.

Case Study

Initiatives in Essex, such as the **Rural Community Council of Essex's Community Bug Hotel Build with Messing Primary School in Colchester** show how this can be a hands-on way to bring pupils and the community together while supporting local ecosystems.

Case Study

Springfield Primary School in Chelmsford created '**Bug-ingham Palace**,' a bug hotel built with help from a grandparent, to their pond area for exploration.

Case Study

Prettygate School in Colchester has built a bug hotel, with students utilising a variety of different materials.



Case Study

Epping Primary School worked with Epping Leisure Centre contractors to **build a bug hotel from recycled construction site materials**, teaching pupils about biodiversity.

Useful guidance for building insect hotels can be found via the **Royal Horticultural Society's School Gardening Bug Hotel Guide** and the **Essex Wildlife Trust's Bug or Bee Hotel instructions.**

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) hosts the **School Gardening Awards** and has a number of resources available:

- **Setting up a school garden**
- **School gardening resources**
- **Encouraging wildlife into the school garden**
- Schools **can also sign up** **(for free)** to join the RHS' community of schools and receive tips and advice on gardening in schools.
- Teachers can sign up for **free online school gardening training courses**
- Schools can also take part in the **RHS Schools Gardening Awards**
- RHS also works with The Wildlife Trusts on the **Wild About Gardens Campaign**

Schools In Bloom competitions – which encourage primary schools to improve their school grounds by creating gardens and green spaces – are found across Essex.

Your school may wish to consider:



- **Meadow Croft Garden Centre's Schools in Bloom:** An annual competition which invites local schools (within a five-mile radius) to take part, with free bedding plants being delivered to schools in April, allowing students to plant and tend to them in any containers, pots, styles or themes the children choose, before being judged by the Schools in Bloom panel in July. The winning school will receive a £100 Meadow Croft voucher, to spend on plants or other gardening provisions for their school.
- **Colchester Schools in Bloom:** An annual event where judges visit schools, recognising projects and community involvement, with Prettygate School taking first place in 2025.
- **Epping in Bloom:** Involves pupils designing flower beds, with winning designs planted by the town team, as seen with Epping Primary School.

Garden Organic provides a number of free resources, designed specifically for schools.

They include guidance on how to grow seeds and crops (including a step-by-step guide on **how to sow seeds**), as well as advice on construction and wildlife projects, such as how to **build raised beds** and **ladybird houses**. There are lots of other resources available, including games for children and advice on hosting events (such as a **gardening day**). **South East Organic Gardeners** offers free membership to schools.

Additional Resources

Planting, growing, cooking and nutritional advice:

- **Eat Them to Defeat Them**
- **Eco Essex – School Grounds**
- **Essex Schools Infolink – Developing School Grounds**
- **Food4Families**
- **Food For Life**
- **Simply Veg**
- **Trees for Cities** – Food growing resources, including curriculum guides and lesson plans
- **Veg Power**
- World Wildlife Fund – **School garden calendar**

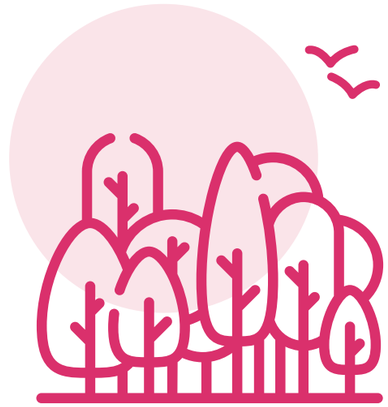
Could you set up a compost bin at your school? **Love Essex** provides discounted compost bins to Essex postcodes, as well as information about how to manage composting.





8. Green Space and Green Initiatives Beyond School

Green spaces are vital for combatting climate change and improving our environment.



