

Eco Councils: A guide



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Introduction: Schools guide to developing Eco Councils

While schools are familiar with Eco Councils as platforms for environmental action, recent research highlights their crucial role in amplifying pupil voice, which enhances student engagement, wellbeing, leadership development and sense of belonging. This guidance aims to help schools recognise and strengthen the dual value of Eco Councils as tools for environmental action and as a structured way to strengthen pupil voice. Bringing together climate action, wellbeing, and pupil-led solutions to social challenges.

An effective Eco Council is a platform where children are equipped with the tools, voice, and confidence to lead practical, inclusive actions that directly support both their own health and the planet's. Through creative, curriculum-connected projects from reducing food waste and promoting active travel, to launching school resources swap shops and growing herbs, Eco Councils can foster a whole-school culture of responsibility, empathy, and action.

Having an Eco-Council will help your school fulfil the [DfE](#) sustainability leadership and climate action plans initiative, the UK Government's ambition for all education settings to have a climate action plan in place by 2025 – covering four key areas: decarbonisation, adaptation and resilience, biodiversity and climate education and green careers.

If you would like assistance to develop your Climate Action Plan [Climate Ambassadors](#) and [Let's Go Zero Climate Action Advisors](#) provide **free** expert knowledge and on-the-ground support for schools to develop and deliver Climate Action Plans.

[The National Education Nature Park](#) provides **free** curriculum-linked resources and practical activities to engage children and young people in nature and the improvement of their local environment. Participation in the Nature Park is a great way to add meaningful education, skills and biodiversity action to your plan.

[Count Your Carbon](#) is a **free**, full-scope carbon emissions calculator. It supports educational settings to calculate, understand, reduce and track your carbon emissions.

[Solar for schools](#) work with schools of all sizes and types, and approach each project differently, depending on its needs and objectives. Looking at funding options such as local grants. Some schools want to own their systems outright, while for others look to us to fully-fund the system. Many schools choose something in-between.

What is an Eco Council?

An Eco Council offers a valuable opportunity for children to take the lead on environmental issues that matter to them, fostering a strong sense of agency, responsibility and nurturing active citizenship from an early age. When pupils are genuinely empowered to shape their school's sustainability efforts, they develop critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, while also feeling that their voices are heard and respected. A pupil led approach strengthens the impact of Climate Action by deepening engagement and ensuring that environmental action reflects the ideas and priorities of the children themselves.

The Eco Council's focus is to involve the whole school community in improving sustainability and reducing the environmental impact of the school's operations. Members of the Eco Council help drive initiatives, lead campaigns, and provide feedback on eco-related activities and projects. Regular feedback from the Eco Council ensures that sustainability initiatives evolve with changing times and challenges. This continuous evaluation keeps the school on track towards its environmental goals and ensures practices remain relevant and effective.

What it could look like in your school

An Eco Council is a group of pupils, typically supported by staff and sometimes parents or external partners, dedicated to promoting environmental awareness and action within the school. For schools that do not yet have an Eco Council, you may consider electing one. These councils often have subcommittees such as but not limited to

- physical activity leaders/play buddies promoting physical activity and active travel
- SNAG groups, for waste reduction, making healthier choices, improving dining experiences
- Well-being warriors promoting ways to use nature to develop positive wellbeing
- recycle-reuse school resources swap shops that extend the life of school uniforms, PE kits and other resources by facilitating exchanges. Thus, supporting a circular economy and reducing stigma for families experiencing financial hardship.

Benefits of a whole-School eco approach

- Pupil voice and agency, children lead real change and learn they can make a difference.
- Health and wellbeing, projects can support physical activity, eating well, emotional wellbeing, poverty and social inclusion.
- Equity and access, actions benefit all pupils but offer value to those in more vulnerable circumstances.
- Sustainability in practice, pupils learn about climate justice while living out its values
- Community connections, families are invited into solution-focused, non-judgemental spaces to take part.
- Curriculum links, topics naturally link with science, geography, PSHE, design technology and English.

Who:

The whole school community is involved. Pupils, parents, staff, school leaders, with a clear emphasis on children leading the change. Every child will be encouraged to take part, particularly those whose voices may not always be heard, including pupils affected by poverty or disadvantage. The Eco Council will be made up of democratically elected pupils representing different year groups and backgrounds.

How: The launch of the school's Eco Council and its environmental pledges.

You will be furnished with a host of downloadable resources and guidance on how to frame your assemblies.

The main launch takes place in a whole school assembly, it's a child-led commitment to making the school a healthier, fairer, and more sustainable place to learn. Pupils will be asked to reflect on what matters most to them, whether it's

- cleaner air
- growing food
- reducing waste
- recycling
- having access to uniforms and resources
- active travel
- Anti idling campaigns
- improving play spaces

and to pledge actions they care about. These pledges will inform the first set of priorities for the Eco Council. Displays and digital materials will help bring pupil

pledges to life across the school, making the initiative and the whole school commitment visible, inclusive, and engaging for everyone.

Consider the following

- Assign the remit of Eco Council to your sustainability lead or member of SLT
- Increase opportunities and platforms for pupil voice, leadership, co-production, and participation on issues pertinent to children's motivations and health
- Develop a school climate action statement
- Review current school curriculum and provision for climate education and link it to whole school approach to health and well-being

Step 1 - Launch an Initial assembly:

The assembly is the platform to introduce the Eco Council's purpose and show how environmental action links to fairness, wellbeing, and everyday life. The conversation will ignite children's curiosity to learn more and how they can contribute. The assembly guidance can be adapted to meet the needs of your school.

Step 2 - Deliver Classroom activity:

Pupils will be given a worksheet to make their own personal eco pledges, either through drawing, writing, or using sentence starters. The Eco-council will collect and prioritise them. It would be recommended to display the pledges in a visible area for the whole school community to see. Adding the leaves of pledges is a great visual of showing every action contributes to positive change.



Planning:

These pledges will be collected and reviewed by the Eco Council, who will group them into themes and identify the most urgent. Adults may need to guide children, asking them to think about what would make the biggest difference to your school and the planet (which idea will help the most people? Which idea is most urgent? Which idea do lots of children care about?) It needs to be a democratic process. This will become the basis of an action plan, supported by staff, but led by the council. Template for this is provided in the resources section under classroom resources. you may wish to work on more than one priority depending on the children's capacity.

Follow up assembly:

A follow-up assembly led by the Eco Council is advised to update the school on what actions have taken place since the pledges and what the call for action is collectively. You may wish to share the action plan so the children can visualise the journey to impact. Please see guidance for follow up assemblies.

Pupil Voice:

Check in with your Eco Council to gather Pupil voice, you may wish to ask questions

- 1: What would you say to someone who would like to join Eco Council but may feel nervous?
- 2: What are your top 3 tips on being on Eco Council?
- 3: What does it feel like to be able to make a difference?