

The Zero Carbon Fund

Accelerating innovation
in school sustainability

Impact report



Let's Go Zero is a campaign brought to you by



A fund to cut emissions, and create better schools nationwide

Decarbonising our schools will be a huge leap towards a greener, fairer future. Schools account for over a third of public sector carbon emissions, and face an annual energy bill of £1.8 billion. So decarbonisation can deliver huge cash savings and carbon cuts – while making schools more comfortable, inspiring places to learn and work. And with school-aged children in many millions of UK households, action can spark wider change across our communities.

Innovation will unlock this opportunity faster. So, it's vital we pilot new approaches that tackle the biggest challenges to school decarbonisation. These include policymaking and finance, collaboration and knowledge sharing, and creating new digital tools to accelerate change.

That's why Ashden's Let's Go Zero campaign, and our funder Green Future Investments Ltd. created the Zero Carbon Fund. A one-off grant scheme to discover, spotlight and support bold and innovative projects that boost green measures and cut carbon emissions in schools.

Alex Green



Head of Let's Go Zero, Ashden

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In 2024/25, the Zero Carbon Fund gave five £100,000 grants to a cohort of groundbreaking initiatives across the UK. This report shares the impact created from this work.

Major impacts include:



Advocacy that's helped secure a £550m increase in the UK's School Rebuilding Programme.



New digital tools that will spark transformative building upgrades, and more ambitious climate action plans for individual schools.



The expansion of a proven climate support programme directly to 82 new schools – benefiting 40,000 young people.

Along with substantial investment, we supported each project with advice, networking and amplification.

About Let's Go Zero

Let's Go Zero is the campaign for all UK schools, colleges and nurseries to be zero carbon by 2030.

One quarter of UK schools back our campaign, and we regularly work in partnership with Government. This means we were well placed to bring extra value to these projects - through linking them with individual schools, policymakers, or leading organisations in the education sector.

The Let's Go Zero team includes dozens of climate action advisors, who work directly with local schools on their decarbonisation journey. Our advisors are a key reason that we're a trusted voice in the education sector – able to recognise practical solutions that is delivering real impact.

Innovation is at the heart of Let's Go Zero. Examples include our work as part of the UK Government's GB Energy Solar Partnership, which is creating significant energy and emission savings at schools in England.

If you'd like to discuss powering innovation in school sustainability, please reach out.

Feedback from our fund partners

“We have really valued the collective influence that comes with working together to reach the same aims.”

Amy Padfield, Senior Project Manager, SOS-UK (Fund the Future)

“Let’s Go Zero’s funding was catalytic. It allowed us to trial new ideas, invest in school-led initiatives, and connect national climate goals to local food action. The network of other Zero Carbon Fund grantees was valuable for sharing learning and finding aligned projects. Let’s Go Zero’s supportive team helped us refine our focus, think strategically, and stay action-oriented throughout.”

Emma Cantillion, Co-director, Shropshire Good Food Partnership

“Being part of the cohort of Zero Carbon Fund grantees has been extremely valuable. We’ve made valuable connections at the events we’ve attended, which has been great for enabling us to widen engagement.”

Louise Robson, Project Manager, Keep Britain Tidy (The Playground)

“The Zero Carbon Fund has allowed us to greatly extend the reach and impact of the programme, refine its key elements and create a model which we know works effectively in all school and socio-economic contexts and could be rolled out nationally with government support. Let’s Go Zero have been incredibly supportive throughout the project from the initial application, through the on-going guidance and through practical support for the training programme and resources.”

Katie Eberstein and Jonathan Cooper, Project Leads, Our Schools Our World

“The Zero Carbon Fund grant from Let’s Go Zero was a game changing moment, which unlocked the opportunity to turn those dreams into reality.”

Kate Trinder, Director, RAFT

The Zero Carbon Fund Projects



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Our Schools, Our World



Our Schools,
Our World

Our Schools, Our World is a renowned, whole-school framework from Brighton & Hove City Council that embeds sustainability into every aspect of school life. The Zero Carbon Fund enabled the authority to share it via regional hubs across England, advancing climate leadership and sustainability in education.

Sustainability is often a siloed issue within schools. Our Schools, Our World ensures that every student and staff member knows how their school is tackling climate change, and the role they can play.



“

The programme has created a shared sense of purpose and collaboration, helping schools feel more supported and connected in their climate action journeys.”

