

Environmental sustainability at a glance

Guidance for governing boards in schools and trusts

Updated February 2024

This guidance has been developed to help governors and trustees start meaningful conversations that ultimately result in tangible climate action plans. As a first step, we recommend that governing boards put environmental sustainability on the agenda of their next board meeting.

Why does this topic matter?

Pupil voice

Many young people care about environmental sustainability. Stakeholder engagement is a core function of governance and listening to pupils' views is essential in ensuring they feel valued.

Global citizens

Schools have a crucial role in helping young people to understand the world and develop skills and attitudes to live fulfilled lives as responsible citizens who are aware of, and helping to combat, global issues.

Net zero

Climate change and sustainability is now part of most government plans and with schools accounting for a quarter (25%) of UK public sector building emissions, it provides the opportunity to positively contribute to government targets.

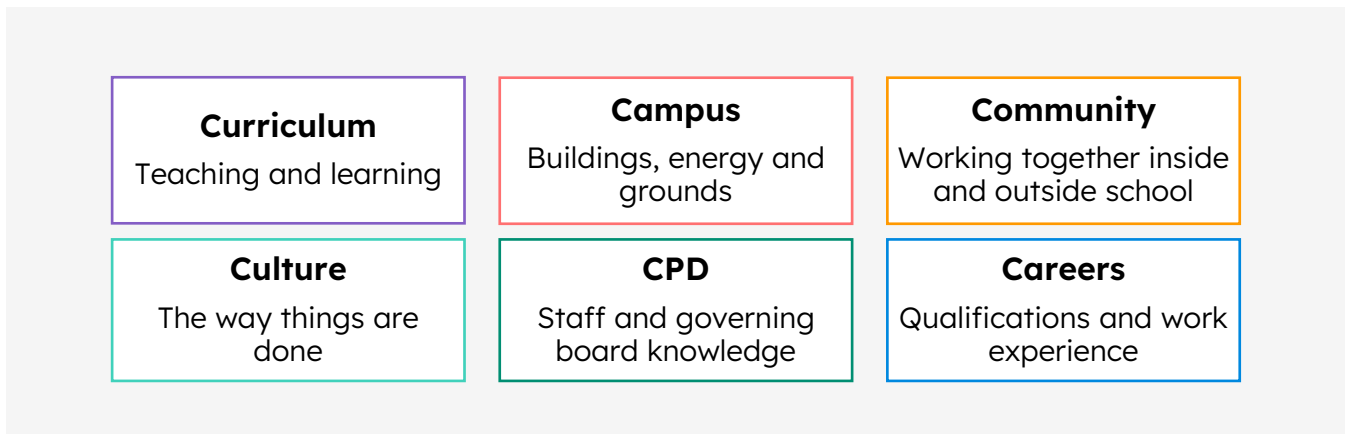
Who is leading change?

In April 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a national strategy for [sustainability and climate change in education](#), outlining how they aim to make the United Kingdom the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030. This includes appointing school/trust leaders responsible for sustainability and the development of school/trust climate action plans.

At a local level, governors and trustees can lead change. It is a core function of boards to determine the values, vision, ethos, and strategic priorities of the school or trust it governs. Governing boards are in a position to consider their role in environmental sustainability and ensure that their trusts and schools take action.

What is the governing board's role?

The governing board's role is to ensure that the school/trust has a strategy for their contribution to environmental sustainability. Although tempting to get involved in operational activities, it is your role to hold school and trust leaders to account for that work and remain strategic. You should be ensuring a whole school/trust approach to environmental sustainability, which should encompass all aspects of school life, learning and management, encapsulated by the Six Cs:



In practice, governing board responsibilities can include:

- initiating discussion on environmental sustainability
- appointing an eco-governor/trustee or working group
- incorporating environmental sustainability into the school/trust vision and strategy
- agreeing school 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?
- In what ways do the school/trust buildings and grounds impact environmental sustainability?
- Have staff received any CPD relevant to environmental sustainability?

Find out more

Visit [NGA's Greener Governance campaign page](#) to explore further resources, including our [webinar](#) covering the board's role in environmental sustainability.

NGA members can also access our [full extended guidance](#) containing case studies and partner resources.