

Environmental sustainability: at a glance

For governing boards in schools and trusts

Updated July 2026

This information sheet is designed to help governors and trustees start meaningful conversations about environmental sustainability at board meetings. NGA members can also access our [full extended guidance](#) containing case studies and partner resources.

Visit [NGA's Greener Governance campaign page](#) to explore further resources, including our [bitesize e-learning module](#).

Why does this topic matter?

Schools account for around a quarter (25%) of UK public sector building emissions, giving them an important role in tackling climate change. The average schools' emissions come from transport-related activities (40%), food and purchased goods (32%), energy use (27%), and water and waste (less than 1%).

Taking action also responds to pupils' interest in sustainability and helps prepare them to become responsible global citizens.

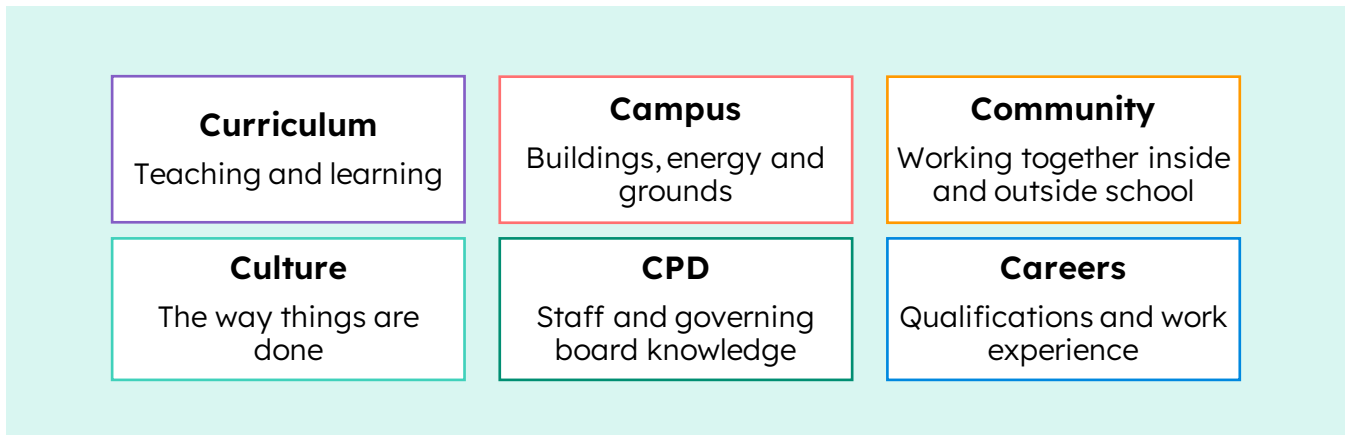
Who is leading change?

In April 2022, the Department for Education outlined how they aim to make the United Kingdom the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030 by publishing a [sustainability and climate change strategy](#). This includes the expectation for schools and trusts to [develop climate action plans](#) which will be driven forward by sustainability leadership.

What is the governing board's role?

Climate action is part of effective governance, helping schools become safe, resilient, equitable, and future-ready. As governing boards determine the values, vision and strategic priorities of the school or trust you should consider environmental sustainability within this, ensuring action is taken.

This means championing a whole-school or whole-trust approach to environmental sustainability across all aspects of school life, learning and operations, as reflected in the Six Cs:



In practice, governing board responsibilities can include:

- initiating discussion on environmental sustainability at board meetings
- appointing a link governor/trustee or working group
- incorporating environmental sustainability into the school/trust vision and strategy
- agreeing school/trust climate action plans

Questions you can ask to start board discussions:

- What happens at school level on a day-to-day basis that encourages environmental sustainability?
- What and when do pupils learn about environmental sustainability?
- How are children travelling to school?
- In what ways do the school/trust buildings and grounds impact environmental sustainability?
- Do we offer qualifications that include green skills or that can lead on to green careers?
- Have staff received any CPD relevant to environmental sustainability?