Beth Newman, Brent Hub Lead

Widespread Reach and Engagement

Funding established Our Schools, Our World programmes in Brent, Devon, Bedfordshire, Leicester and Suffolk, proving the approach works across cultural and economic contexts.



82 schools took part, bringing Our Schools, Our World to 40,000 pupils and 3,600 staff.



Many of these regions have begun recruitment for their 'second cohorts', where more schools will be trained in the framework and begin implementing it in their settings.

On the Road to Reduced Emissions

Launching in schools at the start of 2025, Our Schools, Our World has already made significant progress in making schools more sustainable:



94% of schools involved have created their Climate Action Plans, a detailed roadmap of the actions they'll take to reduce emissions.



71% completed baseline carbon calculations and 94% have adapted their curriculum to equip pupils with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make a positive environmental impact.

Supportive, Sustainable Networks

Creating networks is key to the Our Schools, Our World approach. Across each of the regional hubs, schools come together to share their experiences and challenges and offer solutions. Schools also receive guidance from their dedicated regional leader, who also connects with other hubs around the country.

Fund the Future

**TEACH THE
FUTURE**

Fund the Future was a campaign by student-led group Teach the Future to secure more government funding for retrofitting and rebuilding state schools. Success would ensure more young people could learn in a modern and comfortable environment, and more schools could lower their emissions and energy bills.

Using its strong student voice and established reputation, Teach the Future aimed to build support by hosting and attending events, running media campaigns and directly engaging politicians and policymakers.

Political Engagement

Campaign initiatives led MPs to pledge their support for increased school funding:



A Parliamentary Reception, sponsored by Nadia Whittome MP, brought together 175 people in support of school decarbonisation, with more than 20 MPs and Peers attending.



The campaign secured a Private Meeting with then Minister for Early Education, Stephen Morgan, who confirmed that a sustainable school estate was a priority.



Lord Knight, a former minister, published an Op-Ed in Politics.co.uk stressing the importance of rebuilding schools. Five Labour MPs also urged for greater investment in an open letter published in The Guardian.



A Fund the Future email campaign inspired over 300 supporters to ask their MPs to support school decarbonisation. This led independent MP Alex Easton to submit a question on the subject, which received an oral response from Stephen Morgan.

“

A net-zero retrofit programme would set a positive example for younger generations and inspire them to continue taking action on the climate crisis.”

Lord Knight of Weymouth

Empowering Young People

As well as campaigning for improved school funding, Fund the Future supported young people themselves to call for action.



In the build-up to the general election, digital outreach led to 3,222 new supporters for the campaign. 754 of these supporters contacted their candidates for MP to demand action.



Three new student staff members and 28 new volunteers joined Teach the Future.



A webinar series helped young people engage with MPs: 78% of attendees said it made them more confident to do so.

Influencing at Key Moments

In partnership with Let's Go Zero, Fund the Future submitted responses to key political moments. These included:



A joint-response to the Spring Spending Review.



A joint submission in the Public Accounts Committee inquiry on the Condition of Government Properties (which was published as official written evidence).

Campaign Wins

Fund the Future's aim was to build political support for, and increase government funding towards, school retrofit and rebuild. There were some notable wins during the campaign period, when the government committed to:



A 19% increase in capital investment for the Department for Education.



