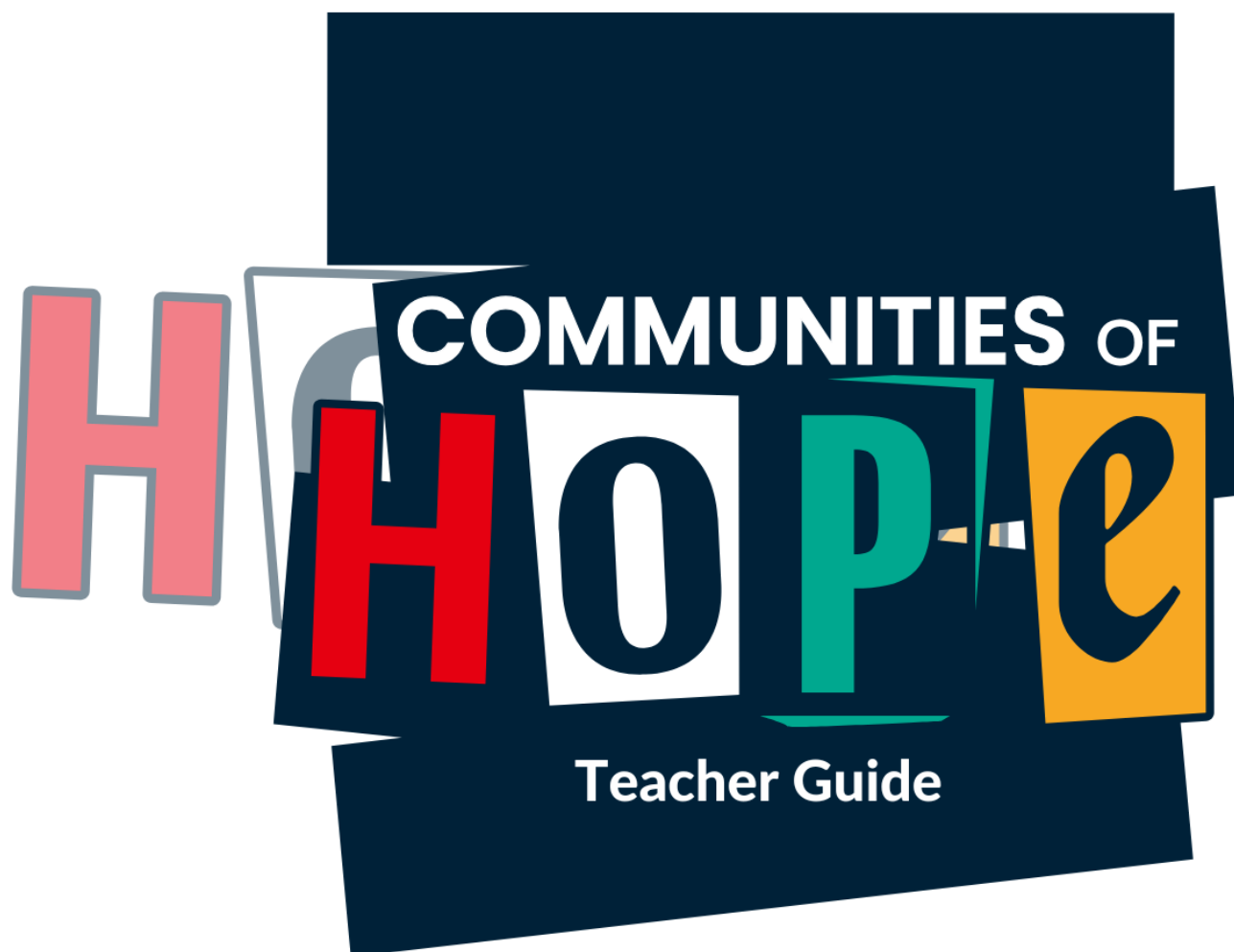


H O P E



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Introduction

This teacher guide shares the Communities of Hope project's approach and ethos, key learning from the project, and links to support next steps for teachers and schools wanting to take creative climate action with their pupils and students.

Background to the Communities of Hope Project

Schools in Tower Hamlets explored climate and sustainability through Communities of Hope, a three-year project running from 2023 to 2026.

In the Communities of Hope project, Global Learning London partnered with several Tower Hamlets schools during the initial pilot year. In the second and third years, the project worked in a more sustained way with two Tower Hamlets schools, Stepney All Saints and Bow, focusing primarily on teachers and Key Stage 3 students.

