



Hampshire
County Council

Improvement and
Advisory Service

HIAS MOODLE OPEN RESOURCE

Primary Geography

Sustainability

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Overview

This document contains guidance to support further embedding climate education in the primary geography curriculum. It also provides points to consider when developing the concept of sustainability within schools.

Points to consider when using this resource

It was created during April 2025 and all website links were active at this time. The organisations signposted are national ones that teachers are likely to be familiar with but it is always recommended to quality assure any online sources you use in the classroom with your colleagues.

Sustainability

What is sustainability?

When people think about sustainability, they often think about climate change. The growing concern over climate change has been a defining issue of our time. Severe storms, unprecedented heatwaves and rising sea levels are just some of the effects of global warming that are happening around our world. These effects cause widespread issues such as flooding, drought, biodiversity loss and poverty.

If something is sustainable, it is able to look after itself. It is self-providing and not self-destructive. In a sustainable system, such as a successful eco-system, the parts of the system interconnect and interdepend on each other to work or survive. Geography and science are often linked to the idea of sustainability because the disciplines study these systems at local, regional, national and global scales.

Consider the questions below:

Local: *Are local people supporting local businesses?*

National: *Does the UK have to import fuel for its motorists?*

Global: *Do all countries in our world have enough food?*

Our world is clearly not sustainable and modern practices have caused it to become less sustainable over time. To avoid a continuing decline, organisations have come together to address the issue of sustainability. In 2015, United Nations Member States came together to create 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to achieve by 2030 [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development](#).

As seen by the SDG, sustainability is not just about climate change: healthcare, gender equality and peace and justice are just a few of the goals at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. However, many of the goals can be linked to the causes and effects of climate change.

DFE Sustainability and Climate Change for Schools Guidance

The 2022 policy paper from the Department for Education (DfE) set an ambitious vision of the UK becoming the world's leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030 (DfE, 2022) as outlined below:

“Vision: the United Kingdom is the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030.

In England, we will achieve this through the following strategic aims:

- 1. Excellence in education and skills for a changing world: preparing all young people for a world impacted by climate change through learning and practical experience.*
- 2. Net zero: reducing direct and indirect emissions from education and care buildings, driving innovation to meet legislative targets and providing opportunities for children and young people to engage practically in the transition to net zero.*
- 3. Resilience to climate change: adapting our education and care buildings and system to prepare for the effects of climate change.*
- 4. A better environment for future generations: enhancing biodiversity, improving air quality and increasing access to, and connection with, nature in and around education and care settings.”*

Source: Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems).

This guidance is not statutory. **Instead, it sets out a key initiative for all schools to have a nominated sustainability lead and a climate action plan in place for 2025.** The guidance breaks down the vision to provide five areas where schools and educators should focus:

- 1. Climate education**
- 2. Green skills and careers**
- 3. Educational estate and digital infrastructure**
- 4. Operation and supply chains**
- 5. International**

Sustainability in Primary Geography

The advice below is to support primary geography subject leaders and teachers in exploring the idea of sustainability in their educational setting.

How to explain sustainability to a young person

A school is a system and the stakeholders in the system need to work together to make it a successful and sustainable place. Children are stakeholders. However, as sustainability is such a global issue, it may be hard to envisage how to educate young children in the concept. The table below shows examples of knowledge children could acquire to support sustainability education, written in child-speak.

EYFS/Key Stage 1

I know how to look after myself and my friends at school.

I know we need to look after our planet by recycling.

I know we need to turn lights and taps off when we are not using them.

I know I need to follow the school rules to keep our school a safe and happy place.

We work together to make our school the best that it can be.

I know we need to look after people and animals that can't look after themselves.

Key Stage 2

I know that our climate is changing and it is making a difference to the lives of others.

I know that everyone in our world does not have equal access to resources we all need.

I know what a 'carbon footprint' is and how everyone has one.

I know that there are people in our world who live in poverty.

I know that local businesses import goods from far away instead of from other local businesses.

I know that habitats of animals are being destroyed by humans and natural disasters.

Areas of the EYFS Curriculum and National Curriculum that link to sustainability

The EYFS Curriculum

- **The characteristics of effective learning** contain skills that will later support children when thinking about sustainability. The ability to explore, think creatively and problem solve are just some of the skills that will support children on their journey.
- **Using stories** to introduce children to different environments.
- **Learning about people, their communities and what is important to them.**
- **Discovering the different animals of our world and their habitats through stories and small-world play.**

Key Stage 1

- **Hot and cold areas of our world** – introduce children to the polar regions and explain how the ice is melting.
- **Non-European study** – similarities and differences of place (focus on geographical differences rather than economical differences).
- **Seasonal and daily weather patterns** – discuss and observe the effect weather has on people, plants and animals in the school environment.
- **Fieldwork** – utilise the school environment by conducting fieldwork in the school grounds. Explore biodiversity through longitudinal studies in the environment (linking back to geographical knowledge as well as scientific knowledge).

Key Stage 2

- **Biomes and climate zones** – children understand the relationship between climate and vegetation. Begin to discuss the biomes/vegetation belts most affected by climate change, eg arctic tundra, tropical rainforests.
- **Regional studies** – similarities and differences of place (focus on geographical differences rather than economical differences).
- **Trade** – explore imports and exports at a local, national and global scale. *Does the United Kingdom trade sustainably?*
- **Natural resources** – *does every country have equal access?*
- **Rivers** – investigate flooding/drought caused by temperature and amount of precipitation. Compare the quality of water of two different rivers and the effect this has on the wildlife.
- **Fieldwork** – in addition to the fieldwork ideas above, gain an understanding of the sustainability of the local area by looking at local business sustainability, traffic patterns and how the land in the settlement is used and treated by people.

A sustainable school

Though each school has been advised to appoint a sustainability lead, sustainability is fostered through a whole-school approach. Consider the role of the following stakeholders in the sustainability of a school.

Senior Leadership Team	Do any of the school values relate to sustainability? Are staff being supported to promote sustainability in the curriculum? Is the school aware of services that could provide extra support to the families of the school community?
Subject leaders	How does the concept of sustainability thread through their subjects?
Teachers	Is technology being used sustainably in classrooms? Are the children being taught to be sustainable during everyday situations where appropriate?
Children	Are the children acting responsibly in the school? Do they know their choices make a difference?
Site Manager	Is the premises as energy efficient as possible? Is the school's infrastructure sustainable?
Governors	Is sustainability a factor that is considered when planning the school's strategic direction? Is the school making sustainable financial decisions?
Parents	Are parents being invited to share their ideas for making the school more sustainable? Are they able to access the school site as sustainably as possible during drop-off and pick-up times?

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