

Multi-academy trusts lead schools' charge to zero carbon

2 years ago



Alex Green, head of the Let's Go Zero campaign, says trusts are showing their ambition to be zero carbon by 2030

Academy trusts are championing the education sector's response to climate change. Their actions – which include fixing up draughty buildings, investing in on-site energy generation and tackling energy waste – help schools save money and lower their emissions.

Schools from 389 multi-academy trusts have thrown their weight behind Let's Go Zero, our UK-wide campaign helping schools become zero carbon by 2030, with the largest trust in England signing up all 100 of its schools.

The pace of academies embracing the campaign is gathering speed, with 105 joining us so far this year. This totals more than 2,400 schools signed up across the UK. These school leaders are urging Government to accelerate its climate emergency response across the education sector, and are taking strides to retrofit their estates.

Sharing climate action knowledge

Academies can have a huge impact on the education sector becoming zero carbon – sharing invaluable lessons learnt between the trust schools quickly, and trialling initiatives in small pockets of schools before rolling out to the rest of the trust. Multi-academy trusts benefit from shared resources and experience, and use that learning to quickly spread winning zero carbon initiatives across their school networks.

They also demonstrate best practice – to students, teachers and the wider community – and boost the

local economy through building contracts for installing renewable energy, and retrofitting schools to be more energy efficient. Some Let's Go Zero schools also source equipment, food and materials locally, to lower the carbon footprint.

Climate Action Advisors offer support

Excitingly, this month also sees a massive upscaling in the support Let's Go Zero is offering to all schools, colleges and nurseries across England. The campaign has just recruited six [climate action advisors](#) in the East and West Midlands, with more to come across the England in early 2024. The advisors provide clear, concise specialist guidance to school leaders and facilities managers on climate action measures, spanning from quick wins to more intensive changes. They link schools to the latest Department for Education advice and reporting, resources and technology advice, and show schools how to tap into a wealth of finance and grants.

Campaign spans the country

Academies joining Let's Go Zero range from as small as a handful of schools in a trust, such as the five-strong Learning Life Partnership, to the largest trust in England; United Learning Trust is made up of 94 schools across the country, and spans from Carlisle to the south coast.

In 2019 the United Learning Trust set the ambitious target of reaching carbon neutral by 2030 and committed to investing in local communities, the national education system and the wider world. United Learning ensures its carbon neutral ambition is a high priority for headteachers by presenting its research, carbon data and strategies at headteacher face-to-face meetings.

The United Learning Trust has taken steps to cut its carbon emissions and inspire students and staff to play their part. Its actions include switching all schools to a 100% renewable electricity provider, running an energy-saving week each January, and adapting the primary school curriculum to have a focus on sustainability. The trust is currently doing the same for its secondary school curriculum, as well as introducing one meat-free day a week in every school. And it is creating a green directory of preferred suppliers for staff to use. It hopes to include a sustainability clause in all new procurement contracts from 2025.

Climate action saves trust £1.5m a year

Bellevue Academy Trust, which manages 10 schools in London and Berkshire, has partnered with eEnergy to reduce its carbon footprint and work towards net zero by 2030. It has switched to a 100% renewable electricity tariff and with support from eEnergy, and five of the trust's schools have now replaced their old, inefficient lights with LED lighting. Nine of the trust's 10 schools now have solar panels, saving the trust a phenomenal £1.5 million a year.

The largest academy trust for primary schools, REAch2, which support 60 primary schools across England, has just started its journey on climate action and sustainability. It has created a six-point strategy which encompasses sustainability – this includes looking into policies, process and procurement, adding environmental impact into its decision-making and embedding sustainability into its schools' culture. It's now focused on reducing emissions from its school estate and improving school grounds to support the curriculum and improve biodiversity.

From strength to strength

The Let's Go Zero campaign, offers schools further support from [15 Let's Go Zero coalition members](#). These include a range of NGOs working on environmental guidance for schools, including ready-made lesson plans and project ideas, webinars and case studies. And the coalition is growing. Competitions to fund sustainability-focused projects, run with IKEA and OVO Foundation, mean schools can involve their students in both creating environmental projects and securing the money to bring them to life.

And we won't stop there. Long-term collaboration with key players in public and private finance is developing through our [innovative finance](#) project to boost retrofit funding opportunities, and a [Zero Carbon Fund](#), to grow existing programmes run by school-focused organisations.

Joining the Let's Go Zero campaign is a simple, and practical way for schools to increase their impact and legacy in the fight against climate change, and we can't wait to welcome you to the campaign.

To find out how your school or trust could benefit from joining Let's Go Zero visit: <https://letsgozero.org/> or email letsgozero@ashden.org