"We are the future and the future we are going to be living in is the one we are making"

Year 7 student participating in the project

Each school completed an initial sustainability audit using the Climate-Friendly Schools tool (see link in the final section), then used the results to identify priorities for school climate action. Once these priorities were established, artist Alaa Alsaraji ran a series of interactive workshops with Key Stage 3 students. Through arts-based activities, students used critical thinking to explore sustainability issues and take creative action based on their own ideas and interests. They produced creative outputs such as zines, poetry, art and prose to raise wider awareness and support climate action within their schools and beyond.

At the end of the project, schools completed the Climate-Friendly Schools audit again to assess changes.



Communities of Hope Approach and Ethos

The Arts in Climate Education and Action – Mindset Shifts and Changes of Heart

As an arts-based project, Communities of Hope takes the view that climate education and action need to focus on more than ‘the facts’ taught through Science and Geography, and more than carbon reduction alone.

Young people in our schools are growing up during climate and nature crises. Human action has brought us to a point where our shared future on this planet is fragile and uncertain. What we do know is that these twin crises will affect every part of the lives of children and young people as they grow up.

These crises, and their roots in human behaviour, are complex and multifaceted. The routes to solutions are equally complex. The deep changes required are not only physical, economic, social and technological; they are also mental, cultural, emotional and psychological. They require mindset shifts, transformed perspectives and changes of heart.

“I used to think the top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with thirty years of good science we could address the problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation, and we lawyers and scientists don’t know how to do that.”

- James Gustave Speth (Environmental Lawyer)

Climate and sustainability education therefore needs to be addressed across the curriculum, not only in Geography and Science. Climate and sustainability action also needs to encompass more than carbon reduction – while recognising that Geography, Science and carbon reduction are all vital.



The Communities of Hope ethos is that, through the arts, we can access parts of ourselves beyond the physical and perspectives beyond the bare facts. A holistic approach that includes creativity, can help educators and students begin to make the mindset shifts needed to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis while we still can. It can also help us adapt to the future as it unfolds and work towards making the transition as fair and kind as possible.

Through stories, images and all forms of art and creativity, educators and students can begin to explore humanity's place on our planet and our interconnection with the rest of the natural world. We can also explore the emotional dimensions of the climate crisis: its root causes, its impact on the world around us, its impact on those who have done the least to cause it, questions of responsibility and agency, and what it means for our future selves.

Climate Justice – Whose Responsibility, Whose Impact?

Part of the Communities of Hope ethos is that this holistic approach must include an awareness of the inherent injustice of the climate crisis. In general, the groups most responsible for the consumption driving greenhouse gas emissions – both in the UK and globally – are not those experiencing the first and worst impacts of droughts, flooding, extreme and unpredictable weather, food insecurity, forced migration and other consequences. Those with the most carbon-intensive lifestyles are often, at least for now, best able to insulate themselves from the worst effects.

The society that children and young people in our schools are growing up in will have to deal with the repercussions of this injustice and inequality, including the risks of mass migration, further conflict and political instability.

An approach that includes values-based and creative elements can support young people to think critically about the values they want to uphold and to navigate their emotions around these issues.

Emotional Wellbeing and Choosing Which Waves to 'Surf'

Young people's mental health and wellbeing is rightly a key concern for schools, particularly as young people face a future that can feel increasingly uncertain. Environmental concerns and the climate crisis are key elements in young people's mental health, as reported in the medical journal The Lancet.

“Distress about climate change is associated with young people perceiving that they have no future, that humanity is doomed, and that governments are failing to respond adequately, and with feelings of betrayal and abandonment by governments and adults. Climate change and government inaction are chronic stressors that could have considerable, long-lasting, and incremental negative implications for the mental health of children and young people.”

- Climate Anxiety in Children and Young People Global Survey The Lancet 2021

Climate Emotions Wheel



Given the nature and climate crises, and young people's understandable fears for the future, it is entirely to be expected that they will experience a wide range of emotions. Anxiety, grief and overwhelm are normal and reasonable responses to the situation in which we find ourselves, whatever our age. So too are anger, resolve, hope and even excitement at the knowledge that we live at a time when what we do now will make such a difference to the future of our species and planet.