Trees, for example, not only absorb carbon, but they also provide cooling in hot spots (sometimes known as 'green shielding'); act as a noise and pollution barrier when put in a row between a road and schools/ parks/ houses; and are a **great habitat for living creatures (improving biodiversity).**

One lesser-known fact is that soil can absorb even more carbon than trees, but at a slower rate, and therefore having marshlands and peatlands are also a great way to help tackle climate change. Furthermore, we know that access to green spaces is vital for improved physical and mental wellbeing. There are a number of initiatives and resources your school may wish to consider:

- Essex County Council's **School grounds: Developing nature-filled outdoor space for all.** The resource aims to support school leaders across Essex to explore the ways in which they can develop their school grounds into nature-filled spaces, that not only increase biodiversity and climate resilience, but also support inclusion, wellbeing and curriculum delivery.
- The Trees and Woodlands team at ECC can offer advice on tree planting and can train teachers to lead their own tree planting events. Contact (**environment@essex.gov.uk**) to explore options. Please note that the tree planting season is from November to February/March. To keep updated on latest tree planting events, visit the Essex Local Nature Recovery Facebook page. The team also offers volunteering opportunities throughout the year enabling volunteers to learn about tree planting and seed sowing. Detail of opportunities are listed on **Eventbrite.**
- The Woodland Trust's **Green Tree Schools Award** encourages outdoor learning about trees, woods and wildlife.



Access to green spaces is vital for improved physical and mental wellbeing.

- **The Woodland Trust** offers **free trees for schools** and communities.
- The Tree Council's 'Young Tree Champions' encourages young people to be a **'Force for Nature'**. The Tree Council also offers a number of **resources**, including training webinars, curriculum linked activity sheets and guides.
- **Essex Country Parks** – Essex is fortunate to be home to a **number of country parks and other diverse habitats,** including woodlands and beaches. Explore Essex provides a full list of these destinations and can assist with school trips (which can include an Education Ranger leading your group for the day). Could trips linked to the curriculum be a possibility for your school?
- **Essex Outdoors** provides outdoor learning at its four centres across the county – with the aim of delivering an inspiring educational experience beyond the classroom.
  - **Outdoors activity sessions for SEND students** – available all year round with a range of activities tailored to weather conditions. Students can attend Essex Outdoor sites, where trained instructors can offer an inclusive and exciting experience.
  - **Forest Schools** – Essex Outdoors offers both onsite (at an outdoor centre) and in school visits, where education rangers work to deliver outdoor learning sessions. Outdoor Forest School sessions are ideal for 30 students and can be a great way of connecting children with the world around them. Essex Outdoors is an active member of the Forest School Association (please see below).
- **The Forest School Association** emphasises outdoor learning to allow children to learn about nature, while building their knowledge and skills. It allows children to explore issues such as risk and wellbeing, while providing them with both the space and support necessary to develop self-guided learning.
- **The Wilderness Foundation** offers nature-based outreach programmes and nature therapy camps, along with wilderness trails that enable adults and youth to explore unspoilt wild places.

- Persil's **Dirt is Good Project** aims to encourage children to learn about the outdoors, the environment and climate and to feel empowered to make a difference.
- There are a number of popular schemes which reward climate and environmentally friendly efforts made by young people, including the **Blue Peter Green Badge Award**.
- Schools may wish to consider working with local community groups or their local parish to promote green areas and protect the local countryside.
- Can you bring the community to school? Danbury Park Commun School successfully applied for a **free crisp packet recycling bin to be hosted on its site.** This has seen parents and students bring these difficult to recycle items into school and Danbury successfully become a centre for recycling an item which may otherwise have ended up in landfill. You can find out more about obtaining recycling bins on the **Terracycle website**.



- **Litter picking** can take place on school premises, at break times or form times, but can also be carried out in tandem with community litter picking groups. They may be able to provide advice, equipment or information about how pupils can join community litter picks (with parental consent). District councils across Essex – including **Uttlesford** – offer to lend litter picking equipment to schools and will also organise collection of the litter for disposal. It is worth contacting your district council to see what provisions are available. Other groups, such as **Love Your Chelmsford**, run a litter picking volunteer programmes for schools.
  - There are a number of litter-picking resources and idea packs available, including from **Countryside Classroom**.
  - You could also consider signing your school up to take part in the **Great Big School Clean** outdoors, the environment and climate and to feel empowered to make a difference.



Case Study

As part of the **Great British Spring Clean**, Darlinghurst Academy in Leigh-on-Sea, organises community litter picks. In 2024, the school worked with a local group, **Litter-less Leigh**, and other local schools, to collect litter from Two Tree Island. **Over 40 sacks of rubbish were removed from the area by around 40 volunteers.**

The litter was collected by members of the community, pupils, parents and staff.

