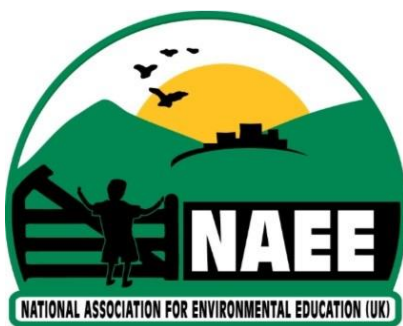
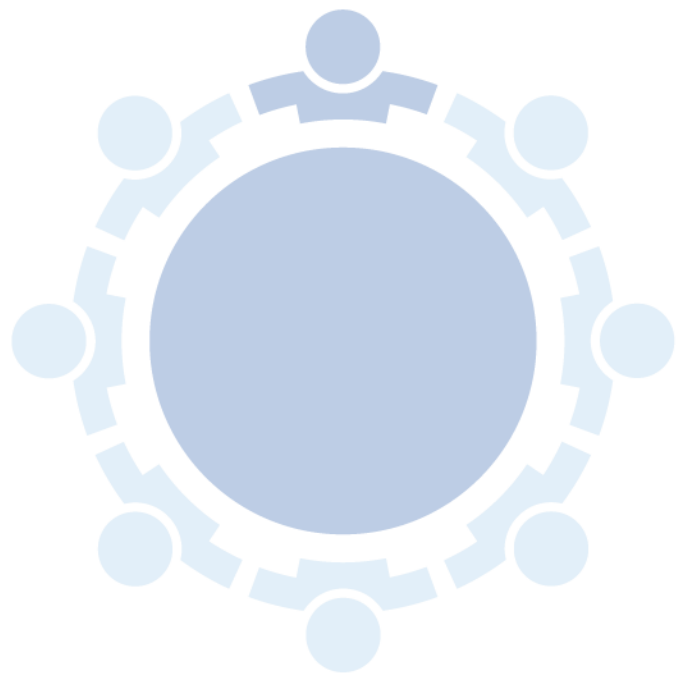


## Developing a whole school approach to environmental sustainability

### A guide for governing boards

November 2020



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### **National Governance Association**

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

[www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)



## Introduction

As a society we have become increasingly aware of environmental issues and the need to create a more sustainable future. Schools have a crucial role in achieving this because they help young people understand the world and develop the skills and attitudes to live fulfilled lives as responsible citizens.

This guide encourages governing boards to influence a whole school approach to environmental sustainability, both by adopting it as a core value and by making it a key element of their strategy. The guide outlines a broad approach, highlights good practice and signposts useful resources. It has been produced in collaboration with the [National Association for Environmental Education \(NAEE\)](#), who support a wide range of professional educators to help them improve the quality of their teaching and their pupils' learning, in relation to environmental and sustainability issues.

## How governing boards can influence a whole school approach to environmental sustainability

### Adopting environmental sustainability as a core value

The values that governing boards discuss, adopt and reaffirm every year when discussing their strategy are not simply words for the website or posters on the wall; they guide the thinking and behaviour in the school or trust. A governing board that has environmental sustainability as a core value is making a tangible commitment to develop policies and procedures that help ensure the value is lived on a daily basis, whether through the curriculum, stakeholder engagement or the management of resources.

### Connecting environmental sustainability to their vision for the future

Clarity of vision is the first of the three core functions for every governing board. The vision is reviewed annually and should, in a few sentences, describe what the school or trust will look like in three to five years' time. Making environmental sustainability (improving the school's overall attitude towards caring for the environment) fundamental to the vision, provides the catalyst for developing and promoting sustainable practice throughout the school or trust.

### Engaging stakeholders in the whole school approach

The best ideas, solutions and support are likely to come from the school community - so involve them at an early stage and maintain that involvement. Discuss with your leadership teams how to harness the knowledge, energy and enthusiasm of:

- **Pupils, classes, year groups and school councils** - young people are increasingly concerned about sustainability and climate change and are looking for opportunities to learn more.
- **Parents and parent forums** – when schools have the support of parents, they are in a much stronger position to achieve their aims around environmental sustainability. NGA has produced [a guide to successfully engaging with parents and carers](#).
- **Staff** - teachers are fundamental to pupil learning about sustainability and school business leaders have an important role in making sustainability a fundamental part of resource management.
- **The wider community** - there are many examples of businesses and local authorities collaborating with schools and supporting them to build a more sustainable infrastructure.
- **Support organisations** - countless organisations work at local, national and international level to provide information, training, resources and opportunities that both inspire and affect positive change in schools. The NAEE website (see below) is one such invaluable resource.