Climate Emotions Wheel © 2023 by
Ryleigh Corrigan, Anya Kamenetz, Sarah
Newman, Panu Pihkala, Megan Slade, and
Julie Souza is licensed under CC BY-SA
4.0



ClimateMentalHealth.Net

based on research by Panu Pihkala: bit.ly/3Ky4k6G



We can learn to be honest with ourselves and each other about these emotions. We can also learn to choose which emotional waves we want to 'surf' and which ones we will allow ourselves simply to bob up and down on. The emotional awareness needed to do this is essential learning, and schools today have an important role in supporting pupils and students to develop it.

A key element of the Communities of Hope project was finding ways to be honest with young people about the issues while avoiding leaving them stuck in overwhelm. Our experience through the project was that positive, creative action can help young people feel a sense of empowerment, agency and active hope. When that creative action is undertaken in community, it can be especially supportive – hence Communities of Hope.

'I'm a child and I can't do big stuff like move a mountain or change the weather but it's the small stuff I can do that really makes a difference'.

- Year 7 student participating in the project

Starting From Where We Are, Moving Towards Where We Want To Be: Ripple Effects

We can learn about the nature and climate crises theoretically, but as we found in the project, applying this knowledge practically to our own lives and situations can make it much more powerful and engaging. This approach takes students from identifying a wider issue to deciding what creative action they can realistically take.

The project structure took students through a process from thought to action and helped them see the ripple effects of their actions and outcomes. By reflecting on and modelling this process with students, the project supported them to apply the same approach wherever they go next as individuals. As a community, the participating schools can also continue this process by involving students in identifying issues, thinking critically about them and creatively problem-solving to move closer to where they want to be.



Grounded in Our Place

Another important element of the project's approach was connecting schools with local green spaces, such as Bethnal Green Nature Reserve, and with environmental community groups that can help students access, experience and connect with these spaces.

Many of the students in the participating schools were not strongly connected with natural spaces in their own neighbourhoods. Initially, some did not see these spaces as significant, valuable or relevant to their lives. Helping young people to make these connections, especially in inner-city settings, is crucial. Through this local connection, students were able to connect with nature in an immediate and meaningful way.

Creativity and Fun

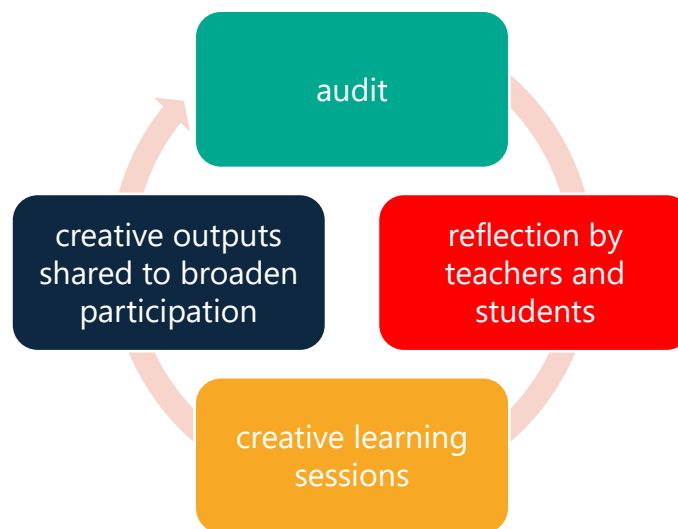
A final, but hugely important, part of the Communities of Hope ethos was that the creative approach had to be fun. If climate and sustainability are taught only theoretically, and out of the context of young people's lives, the topic can become dry and disengaging. The creative, hands-on approach helped students enjoy the process and develop the sense of agency that was vital to the project.

What Did The Project Involve?

A Cyclical Approach

The Communities of Hope project took a cyclical approach, revisiting key steps and deepening engagement and learning over time.

The cycle began with an audit, followed by reflection by teachers and students on the audit outcomes. This included input to build understanding of the issues. Students then took part in sessions where they could make a creative personal or group response arising from their reflection. The creative outputs were shared more widely to broaden participation in the action, before the cycle returned to the audit stage so progress could be reviewed and the process restarted.



Audit

There are many audit tools available (see links below). The tool used in this project was provided by Climate-Friendly Schools. The audit enables a school to assess its climate action across seven key areas: Energy, Consumption, Transport, Grounds, Buildings, Water and Food. It helped each school understand where it was starting from in these areas and what might be possible as a longer-term goal.



Reflection

In the short term, using the audit results, teachers and students identified ten whole-school next steps to achieve by the end of the school year. These were intended to significantly improve the outcome of the audit when it was repeated. The next steps were chosen as 'quick wins' using the following criteria:

- ▲ be achievable
- ▲ have a strong, quick impact — where student action could make a meaningful difference to the school
- ▲ engage and capture the imaginations of students
- ▲ involve a large number of students in action that would help them feel a sense of agency.