- **Climate Committee** – As discussed on **page 12**, you may wish to set up or develop an existing climate committee. You could consider including (or creating a separate committee) which invites members of the local community to explore what you can do together to make a difference.

Other Schools in your Community and School Networks

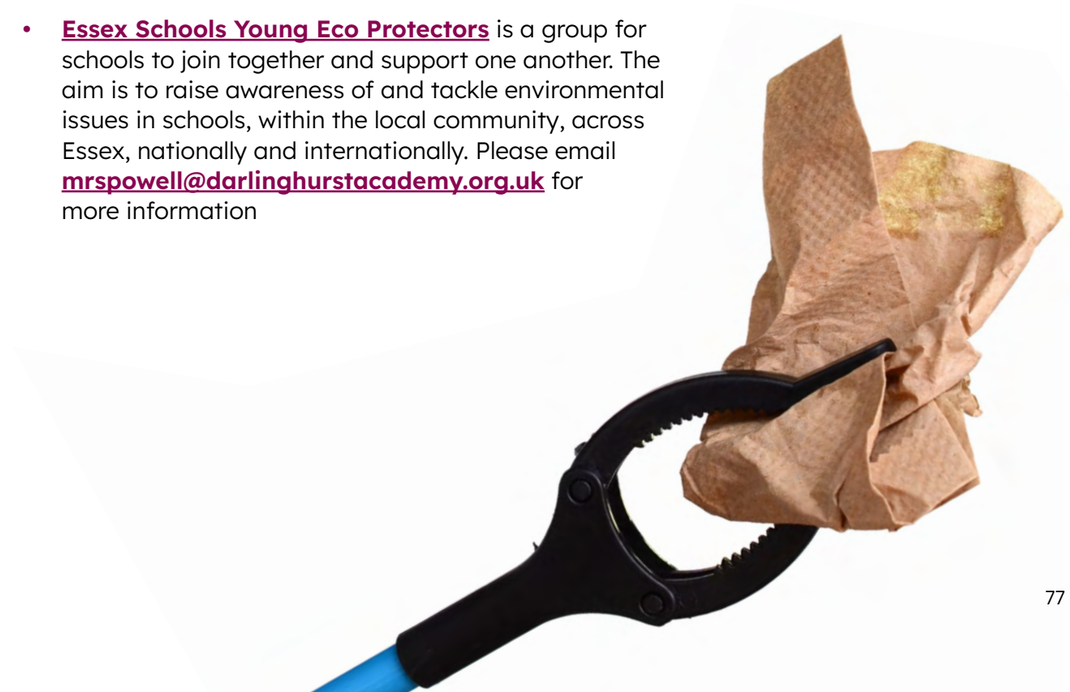
Your neighbours, residents and businesses are not the only important elements of your community, other schools in your area are integral as well. At both district and county level, there is a wealth of activity underway on a school-by-school basis to tackle climate change and improve the environment. How can this be harnessed?

There are lots of ways to achieve this. Something as simple as reaching out to a neighbouring school to share best practice could lead to new ideas and potential collaboration.

Innovative forums can lead to the sharing of ideas from both pupils and teachers.

- The **Essex Schools' Climate Action Network** aims to bring together students and teachers from across Essex to share ideas in relation to climate action. Members of the network will become Essex Climate Ambassadors and meet virtually, sharing success stories of climate projects undertaken at their schools and learning from others. If you are interested in joining the network, please **register online**.
- The **Let's Go Zero** campaign (mentioned on **page 13**) includes over 8,700 schools in its network. The campaign seeks to reach net zero for schools by 2030 and for young people to be provided with a robust education around sustainability and to prepare them to enter adult life receptive to zero carbon jobs and lifestyles. You can find out more and join the Let's Go Zero campaign and extended network **here**.
- **The Young Essex Assembly** is an important platform for the young people of Essex to discuss the issues which matter to them, including climate change. The two co-chairs of the Essex Climate Action Commission are members of the Young Essex Assembly. Why not **encourage students to stand for election** to join the Assembly?

- **Essex Schools Young Eco Protectors** is a group for schools to join together and support one another. The aim is to raise awareness of and tackle environmental issues in schools, within the local community, across Essex, nationally and internationally. Please email **mrspowell@darlinghurstacademy.org.uk** for more information



9. Funding Opportunities

There are often limited funding opportunities available for schools to support green initiatives. The below list highlights some key potential sources of funding, but is not exhaustive. It is always worth applying early to avoid disappointment.