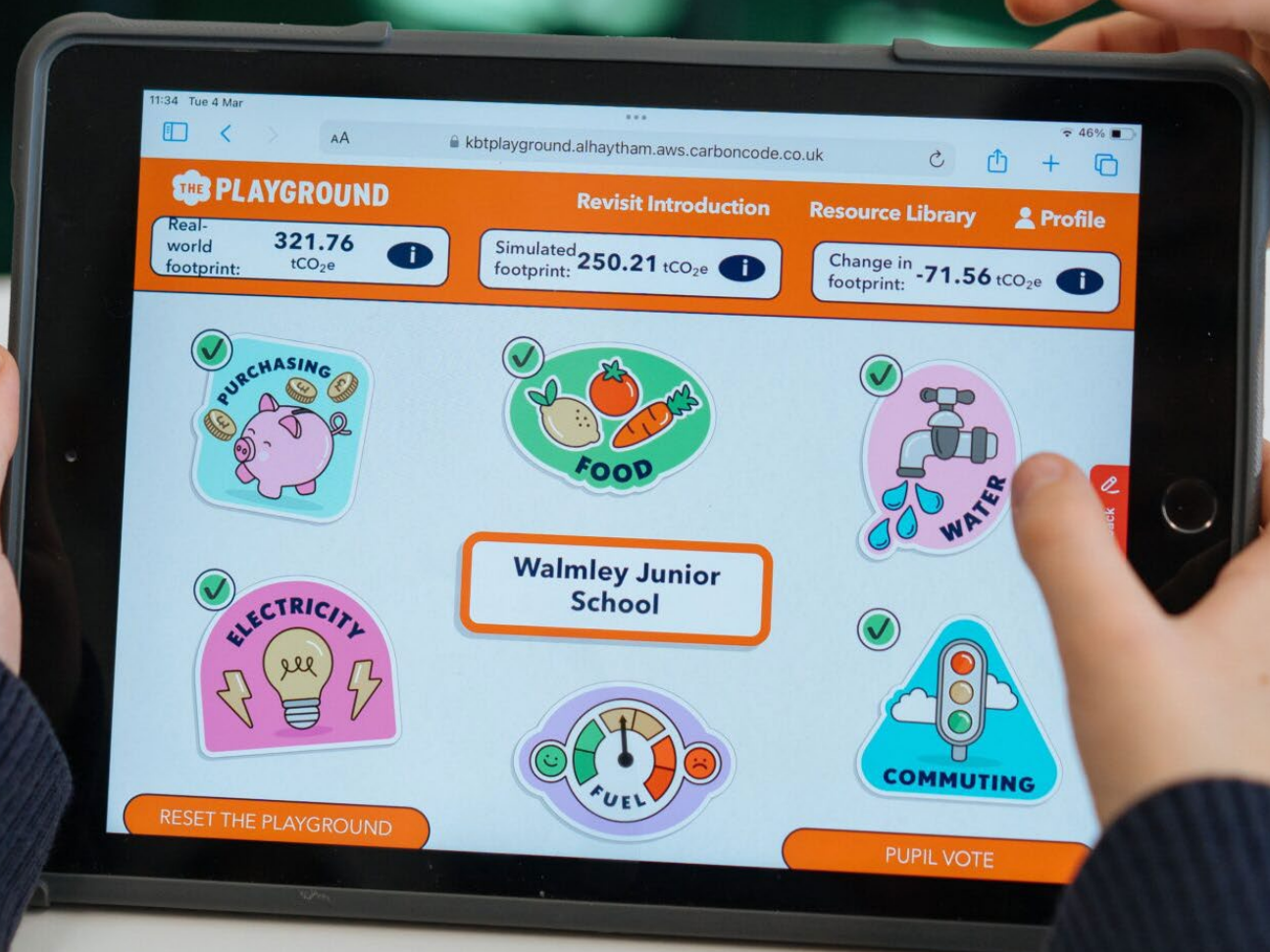
A £550m increase in the School Rebuilding Programme.

Teach the Future have also consistently advocated for a greater focus on climate change and sustainability in the English curriculum. The publishing of the Curriculum and Assessment Review in November 2025, saw the government take on some of Teach the Future's recommendations. They included making education on climate change one of five key knowledge areas, and greater integration of climate education and sustainability in science, citizenship, geography and design and technology. As well as a new enrichment entitlement prioritising increased access to nature and the outdoors.

The Playground

The Playground is an online tool from charity Eco-Schools, inspiring students and staff to take meaningful climate action. Using the unique characteristics of an individual school, it shows in detail how a wide range of changes to their operations – from building upgrades to greener travel – would affect overall emissions.

The Playground gives teachers and pupils the ability to explore their carbon footprint across six key areas, improving understanding of where emissions come from and bringing climate learning to life.



Sparking Smarter Decisions

The Playground draws on real data from a school's carbon footprint report, taken from Count Your Carbon – Eco-Schools' carbon footprint calculator for nurseries, schools and colleges. In the Playground, the carbon footprint is broken down into six key areas: electricity, fuel, purchasing, commuting, food, and water. Schools can explore possible changes in each area and see the difference they create, encouraging a focus on actions that lower overall emissions.

Educating and Empowering Students

The Playground is also a learning resource, educating students and staff on how the key areas contribute to emissions. Students can take this knowledge into their everyday lives, developing carbon-saving habits inside and outside the classroom.