The audit results were shared with a wider group of students, and the ten 'quick win' steps were incorporated into the workshop delivery in each school. For example, one school chose to introduce the 6 Rs of sustainability, as outlined in the audit, to frame the workshop sessions.

Workshops were designed to start conversations about environmental and climate action and to meet students where they were. One example was a Diamond 9 group discussion, where different possible actions were written on separate cards and students prioritised them into a diamond shape against different criteria, helping them decide which actions to take (see Activities section below). This activity generated rich discussion. It helped students explore factors such as carbon-saving impact and the effect on their peers' awareness, while also building ownership of the actions they eventually chose.

Creative Sessions, Sharing the Outputs and Broadening the Action

Once the possible actions were prioritised, students began work on their creative tasks, using design skills introduced by project artist Alaa Alsaraji and their own creativity to address the issues identified through the audits. The creative outputs were designed to be shared more widely across the school, raising awareness and involving more students in the action.

For example, one school identified an issue with single-use plastic water bottles and cups being wasted every day at lunchtime. One student group chose to focus its action campaign on this. The artist provided basic design input on what is needed to communicate a message clearly and drive change. The group then designed and created posters to display in relevant places across the school. The level of student buy-in and agency was impressive, and the campaign sparked many conversations among students and their peers. As a result, teachers allocated budget to buy a reusable water bottle for every student in the school, and the school council judged a competition to design the bottle.

Another example was a group of students who decided to create a nature garden on part of the school grounds for all students to access and enjoy. Through new links with the local nature reserve, the students were supported to make the garden as biodiverse as possible.





Learning From The Project

The following key learning points from the Communities of Hope project are offered to other schools embarking on creative climate action.

Understanding Our Community and Context

The Tower Hamlets schools participating in Communities of Hope were located in areas facing significant socioeconomic disadvantage.

For many students in this context, the importance of sustainability was understood primarily in terms of saving money. The intrinsic value of sustainability action was not always immediately recognised. The initial priority many students brought to discussions was not necessarily global climate or nature issues, but the practical concern that wasting electricity meant wasting money.

The Communities of Hope project schools also served highly diverse communities, including many students from racialised and diaspora backgrounds. For some first- or second-generation diaspora families, flying to visit close family – sometimes described as ‘love miles’ – is a significant priority. In this context, messages about giving up flying can land very differently from how they might in contexts where flights are taken predominantly for holidays.

Understanding the landscape of each particular school and classroom is vital for understanding starting points.

Starting From Where Students and Staff Are At

Connected to this, schools are at different stages in their journeys towards sustainability. A variety of schools were involved in the initial pilot year of Communities of Hope. One was in a new building that had sustainability built into its fabric, and where connection to nature was already a key part of education. The school had a boat that regularly went out onto the river as part of students’ active learning in environmental science. The contrast between this school and the settings that Communities of Hope focused on in Years 2 and 3 shows that, even within a few postcodes in one borough, schools can have very different realities and experiences.

Every school is different, and trying to start from anywhere other than where we and our communities are will not get us very far. In a school that does not have recycling bins



that are used properly — or does not have recycling bins at all — simply getting effective recycling started is a major step forward and something to work towards and celebrate.

Each series of workshops was based on the school's particular context and needs, and the audit was vital in establishing this. We have to start where our settings, students, staff and communities are. Sometimes this might feel like starting small, but the mindset shift can be even more significant than in a setting where there is already more awareness and action.

Being Focused – Not Trying To 'Do Everything'

Sustainability is so far-reaching that it connects with every part of our lives. Every part of school life — from buildings, grounds and purchasing to daily routines and student wellbeing — and every curriculum subject connects to climate education and action. The pilot year of Communities of Hope connected with local faith communities, bringing in faith perspectives on sustainability. However, this made the project too broad, so in Years 2 and 3 the focus was narrowed.

Similarly, the initial school audits raised many possible actions. For each school, narrowing the focus to ten manageable goals for the coming year was vital in avoiding overwhelm for staff and students alike.

Balance of Responsibilities

Climate action education requires a delicate balance. On one hand, it is important to acknowledge the responsibility each of us has in addressing the climate crisis. It is helpful for all of us, including children and young people, to recognise that what each of us does, matters and that every action counts, no matter how small. This idea of many small actions contributing to a bigger shift is true, and it helps students develop agency and active hope. Each student's small action can create a ripple effect that may reach far beyond the initial action.

