

## Hub Guide: Building Decarbonisation Starter Guide for Schools

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### Executive Summary:

This guide aims to be a starting point for information and learnings which will help schools on their decarbonisation journey. Schools play a crucial role in reducing carbon emissions and fostering sustainability. Decarbonising a school building not only helps combat climate change but also reduces energy costs and provides an example to pupils and parents of low carbon technologies in action. With all schools encouraged by the Department of Education to have a [Climate Action Plan and Sustainability lead](#) this guide will also help support this work.

### Current Support Bodies:

#### How the Greater South East Net Zero Hub can support the decarbonisation of schools

The Greater South East Net Zero Hub provides free strategic and technical support to the public sector and communities to develop, help finance, and deliver net zero projects. This includes supporting schools on their decarbonisation journey; through undertaking critical friend reviews on any key documentation (e.g., technology-based studies and funding applications) to providing technical advice and project management support in developing [Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme](#) funding applications. The Hub can also support the development of Heat Decarbonisation Strategies and Heat Decarbonisation Plans as well as undertake desktop assessments to help pre-qualify sites for future funding bids. This is in addition to providing general guidance, advice and signposting to other resources that may be able to assist in developing a successful project. Schools can get in touch at [info@gsenetzerohub.org.uk](mailto:info@gsenetzerohub.org.uk).

#### How Let's Go Zero can support the decarbonisation of schools

Let's Go Zero's team of Climate Action Advisors offer free and impartial support for schools to help develop Climate Action Plans that align with the [Department for Education requirements](#), exploring how to improve sustainability across energy, waste, water, transport, food, procurement, nature, culture, curriculum, as well as looking at adaptation and resilience to climate impacts on school sites and the opportunities for students to develop green skills and careers. Schools can book an appointment with an advisor at: [Climate Action Advisors - Lets Go Zero](#)



## Sustainability Support for Education

[Sustainability Support for Education](#) is a UK Department for Education funded initiative that helps educational settings from early years to higher education advance their sustainability efforts. It offers tailored guidance, quality-assured resources, and expert advice to support the creation of Climate Action Plans, which all education settings in England are expected to develop by 2025. The platform connects schools, colleges, and nurseries with volunteer Climate Ambassadors and Let's Go Zero Climate Action Advisors, who provide free, independent support. It also assists in identifying funding opportunities, improving building efficiency, enhancing biodiversity, and integrating sustainability into teaching and operations.

## Climate Ambassadors

[Climate Ambassadors](#) is a Department for Education funded programme, mobilising and supporting education settings in England to develop and deliver impactful climate action plans with the help of skilled volunteers. Climate Ambassadors from across the private, public, charity, university and community sectors provide you with free, tailored guidance, wherever you are on your sustainability journey. Climate Ambassadors are fully DBS checked and have access to a suite of training to complement their existing expertise and skillsets. The programme is available to all nurseries and early years settings, primary and secondary schools, SEND schools and colleges in England.

## National Education Nature Park

The [Education Nature Park](#) is a free, Department for Education commissioned programme designed to help schools, nurseries, and colleges across England enhance biodiversity and embed climate education into everyday learning. It offers high-quality, curriculum-linked resources, guides, and activities that support educators in transforming grey spaces into thriving green areas, while fostering students' connection to nature and wellbeing. Participants can access funding opportunities, contribute to national biodiversity mapping, and develop green skills through hands-on projects and scientific research. The programme also supports Climate Action Plans and encourages young people to take meaningful action for their future and the environment.

## Current Guides:

[Public Sector Decarbonisation Guidance: schools resource hub](#) - Energy Systems Catapult have developed a detailed [Schools Resource Hub](#) providing access to government-backed guides, checklists and tools that have been specifically created and curated to help schools decarbonise their buildings as

part of a climate action plan. This forms part of the wider Public Sector Decarbonisation Guidance commissioned by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Government Property Function to help public sector bodies and their decarbonisation partners understand the best route to Net Zero. The schools Resource Hub offers resources on energy efficiency, heat decarbonisation, funding opportunities and practical steps to achieve net-zero goals within schools.