- **Blue Spark Foundation** – A registered charity which was set up to 'support the education and development of children and young people by providing grants for educational, cultural, sporting and other projects'. Schools, colleges and school clubs are eligible to apply.
- **Earth Echo International** – **UK OurEcho Challenge** is a STEM contest that empowers young changemakers to take a closer look at biodiversity in their communities. Prizes of £5,000, £2,500 and £1,000 are awarded to successful applicants.
- **The Ernest Cook Trust** – The Outdoor Essentials Grant offers grants of between £500 (for primary and special schools) and £1,000 (for secondary schools) to UK state-funded schools 'to remove barriers and enable pupils to connect to nature and learn outdoors'.
- **Essex Local Nature Partnership's LNP Community Fund** – Offers funding for schools of between £500 – £2,000. All projects seeking funding must deliver meaningful environmental benefits.
- **EVOLVE ADVICE** – **The Get Out! Grant** is a series of £500 grants to support schools with providing educational visits opportunities.
- **Ford of Britain Trust** – Offers grants of between £250 - £3,000 for projects focused on topics including education and the environment.
- **Get Composting** – Discounted **compost bins and water butts** (with an Essex postcode).
- **Learning through Landscapes** – An outdoor learning and play charity which offers **free outdoor lesson resources** and **Local School Nature Grants** to schools and early years settings. Grants of up to £500 are available, with schools able to pick items from an online product catalogue, ranging from den building kits and motion activated wildlife cameras, through to online learning courses for staff and seed kits.
- **Let's Go Zero** – Runs the **OVO Foundation Nature Prize**, where schools have the chance to win £500 in order to 'bring students closer to nature'. Previous projects which have received funding include: tree planting initiatives; vegetable growing; and boosting wildlife in school grounds.

- **Linnean Society** – The Local Nature Grant offers grants of up to £1,000 to support 'innovative projects that are designed and led by young people in the UK'. Projects should 'seek to empower local young people to enact changes they want to see, such as increasing access to natural spaces and improving understanding of their local biodiversity'. Groups such as school staff and student groups are eligible to apply.
- **National Lottery Community Fund**
  - **Climate Action Fund – Energy and Climate (£500,000 – £1,500,000)**
    This funding aims to inspire and support communities across the UK to address the energy and climate crisis. The projects being funded should show how communities can address climate change while tackling the energy challenges through community-led climate action. Schools can apply for this fund, providing that the project benefits and involves the wider local community.
  - **Climate Action Fund – Food Systems (£2,500,000 – £7,000,000)**
    Funding for projects that strengthen food systems and reduce food insecurity for people and communities. Schools can apply for this fund, but you must be part of a partnership, and the project must benefit and involve the wider local community.
  - **National Lottery Awards for All England – Environment (£300 – £20,000)**
    This fund supports community-led projects that improve the environment and help people to connect with and enjoy nature where they live. Plastic Clever Schools – offers an award of up to £500 to take action on plastic waste via its **Plastic Clever Schools Action Fund**.
- **The Royal Society** – **The Partnership Grants** scheme funds schools and colleges up to £3,000 to work in partnership with STEM professionals to run STEM projects.
- **Tel Group** – The Go Green Scheme for the Education sector offers grants of up to £1,000, The programme aims to 'provide additional funding for current or planned projects focused on sustainability, which can make a significant positive impact on the environment'.
- **Tesco Stronger Starts** – provides grants of up to £1,500, with priority given to projects that provide food and support to young people. This includes, but is not limited to: breakfast clubs; buying equipment for outdoor or indoor activities; support for school clubs and developing food growing areas in schools.
- **The Veolia Environmental Trust** – Offers a number of grant opportunities, including the **Community Grants Scheme** and the **Habitat and Biodiversity Grant**. In order to be elgibile to apply for a grant, most projects must be able to demonstrate **community benefit**, as well as supporting the natural environment.
- **Workplace Charging Scheme** – Schools are eligible to apply for a grant of up to £2,500 per socket to support the installation of electric vehicle charging points.
- **Alpkit Foundation Grant** – Supports a variety of projects for schools, including discounted equipment for outdoor activities and support for staff upskilling.