However, this needs to be balanced with an understanding that responsibility must also be recognised and acted on within wider systems: by institutions, groups, businesses, elected representatives and decision-makers at every level, from local to global. It is counterproductive and demotivating for students to feel that the onus is entirely on them if, for example, the school as an institution or the local council is not also doing its part. Case studies and examples of responsibility and positive action being taken in



different contexts, from local to global, are therefore important alongside support for individual and collective student action.

Activities

The following two activities, used within Communities of Hope, can be used with staff and students. Both are flexible and can be adapted to suit your context. They can work together or separately.

Visions of the Future: Probable and Desirable Futures

This activity can be short or much longer, depending on how much detail you want participants to explore. It is useful after a session in which basic concepts of sustainability and climate change have been introduced, and when you want participants to reflect on possible, probable and desirable futures.¹

Ask participants to draw a vertical line down the middle of a large sheet of paper, leaving space at the bottom. On the left-hand side, ask them to portray the future they think is probable. Depending on your aims, you can set this probable future at any scale, from a global perspective for the whole planet to a local perspective, such as the probable future for their school. You can also choose a timeframe that will help them think at the level you want – for example, ‘by 2100’ or ‘in ten years’ time’. They can use words, pictures or any creative format they like.

Once they have finished, pause for explanation, discussion and reflection.

Now ask participants to imagine the future they want to see, using the same context and timeframe as for the probable future. They should portray this desirable future on the right-hand side of the line in whatever creative way, and in whatever level of detail, you choose.

Again, pause to allow participants to share their visions of the future they want to see.

The final step is for participants to draw an arrow from left to right in the space at the bottom of the page, from the ‘probable’ to the ‘desirable’ future. Underneath the arrow, ask them to write actions that could be taken now to make the desirable future more

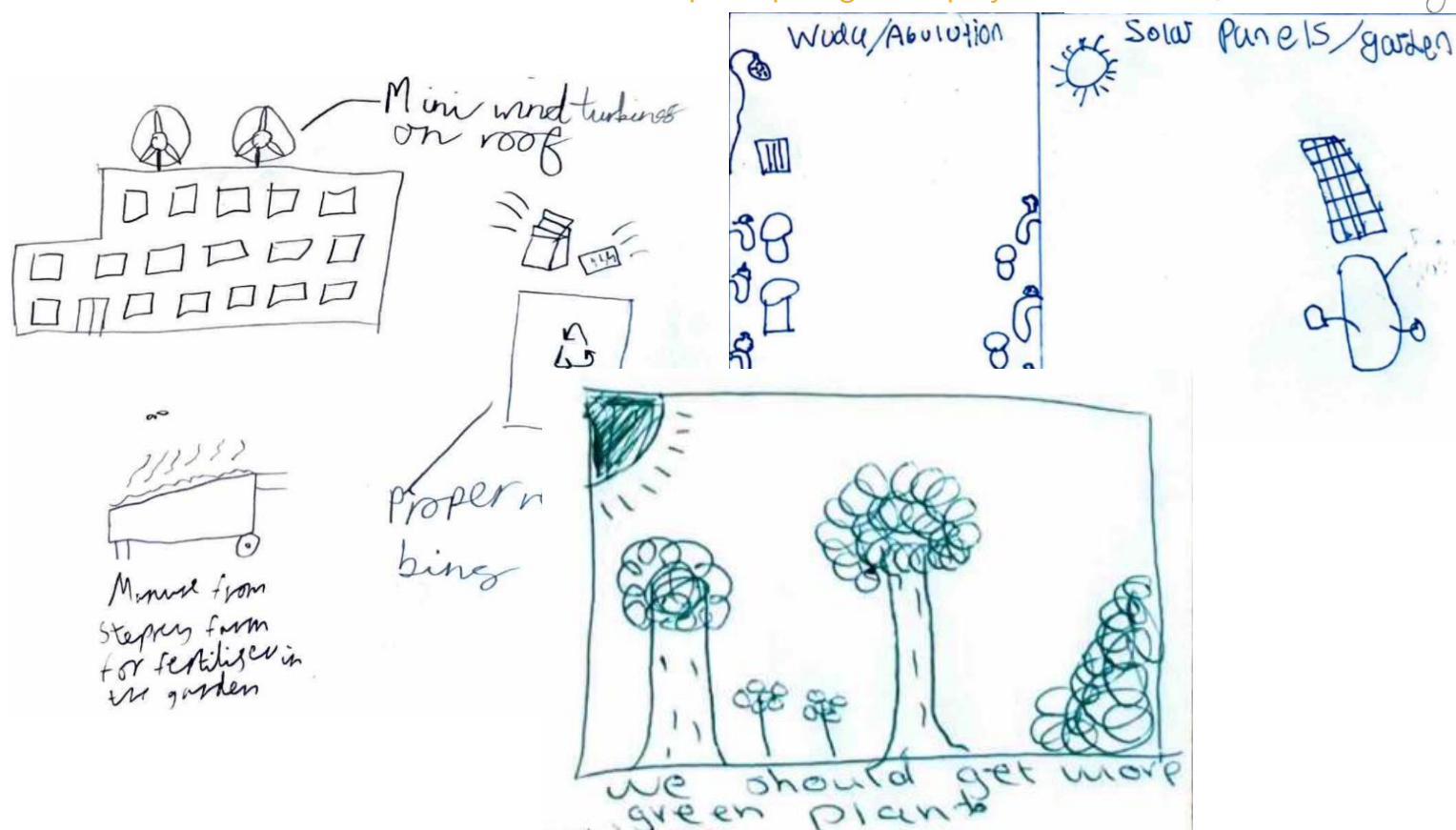
¹ This activity is based on ideas from David Hicks, Lessons for the Future: the missing dimension in education