## Understanding the School's Carbon Footprint:

Understanding a school's carbon footprint is a key first step to identifying opportunities and priorities for decarbonisation. Schools can calculate their carbon footprint from energy use by collecting data on their annual consumption of electricity & gas (in kilowatt hours (kWh)), heating oil, petrol and diesel (in litres) and multiplying these by a "carbon conversion factor". The Government publishes updated carbon conversion factors every year: [Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2024 - GOV.UK](#). Charities like Energy Sparks and [Eco Schools](#) can help with carbon footprinting.

## Funding:

Once schools have quantified their carbon footprint and identified sources that are a priority for reduction, there are a number of sources of funding available to help develop or deliver projects.

**[The Greater South East Net Zero Hub](#)** is a free and impartial resource here to support schools with the decarbonisation of their estate from strategy stage to detailed design. The hub can provide support to schools applying for various funding sources. Schools can get in touch at [info@gsetzerohub.org.uk](mailto:info@gsetzerohub.org.uk).

- **[Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme \(PSDS\)](#)** – Provides capital grant funding for the installation of low carbon heating. *\*Disclaimer - Some smaller schools may struggle to apply for this alone. In this case, please contact the Local Authority and we can support them with any potential bids.*
- **[Workplace Charging points for Electric Vehicles](#)** – Available to state-funded schools and educational institutions to support the installation of electric vehicle chargepoint sockets on their premises. It covers 75% of the purchase and installation costs, with a maximum allowance of: **£2,500 per socket** and **up to 40 sockets across all sites** (including any previous applications submitted through the Workplace Charging Scheme).
- **[Greener Schools Programme](#)** – **\*Note for London Schools Only** - Capital funding for Greater London schools to implement decarbonisation measures. The pilot phase has concluded, but there may be further rounds in future.
- **Smart Export Guarantees (SEG)** - A payment for electricity exported to the grid e.g. from a solar photovoltaic installation. Electricity generated from solar is of most value if it is used on site, however, SEGs ensure that schools are paid for anything they export. There is a comparison of current SEG tariffs here: [Best SEG Tariff in the UK: All 27 Export Tariffs Ranked in 2025](#). Check



with the schools electricity supplier what SEG tariff they offer. Some suppliers will offer a SEG tariff to customers for export only i.e. meaning that a school will not have to switch electricity supplier to access their tariff. Check what electricity metering a SEG provider requires, some are focused on domestic customers and don't work with non-domestic electricity meters. NB SEG tariffs are not fixed and can go up or down over time. Check with the school's electricity supplier what SEG tariff they offer. Some suppliers will offer a SEG tariff to customers for export only i.e. meaning that a school will not have to switch electricity supplier to access their tariff. Check what electricity metering a SEG provider requires, some are focused on domestic customers and don't work with non-domestic electricity meters. NB SEG tariffs are not fixed and can go up or down over time.

- [Mayor of London's Zero Carbon Accelerator](#) \*Note for London Schools Only – Offers free technical support to London-based organisations to develop larger, more ambitious decarbonisation projects while providing fully funded technical support to make them investment-ready, financially viable, and ready for implementation.
- The [National Lottery Awards for All England](#) – Provides grants of £300 to £20,000 for projects that bring communities together. Schools can apply for funding if the project benefits and involves communities in the vicinity, e.g. if the school is open for community education in the evening or has a community use sports centre on site. Community activities during lunch breaks, before and after school, may also be eligible.

## Alternative Funding Approaches:

Alternative approaches and financial models to delivering decarbonisation projects where funding may not be available or suitable are outlined below. Schools will need to review individual offers to consider whether they represent good value given the fluctuation in energy prices.

- **Solar for Schools & Schools Energy Co-op** – [Grants and Funding - Solar for Schools UK](#) & [Schools Energy Coop | Community owned solar energy on schools can](#) fund, install, operate and maintain solar panels on school roofs. Funding is via a community energy mechanism and schools would sign up to purchase electricity from the solar at a mutually beneficial rate
- **Lighting as a Service** – A number of commercial suppliers offer upgrades to LED lighting with no upfront capital cost. The installer recovers the installation costs from an annual service charge to the school.