Tree Planting

- **England's Community Forests** – Supports a range of woodland creation schemes, with grants to cover up to 100% of costs.
- **I Dig Trees** – Provides free trees to schools and community groups across the UK.
- **The International Tree Foundation** – offers grants to organisations, including schools, to support tree planting.
- **The Tree Council**
  - Provides **grants of between £250 - £2,500** to support tree planting, with schools eligible to apply.
  - **Young Tree Champions** – Provides a variety of resources, support and free equipment to participating schools.

Grant Finders

- **Grants Online** – Hosts a frequently updated list of grants and other funding available across energy, environment and transport. Includes funding opportunities which schools may be eligible to apply for.
- **National Education Nature Park** – Hosts a list of grants and other funding support available to schools, which is updated.



10. Useful Teaching and Learning Resources

Primary

Air Quality

- Essex Air
- The Global Centre for Clean Air Research, University of Surrey
- Transform Our World – Clean Air for Schools Framework

Circular Economy

- BLUEPRINT Schools – Fox's Waste Adventure

Climate Change, Sustainability & Environment (General)

- Earth Cubs – games, videos, puzzles, badges and tree planting
- NASA Climate Kids
- National Education Nature Park
- Young People's Trust for the Environment – Better Planet Schools (online environmental education programme)

Food & Agriculture

- Barleylands Farm Park – School visits
- Eat Them to Defeat Them
- Food and Farming Day – Essex Agricultural Society
- School Food Matters
- TastEd
- The Country Trust – School trips to local farms and other resources
- Trees for Cities – Food growing resources, including curriculum guides and lesson plans

Outdoor Learning

- Outdoor Classroom Day
- The Tree Council's Young Tree Champions
- Wildlife Watch

Plastic

- Environment Agency

Power & Water

- School Visits to the Museum of Power
- Solar Energy Activity Pack

Transport and Travel

- Modeshift – Active Travel Inspectors

Waste

- WRAP – Waste classroom activities, audits and action plans

Secondary

Air Quality

- Essex Air
- The Global Centre for Clean Air Research, University of Surrey
- Transform Our World – Clean Air for Schools Framework

Climate Change, Sustainability & Environment (General)

- Career & Enterprise Company – Key Stage 3 Green Careers in the Curriculum
- Royal Meteorological Society – How do climate negotiations take place and how can we stage our own?
- Science Museum – Carbon Cycle Caper
- TedEd Video Resources
  - Can we create the "perfect" farm?
  - The state of the climate crisis
  - Earth School series

Transport and Travel

- Modeshift – Active Travel Ambassador (ATA) Programme – Support provided by a Modeshift ATA Coordinator and school staff to help ATA students (aged 11+) research and develop behaviour change campaigns, focusing on active travel and road safety. Contact: admin@modeshift.org.uk.

Primary and Secondary

Air Quality

- CoSchools – Classroom High-Efficiency Particulate Air Filter (CHEPA) Calculator
- Schools' Air quality Monitoring for Health and Education (SAMHE) – Teacher Resource Pack

Climate Action Plans

- Climate Action Management Platform
- Climate Ambassadors – free support to develop climate action plans
- Department for Education
  - Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education
- Essex Schools Infolink – Climate and Sustainability
- Friends of the Earth – Climate Action Plan for Schools resource
- Let's Go Zero's Climate Action Advisors – free advice to schools, including on climate action plans
- National Education Nature Park – Climate action plans – advice and guidance
- Sustainability Support for Education – collated resources available to support schools produce a climate action plan
- Transform Our World – an online tool which helps schools identify key areas which could be included in a climate action plan

Climate Change, Sustainability & Environment (General)

- BBC Bitesize
  - The Regenerators
  - Earth School – Video resources across energy, transport, materials, food, nature and people
- British Council
- Education - Colchester Zoological Society
- Department for Education
  - Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems'
  - Good estate management for schools
- do your :bit
- Encounter Edu
- Essex Libraries
- Generation Earthshot
- Global Action Plan
- Go Compare – Energy Cost Calculator (comparative costs for different appliances)
- Learning Outside the Classroom Providers
- The Ministry of Eco Education
- National Education Nature Park
- Our Planet
- Oxfam GB
- Planet & People
- Practical Action
- Royal Society
  - Climate Change
  - Biodiversity
- The Tree Council
- STEM Learning
- TedEd Video Resources
  - Why is the world warming up?
  - What is net zero?
  - Why is 1.5 degrees such a big deal?
  - Where does all the carbon we release go?
  - Why act now?
- ThoughtBox Education
- Transform Our World
- WaterAid
- Wilderness Foundation UK – Wild Schools
- World Wildlife Fund