### Setting strategic goals linked to environmental sustainability and sustainable practices

The board's strategy is a high-level document, which sets out how the vision will be achieved. It informs the operational plans developed and managed by school leaders to deliver the strategy. Setting strategic goals for raising awareness of environmentally sustainable practice will generate the operational plans that lead to, for example, reduced energy use, increased active travel, and sustainable purchasing. This will have a positive impact not only on environmental sustainability but on effective resource management in the school or trust.

Strategic goals linked to environmental sustainability should be based on:

- The key areas that make a whole school approach - NAEE recommends a "4Cs" model focusing on curriculum, campus, community and culture (the way things are done).
- An overview/audit of existing practice in the school and trust that includes resource management and curriculum provision – this should help to highlight key issues rather than create a reporting industry for school leaders and school business leaders.

### Systematically monitoring progress

Governing boards and school leaders regularly monitor strategic goals linked to school accountability measures. Extending this to monitor progress made on environmental sustainability goals is fundamental to evaluating the impact of the whole school approach. There may be competing demands, so governing boards will need to work closely with their leadership team to agree:

- What is important to know about how the school/trust is progressing towards its strategic goals for environmental sustainability?
- What data and information will tell the board what it needs to know?
- How this is balanced against other workload demands?

This is likely to lead to a monitoring routine that utilises all or a combination of the following:

- reporting to committees/working groups/special responsibility governors/trustees
- feedback from themed governor/trustee visits
- survey data e.g. travel surveys
- engagement with pupil and parent forums
- resource data e.g. recycling rates or data on energy bills

Governing boards may want to ask or adapt the following questions when discussing the impact of the whole school approach with school leaders:

1. Can we point to examples of how our approach and policies have led to sustainable practices and habits throughout the school/trust and amongst stakeholders?
2. Can we point to examples of the wider benefits of our whole school approach, like financial efficiencies or pupil learning?
3. Have there been negative consequences of our whole school approach to environmental sustainability – what are they?
4. Based on what we have learned, what should we be doing more of or doing differently?
5. How are we supporting our staff (e.g. through CPD) to stay abreast of the issues and help embed our whole school approach?
6. What do our stakeholders, especially our pupils think of our whole school approach – how do we know?
7. Are we engaging with local, regional and national expert organisations to enhance our learning in relation to environment and sustainability?



## Understanding how and what pupils learn about the environment and sustainability

[NAEE's curriculum guides](#) detail opportunities for environmental education across the national curriculum. There are many areas of the curriculum where schools can, should they choose, focus on climate change and environmental issues. This focus should help pupils develop a global perspective, foster responsible attitudes and inspire them to take action in order to live more sustainably.

A school's curriculum is an embodiment of its vision and values. Governing boards who have highlighted environmental sustainability as one of their core values should take a keen interest in how this is covered in the curriculum.

As a starting point for a conversation with your school leaders ask them:

- How do pupils develop knowledge and understanding of their local environment and their place within it?
- Does the curriculum foster curiosity and give pupils the opportunity to explore wider and global environmental issues?
- How do pupils learn about the concepts of environmental sustainability, such as the impact of human activity on climate change?
- Do pupils develop positive attitudes and behaviours towards the environment?

## Leading by example and reviewing board practice

The ways of working and practices that governing boards adopt set an important tone and exemplify the value placed on environmental sustainability. "Quick wins" can be achieved by reducing the amount of paper generated by board meetings (most schools now use a portal or document storage system for any papers) and a schedule that combines face to face with virtual meetings, therefore reducing the need to travel and the carbon footprint.

## Useful resources

- [DfE guidance: Top tips for sustainability in schools](#) suggests practical ways for schools to become more sustainable whilst at the same time saving money.
- The [NAEE website](#) contains journals, case studies and curriculum guides to help schools understand and act on the need to live more sustainably in order to protect the future of our planet.
- The [Sustainability and Environmental Education hub](#) brings together, shares and enhances best practice in environmental education.
- [The Eco-Schools programme](#) empowers children to drive change and improve their environmental awareness through the simple Seven-Step framework in order to achieve the international Eco-Schools Green Flag.