## Guidance on Low Carbon Technology:

- [Heat pumps: everything you need to know - Energy Saving Trust](#) guide will provide information on what heat pumps are the different types and how they work.
- [Solar panels: costs, savings and benefits explained - Energy Saving Trust](#) guide will explain how solar panels work and answer FAQs about them.



- [Advice on installing solar water heating - Energy Saving Trust](#) guide will explain how a solar hot water heating system works, costs, savings and maintenance.
- [Energy efficiency: guidance for the school and further education college estate - GOV.UK](#) provides schools with practical advice on improving energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions, and managing energy costs effectively. It covers heating, hot water, lighting and equipment.

## General Good Practice Advice:

- **Monitor energy consumption.** Keep a log of the school's monthly energy consumption (in kilowatt hours (kWh)). Compare consumption from one year to the next to identify increases and savings being achieved.
- Schools should consider **subscribing to half-hourly automated meter readings (AMR)**, as this enables more precise monitoring of energy consumption patterns. Regularly reviewing this data helps identify instances of avoidable energy use (e.g. heating on overnight or at weekends). Establishing robust energy monitoring practices in advance of capital projects – such as solar PV, or heat pumps, ensures that these technologies are operating effectively and delivering the expected benefits.
- Ensure staff and students **adopt energy savings habits**, such as turning off unused lights and equipment when leaving rooms or at the end of the day.
- [Energy Sparks](#) is a charity which aims to help schools monitor energy consumption and provides easy to implement recommendations on how to save money and reduce carbon emissions. Conduct regular reviews of control systems to ensure optimal performance and efficiency. This includes adjusting occupancy schedules, refining flow temperatures and updating holiday schedules to align with actual usage of the building.
- **Schools that incur Distribution Use of System (DUoS) - [Distribution Use of System Charges - SSEN](#)** - charges on their electricity bills may have the opportunity to reduce costs by requesting an administrative reduction in the capacity of their electricity supply from their Distribution Network Operator (DNO). To assess this potential saving, schools can obtain their capacity usage data from their energy supplier and compare it against the kVA capacity for which they are currently being billed for. If a discrepancy is identified, they may be eligible to request a reduction, leading to lower DUoS charges.
- **Heatwave Advice** - To improve classroom conditions in hot weather, it's recommended to open both windows and doors early in the morning or overnight (if safe and allowed) to release stored heat and encourage cross ventilation. Close windows when outside air becomes warmer than



indoors to maintain cooler temperatures. Use blinds or curtains to reduce heat gain without blocking airflow. Minimize electric lighting and avoid leaving equipment on standby to reduce heat. Mechanical fans can help if temperatures stay below 35°C. Ensure children stay well-hydrated and encourage staff to sign up for Weather-Health Alerts from the UKHSA and Met Office - [Weather-Health Alerting system registration form](#) Advice from [Hot weather and heatwaves: guidance for schools and other education settings – The Education Hub](#)

## Case Study Examples:

- The Greater South East Net Zero Hub supported **St Botolph's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School in Suffolk** to successfully identify a route to address a £44,000 funding gap on a successful PSDS P3a bid to allow the school to complete the project. The school was awarded £1,047,390 PSDS funding to replace their existing gas boiler with an air source heat pump, and to install solar panels. The energy efficiency of the building was improved through the installation of LED lighting, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, new radiators, and improved heating distribution pipework as part of the bid, on top of which was a £37,000 contribution from the school.
- [St Andrew's School](#) successfully reduced its carbon footprint by implementing energy-efficient upgrades, including LED lighting, improved insulation, and air-source heat pump, with support from Phase 1 Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Funding.
- [Windsor Academy Trust](#) reduced its carbon footprint across multiple schools by implementing energy-efficient measures such as LED lighting, solar panels, and low carbon heating systems, with support from Phase 1 Public Sector decarbonisation Scheme.
- [Let's Go Zero](#) have a whole host of case studies for Primary, Secondary, Mixed and Post 16.