likely. These actions can be at whatever level is appropriate for the context and timeframe you have set, from 'world leaders' to 'me'.

Depending on the context and timeframe you chose, the group will have produced a list of possible actions that could bring us closer to the future they have envisioned. You can use these suggested actions in the following activity.

'We're still in Year 7 and we've got so much more time ahead of us so we have to look out for what the future ahead of us is going to be'

- Year 7 student participating in the project



Diamond 9: Prioritising Possible Actions

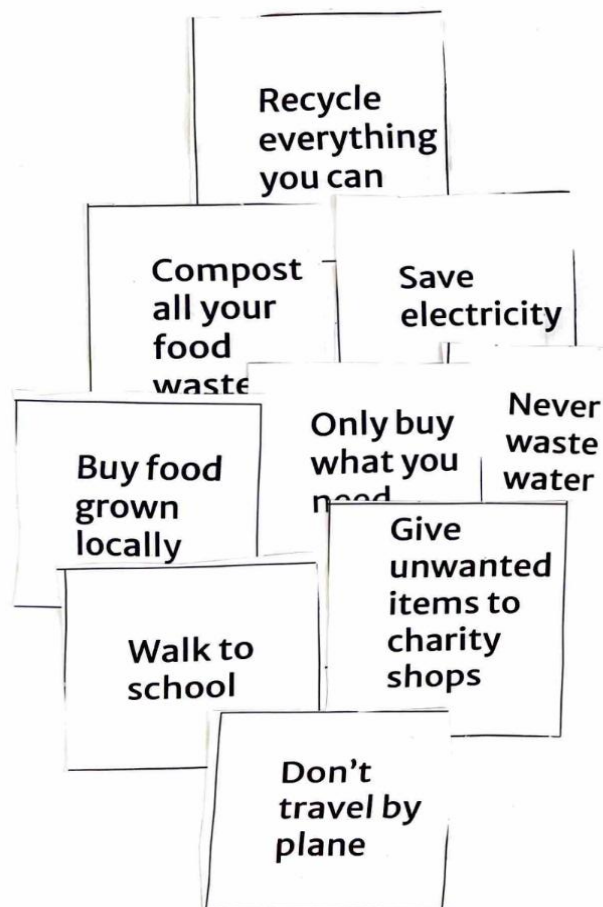
This activity is a way to spark conversations and get participants to analyse possible actions according to different criteria. It is a useful process if you want a group to narrow down a list of potential actions and develop ownership of the prioritisation.

This works well with a list of nine possible actions. Write each action on a separate card. In small groups, ask participants to rank the cards into a diamond shape against different criteria, one criterion at a time. The single most important, effective or best action goes at the top, and the least important action goes at the bottom.