Food & Agriculture

- Data Education in Schools – Lesson plans, presentations and other teaching resources (with links to the curriculum) in relation to food and food sustainability
- Food – A Fact of Life – Collates teaching a learning resources in relation to sustainable, healthy food
- Food Production Calculators (environmental and carbon impacts etc.)
  - BBC – Climate Change Food Calculator
  - Food Miles Calculator – A tool which helps to calculate how far food has travelled before it reaches the consumer
  - My Emissions – Provides a free food carbon footprint calculator

Green Careers and Skills

- Curiosity Connections – hosts information on Green Jobs in their Inspire Green Futures resources
- Department for Education's Education Hub – Green Jobs Explained
- Essex Green Skills Hub – pathways for young people and adults
- Essex Year of Opportunity website – join a young person (Roxie) as she explores various potential career paths and learns about the essential skills required, including for 'green jobs' (such as in renewable energy)
- National Careers Service – Green Careers
- Great Start Essex (ECC) – green careers & CPD – GreatStart@essex.gov.uk

Nature & Outdoors

- British Beekeepers Association
- Essex Country Parks – Education Ranger led days
- Essex Outdoors
- Essex Wildlife Trust – School trips and education facilities
- Kew Gardens
- Learning through Landscapes
- Outdoor Classroom Day
- Royal Horticultural Society
- The Royal Parks
- Trees for Cities
- World Wildlife Fund

Plastic

- Countryside Classroom
- Plastic Clever Schools

Transport and Travel

- Living Streets
- Modeshift STARS
- Safer Essex Roads Partnership
- Safer Greener Healthier
- Walk Wheel Cycle Trust

Water

- Affinity Water – Get Water Smart (for schools and pupils)
- Anglian Water
- Essex & Suffolk Water (includes school trips and speakers who visit schools)
- Plastic Clever Schools (Oceans)
- Thames Water

Essex-based social media pages

Facebook:

- Eco - Essex
- Essex Climate Action
- Essex Local Nature Recovery
- Essex Wildlife Trust
- Sustainable Essex
- Love Essex

Instagram:

- Eco – Essex (@ecoessex)
- Essex Climate Action (@essexclimatecommission)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (@essexwildlifetrust)
- Sustainable Essex (@sustainableessexUK)
- Love Essex (@loveessexuk)

LinkedIn

- Sustainable Essex
- Essex Climate Action

X (formerly Twitter):

- Essex Climate Action (@essex_climate)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (@EssexWildlife)

YouTube:

- Essex Climate Action
- Love Essex

National social media pages

Facebook:

- Energy Saving Trust
- Royal Horticultural Society

Instagram:

- Energy Saving Trust (@energysavingtrust)
- Royal Horticultural Society (@the_RHS)

X (formerly Twitter):

- Royal Horticultural Society (@The_RHS)

Conclusion

We hope that you have found this resource helpful and informative about the steps you can take at your school to reduce its impact on the environment. We can all take steps to help ensure a high-quality environment in Essex today and in the future.

We are keen to make sure that this document remains relevant and helpful to schools over time. Therefore, our aim is to produce updated versions of this action pack as discussions, legislation and priorities around climate change evolve. If you have any ideas or resources which could be included in this pack – or if you think an example of your school's action on sustainability could be incorporated – we would like to hear from you. Please contact: **environment.climatecommunications@essex.gov.uk**

The resources and information in this pack have been compiled and developed in consultation with individuals from across Essex County Council, school teachers, charities and not-for-profit organisations. We are extremely grateful for their expertise, insights and time.

This pack is part of series, which includes others which have been produced for residents, businesses and Early Years providers. You can find out more about these packs **here**.