A voting system asks users to suggest which areas should be prioritised, empowering students to have their say on school sustainability.

Tool in Use Across the UK

Launched on Earth Day 2025, the Playground has seen significant interest already, with schools across the country starting to use the tool and see the benefits.

Walmley Junior School in Birmingham was one of the early schools to make use of this new feature, successfully integrating 'The Playground' within their curriculum and educating pupils on carbon footprints and sustainability.

“

The Playground is a brilliant tool, especially for the pupils. Learning about carbon footprints can sometimes be quite complicated, and it's really simplified it.”

Teacher, Walmley Junior School, Sutton Coldfield





The Schools Food Web

The Schools Food Web, from the Shropshire Good Food Partnership, showed how introducing local, sustainable food systems can support decarbonisation while improving access to healthy food.

School Impact

Operating exclusively in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, The Schools Food Web supported 20 schools to improve their food systems:



Hot bin composters brought real cost savings and emission reductions to schools, with estimates of up to 368.8kg of CO₂e savings for some.



Competitions empowered schools to develop growing and cooking projects, improving their food resilience.



As a result of the project, several schools have hired their own chefs, moving away from catering contracts and giving them ownership over their menus. This can lead to more local and climate friendly options.



Food audits, conducted at the beginning and end of the school year, showed how far school food, policy and culture had moved on.

“

“The project has significantly raised awareness across the school. Just today, one child said, ‘We should be composting those paper towels,’ and they were right! It’s changed how we all think. Staff knowledge has grown too—especially mine! There’s engagement not just from the children but from their families and our wider community.”

Jean Wilkinson, Tibberton CofE Primary

Educational and Behavioural Changes

The Schools Food Web also set out to improve education around food, expanding awareness, understanding and engagement from staff and students:



More than 1,500 students took part in over 60 workshops looking at food growing, cooking and sustainability.



The Schools Food Web produced lessons plans on food systems designed to fit into the curriculum across science, geography, PSHE and Design & Technology.



Case studies showed increased confidence in cooking and gardening amongst pupils and teachers.

Community Engagement

Ensuring that the messages in the project were heard in school communities, Schools Food Web connected schools with local, like-minded organisations:



10 schools established relationships with local growers, organic farms and food organisations.



Schools and organisations developed peer support networks, where best practices and resources were shared.

“

We were quite new to sustainability, so this project has given us a real sense of direction. It's helped us reflect on where we are, what targets we need to meet, and how to start embedding environmental thinking into our everyday school life.”

Sarah Fryer & Jenny Ball, Randlay Primary School



The RAFT Zero Carbon Action Builder

RAFT is an architect-led organisation helping schools and communities decarbonise their buildings. Their action builder is a powerful new platform that will enable schools, trusts and estates to take meaningful action.

Rapid improvements are needed to get the school estate to zero carbon, with finances and expertise often in short supply. Drawing on RAFT's vast experience in retrofit, the tool will give schools the ability to identify, assess and implement retrofit actions to their buildings, driving them towards zero carbon efficiency.

At the time of this report, the Zero Carbon Action Builder is going through final trials and testing to ensure the best possible user experience.



“

As an educator I think the resources will be brilliant.”

Assistant Headteacher,
John Stainer Primary School

Improving Knowledge and Understanding

Action Builder will support school staff to conduct audits of their buildings, providing clear, user-friendly guidance that will help deepen understanding of their sites.

Empowering Action

From the audit data, Action Builder will present schools with a suite of potential changes they can make which will improve their building efficiency. It will also signpost to potential funding options and offer guidance on how to approach applications.

Tracking Progress

Action Builder will give schools the ability to log and track any changes being made through the school dashboard, keeping all staff up to date with any developments, fostering a sense of momentum.

Enabling Engagement and Sharing

Schools using Action Builder will have access to the 'Gallery of Action' a dedicated area which demonstrates the school's journey. There is also a Learning Zone which provides lesson plans and classroom resources, marrying education with action.

A photograph of a man with glasses and a dark polo shirt, standing in what appears to be a kitchen or industrial setting. He is looking towards the camera. The background shows stainless steel surfaces and a large metal duct.

“

“It looks straightforward. It looks like it's got a lot of information. I'm looking forward to starting out.”

Premises Manager, Ashmole Primary School



LET'S GO
ZERO
2030

Get in touch:

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