For example, for suggested school-level actions, you could ask participants to rank the actions by:

- ▲ their impact – for example, how effective they are in saving carbon
- ▲ how easy they are to achieve
- ▲ how engaging or exciting they will be for other students to participate in
- ▲ how many other students could be involved and have their awareness raised

For other kinds of action choices, you may want to use a different list of criteria. Emphasise to participants that there is often no single 'right answer' to the prioritisation – the value of the activity is in the quality of the discussion. At school level, it can help give the group a clear steer in choosing which actions to take.²



² For some of the criteria, eg carbon savings there may be a 'right answer' (although even with this so much depends on the context and circumstances!) The analysis here [19 Ways to Help the Climate. Ranked | World Resources Institute](#) may be useful



Further Contacts and Resources

The good news is that there is now a wealth of support and resources for schools wanting to take creative climate action and to educate and support pupils and students to do the same in ways that support them now and in later life. The range of support can feel overwhelming, so this section summarises the statutory guidance and highlights selected resources.

Support and Guidance from the Government

In the early 2020s, the UK government published policy and guidance linking education to the wider net zero strategy. This included the expectation that, by 2025, all education settings would have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan. DfE guidance now states that, to keep momentum going beyond 2025, the DfE Estate Management Standards include the requirement for a sustainability lead and climate action plan.³

Climate action plans are typically organised through four interconnected ‘pillars’:

- ▲ **adaptation and resilience:** how the setting is preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change
- ▲ **biodiversity and nature:** efforts to protect and enhance nature and wildlife within the setting and its surroundings
- ▲ **climate education and green skills:** how learners are supported to understand climate change, sustainability, and develop relevant skills
- ▲ **decarbonisation and net zero:** actions to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, working towards net zero

Government guidance for schools doing this work can be found through the Sustainability Support for Education hub. Further government-funded support for creating and implementing climate action plans is provided through three partner organisations – Let’s Go Zero, the National Education Nature Park and Climate Ambassadors – which work closely together.

[Sustainability Support for Education](#)

Let’s Go Zero provides detailed support primarily for the decarbonisation pillar, although it also supports other pillars. Its regional Climate Action Advisers offer free training and

³ see [Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children’s services systems - GOV.UK](#) and [Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education - GOV.UK](#)



support to sustainability leads in schools to develop, review and monitor climate action plans.

<https://letsgozero.org/>

The National Education Nature Park provides support primarily for the biodiversity pillar, connecting this with the climate education pillar through outdoor learning and connection to nature. It offers resources and support to help education settings involve learners in evaluating and improving biodiversity on school estates, which are mapped together to show achievements across a nationwide 'nature park'.

[Home | Education Nature Park](#)

Climate Ambassadors recruits and trains volunteers with knowledge, expertise and skills in all areas of sustainability and matches them with education settings. Support depends on locally available volunteers and can span all four pillars. Regional coordinators can also link schools with support available in their area.

[Climate Ambassadors: Embedding climate action where it matters most | Climate Ambassadors](#)

Curriculum

In the foreword to the 2022 strategy on climate education⁴, the then Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, said:

“The challenge of climate change is formidable. For children and young people to meet it with determination, and not with despair, we must offer them not just truth, but also hope. Learners need to know the truth about climate change – through knowledge-rich education. They must also be given the hope that they can be agents of change.”

Nadhim Zahawi

⁴ [Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems - GOV.UK](#)



Since then, the Curriculum and Assessment Review has published its final report, Building a World-Class Curriculum for All, in which climate and sustainability feature strongly.⁵

“The curriculum must equip young people for a rapidly changing world... The climate crisis brings wide-ranging, urgent challenges to address — but also opportunities to seize, as we seek to restore our environment. The curriculum ... needs to adapt to ensure that young people have the requisite knowledge and skills to shape our changing social and physical environment...”

(p34)

While detailed curriculum implementation is still developing, the direction is clear: preparation for future environmental and societal changes is now a core expectation of high-quality education. Education settings not only have a mandate but a responsibility to address this vital element of children’s and young people’s learning, and to provide it in a planned and progressive way, as with any other curriculum provision.

Some frameworks and resources currently available:

Global Learning Leeds [Global Learning Leeds – Educating for a more just and sustainable world](#) offers a Climate Curriculum with progressive learning outcomes KS1 to KS4 across 8 core areas: Scientific Background, Urgency of the Need for Action, Climate Impacts, Responses to the climate crisis, Consumption & Climate Justice, Possible Futures, Feelings & Behaviours, Mindsets & Viewpoints. These learning outcomes are designed to work flexibly with schools’ existing curriculum.

The Royal Meteorological Society’s MetLink climate literacy resources offer a Climate Literacy Framework, with detailed suggestions for knowledge-based curriculum provision across a full range of subjects and age ranges.