Annex One

Category	Action	Cost	Type
Catering	Engage your catering supplier or team on food waste to identify opportunities to reduce food waste. **Food for Life** offers advice on sustainable catering.	Low cost	Repeat action
Critical Suppliers	Survey all critical suppliers and ask for data information about their organisation and products/services to help calculate your carbon footprint more accurately.	Low cost	Repeat action
	Engage with key suppliers about their biodiversity practices. Discuss its importance in your sustainability goals and express interest in working together, especially relevant for estates and grounds maintenance suppliers.	Low cost	One-off action
	Encourage critical suppliers to make a Net Zero commitment using the collaborative approach you have developed.	Low cost	Long-term action
	Work with key suppliers to set mutually agreed decarbonisation targets and track performance over time.	Low cost	Long-term action
Energy	Develop an energy re-procurement plan which outlines a strategy to renew or renegotiate contracts for electricity and gas supply, focusing on cost savings and sustainability. Includes assessing current usage, researching renewable options, soliciting bids, and negotiating.	Milestone	Long-term action
	Engage with energy suppliers and partners to explore sustainable energy options such as solar panels, heat pumps, renewable energy contracts, and wind turbines.	—	Long-term action
	Talk to the companies that provide your energy about your sustainability goals. They can support you in a variety of ways.	Low cost	Repeat action
Site Maintenance	Audit your site suppliers you use to provide goods and services in the management of your grounds. Understand their environmental practices.	Milestone	Low cost, One-off action
Water	Initiate conversations with your water supplier to gather information on your setting's water consumption patterns. Request historical usage data and any benchmarks they can provide to help identify areas for improvement.	Low cost	Repeat action

References

1 **Government response to Curriculum and Assessment Review**, November 2025, pg.25

2 Ibid., pg.39

3 Ibid, pg.40

4 Ibid., pg.40

5 **Education Estates Strategy: A decade of national renewal**, Department for Education, February 2026, pg.5

6 Ibid., pg.6

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., pg.7

9 Ibid.

10 **Curriculum and Assessment Review, Building a world-class curriculum for all**, Department for Education, November 2025, pg.40.

11 **Journey emissions comparisons: methodology and guidance**, Department for Transport, updated 19th December 2024

12 **National Travel Survey 2024**, Department for Transport, August 2025

13 **Government response to Curriculum and Assessment Review**, November 2025, pg.25

14 Ibid., pg.38

15 Ibid., pg.39

16 Ibid., pg.40

17 Ibid., pg.40

18 **Clean Energy Jobs Plan**, UK Government (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero), October 2025, pg.4

19 Ibid., pg.22

20 489,409 in Greater Essex have an **Energy Performance Certificate** (EPC) of D or below, out of a total of 839,355 homes. **Essex Local Area Energy Plan**, 2026. Calculated by City Science on behalf of Essex County Council

21 **Assessment of priority skills to 2030, Skills England**, updated 5th November 2025

22 **UK Food Waste & Food Surplus – Key Facts** WRAP, July 2025, pg.3

23 Action area 3: Education estate and digital infrastructure, **Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems**, Department for Education, 2023

24 '**Education Estates Strategy: A decade of national renewal**', Department for Education, February 2026, pg.5

25 Ibid., pg.6

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., pg.7

28 Ibid.

29 **Essex & Suffolk Water**

30 **Buying for Schools, 'How to make your school more water efficient' , GOV.UK, 23rd May 2022**

31 Ibid.

32 **National Assessment of Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk in England 2024** (National Flood Risk Assessment (NAFRA2) data), Environment Agency, updated 22nd January 2025

33 **UK and Global extreme events – Heavy rainfall and floods**, Met Office

Essex County Council

This information is issued by:
Environment and Climate Action

Contact us:
environment.climatecommunications@essex.gov.uk

Environment and Climate Action
Essex County Council
County Hall, Chelmsford,
Essex CM1 1QH

www.essex.gov.uk

Essex County Council:

- essexcountycouncil
- Essex County Council
- essex_cc
- essex_cc

Sustainable Essex

Sustainable Essex is Essex County Council's home for environment and sustainability, bringing together projects, news, events, advice and partners to highlight the work being done to protect and improve Essex for everyone who lives and works here.

sustainable.essex.gov.uk

Sustainable Essex:

- Sustainable Essex
- Sustainable Essex
- @sustainableessexuk

Stay up to date with the Your Essex, Sustainable Essex and Essex Climate Action e-newsletters. For a monthly snapshot of news, events and activities across the county, sign up at:
www.essex.gov.uk/youressex

The information contained in this document can be translated and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.

Published May 2026
DS26_9159