[MetLink - Royal Meteorological Society A Curriculum for Climate Literacy](#)⁶

⁵ [Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ Full framework is here [Microsoft Word - Curriculum for Climate final](#)



Climate Adapted Pathways in Education [Resources – Climate Adapted Pathways for Education](#) have produced detailed subject-based curriculum guidance at primary for teaching climate change through Science, Geography and Art.

Ministry of Eco Education <https://www.ministryofeco.org/> offers a rich collection of cross-curricular resource-linked schemes of work organised across the themes of Transport, Energy, Food, Nature, Society, Waste and Water. Each scheme is based around an enquiry question e.g. 'Is the Climate Crisis our greatest experiment?' (KS3); 'Is carbon a magic ingredient?' (KS2); 'Can we all fly?' (KS1); 'Is it all rubbish?' (Early Years). The links will also take you through to a whole lot of other resources and organisations.

Thoughtbox has produced a set of cross-curricular schemes of work from Early Years to KS5 focusing on wellbeing and action as well as science and knowledge. There is a taster here [The 'Changing Climates' curriculum > Reboot Education](#) with a link to download the full set.

Audits

Climate-Friendly Schools is the audit tool used by the Communities of Hope project schools. It provides an audit across Water, Grounds, Buildings, Energy, Transport, Food and Consumption.

<https://www.climatefriendlyschools.org.uk/>

Eco Schools is a school carbon calculator which calculates your school's carbon footprint across 11 emissions categories grouped into 4 strands under Energy, Waste & Water; Transport; Food & Drink and Purchasing.

<https://www.eco-schools.org.uk/> [Home - Count Your Carbon](#)

Green Schools Project provides a climate education programme and a free school carbon calculator across similar categories, together with support for pupils and students to make calculations and take action to reduce emissions over time.

<https://www.greenschoolsproject.org.uk/>

Green Careers and Skills

Green Careers Week is a useful starting point for resources and links to support the development of green careers education.



<https://greencareersweek.com/>

Climate Ambassadors regional hubs can connect you with people from different environmental professions who may be able to support your school with visits, careers fairs and related activities.

<https://climateambassadors.org.uk/>

Local Spaces

Nature Park [Find help and local expertise | Education Nature Park](#) Nature Park regional advisers can help you find a local green space near you (whether it's a nature reserve, an allotment or a wild area) and make the most of it.

Funding

Climate Ambassadors' funding padlet contains up-to-date information about funding available for education settings to support work related to implementing a climate action plan. [Y&H Climate Ambassadors programme](#)

Teacher Training and CPD

Many of the organisations listed above offer training and CPD in different areas of climate and sustainability, but this offer is constantly changing.

Check here <https://bit.ly/ClimateTeacherTraining> for Ministry of Eco Education's pick of current training opportunities across a range of different organisations.

Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Climate Psychology Alliance is a network of professionals, researchers and volunteers exploring psychological responses to the climate crisis. It offers links to books, articles, podcasts, videos, organisations and further support for adults, including educators and parents, as well as for children and young people.

<https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/>



Our Pick

Young Climate Warriors provides a wide range of resources, including weekly challenges for pupils and students to involve families in, a Climate Club in a Box to support eco-groups in schools, and Climate Skills challenges that can support Bronze or Silver Duke of Edinburgh's Award accreditation.

[Young Climate Warriors | Climate Change for Children | Cut Carbon |](#)

Energy Heroes offers resources, including free Maths sessions, to support pupils and students to engage actively in saving energy in school through the curriculum.

<https://energy-heroes.org.uk/>

Climate Fresk provides a useful set of cards that can help adults and young people aged 10+ develop their understanding of the climate crisis and how its different elements are interrelated. It is a good starting point for sharing the basics of the climate crisis with other teachers in school.

<https://climatefresk.org/>

Microclimate Books offers a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books about climate change and the environment for children and young people of all ages.

[Micro Climate Books | Climate Change & Environment Books For Children](#)

The Climate Courage Schools campaign from the Climate Majority Project recognises the difficult task teachers face when addressing the climate crisis with children and young people, and campaigns for more support for schools. It is a place to connect with other educators who are likely to be facing similar issues, dilemmas and emotions, and to feel part of a wider movement. It also offers a wealth of links and further resources.

[Climate Majority Projecthttps://www.climatemajorityproject.com/climate-courage-2026/resources](https://www.climatemajorityproject.com/climate-courage-2026/resources)

Acknowledgments

The Team

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