

“Young people must be prepared for a climate-impacted world”

Introduction

In February 2020 General Synod set the Church of England an ambitious challenge: to reach net zero carbon across its parish, cathedral, diocesan and school estates by 2030. The scope of the target for 2030 includes those schools where the Diocesan Board of Education has a significant degree of influence (generally Voluntary Aided Schools, Diocesan Academy Trusts and majority Church Academy Trusts – this latter category only being clarified in 2025). In view of the number of schools involved we intend to focus on VA schools and those schools in Diocesan Academy Trusts initially – these are where we have a greater level of influence.

Guided by the Fifth Mark of Mission—to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth—ODBE places carbon reduction at the heart of how it serves schools, communities, and God’s creation. Our goal is in alignment with the Church of England’s Net Zero by 2030 goal (albeit that the Oxford Diocese has a different target date) and the following policy outlines the framework by how we will achieve this.

The Oxford Diocese has set a target of being zero carbon by 2035. However, to achieve either of these targets it will require, amongst other things, the replacement of all fossil fuel (gas and oil) boilers. This will require tens of millions of pounds and will need to be secured externally through the Department for Education or other government agencies. We have been successful in securing external funding through Salix in 2024 and 2025 to make a start on the required capital works, which focuses of replacing life expired fossil fuel boilers with heat pumps.

The Government announced on 13 December 2024 that it plans to decarbonise the national grid by 2030 and remove reliance on fossil fuels, so any school heating via electricity (for example via heat pumps) will be zero carbon whoever is the energy provider from this date.

1. Policy Purpose & Strategic Commitment

This policy formalises our ongoing commitment to evidence-based planning, school-level empowerment, and diocesan-wide collaboration in support of carbon reduction. The Church of England defines net zero as the reduction of all in-scope carbon emissions and the removal of the remaining portion by accredited offsetting schemes.

Where ODBE has a significant degree of influence we are committed to:

- Supporting our schools to reduce carbon emissions year-on-year.
- Encouraging evidence-led planning and capital investment across the estate.
- Integrating sustainability into governance, education, leadership, and community engagement.

2. Scope & Applicability

**The scope of the target for 2030 includes those schools where the Diocesan Board of Education has “a significant degree of influence (generally Voluntary Aided & Diocesan Academy Trusts) including halls/other buildings”. It should also be noted that work related travel including school trips are also within scope.*

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Out of scope of the target (but still within our mission to influence) are “those Church of England schools over which DBEs have limited influence (generally Voluntary Controlled Schools which are controlled by Local Authorities)’

This policy applies to all ‘in scope’ Church of England schools and academies across the Diocese of Oxford. For these schools we remain committed to working towards achieving the Diocesan target of 2035 through influencing the following:

- School buildings (new and existing), grounds, procurement, travel, catering, and operations.
- Curriculum, leadership, and governance functions with environmental implications.
- Reporting frameworks for emissions and sustainability.

For those schools that are ‘out of scope’, ODBE aims to influence partners (MATs, LAs, governors) through guidance, support, and model policy frameworks.

3. Roles & Responsibilities

The following roles support the delivery of ODBE’s Environmental Policy and are aligned with the national Church of England expectations.

3.1 ODBE Development Committee

- Provides strategic oversight for diocesan-wide net zero work.
- Reviewing and approving policy.
- Ensuring that sustainability is a standing item within risk registers, capital planning, and Estates & Safeguarding governance.
- To oversee progress.
- Ensuring resource allocation is aligned with decarbonisation priorities (e.g. funding through DFC/SCA, supporting Salix and other grant applications).
- Approving strategic capital investment aligned with carbon reduction (e.g. solar, EV infrastructure). Aligns environmental action with wider education, estates, and governance policies.
- Champions the Fifth Mark of Mission within all strategic planning.

3.2 ODBE Central Officers

This cross-functional team is responsible for the planning, coordination, and monitoring of ODBE’s sustainability strategy. This team includes members from the Strategic Leadership Team, Advisor Team, Premises Team and Administration Team.

Key responsibilities include:

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- Drafting, updating, and operationalising a model Climate Action Plan for all schools where we have influence.
- Setting and tracking KPIs for sustainability within the ODBE Strategic Plan.
- Coordinating sustainability reporting to the Development Committee
- Managing project implementation (e.g. LED rollouts, Salix bids, solar installations).
- Providing support, templates, and tools to schools, including guidance for monitoring energy, tracking emissions, and conducting site audits.
- Facilitating the Eco Leads Network and professional development for sustainability.
- Provide tools, data, and templates to schools.
- Facilitate access to funding (e.g. SCA, Salix), support school bids, and maintain a carbon baseline across the estate.
- Facilitate Eco Leads networks, curriculum CPD, and case study sharing.
- Keeping a record of completed works contributing towards the zero-carbon goal.

3.3 Governing Bodies

Each school's Governing Body is responsible for overseeing the implementation of sustainability plans at the school level. Their role includes:

- Reviewing sustainability progress as part of regular governance cycles.
- Holding school leadership to account for implementation of carbon reduction activities (e.g. curriculum integration, energy tracking).
- Ensuring sustainability is embedded in local capital decision-making and procurement oversight.
- Monitoring compliance with sustainability expectations (e.g. waste segregation, switching to green energy).
- Championing local initiatives and acting as a conduit for upward reporting to ODBE.
- Scrutinise progress against carbon reduction goals and ensure integration into school development plans.
- Endorse local school declarations (e.g. Let's Go Zero) and hold school leaders to account.

3.4 Headteachers

Headteachers must ensure that sustainability is embedded in the culture, curriculum, and management of the site. Their responsibilities include:

- Lead the delivery of a school-wide sustainability culture, aligning with ODBE's strategy.
- Delegating operational tasks to SBMs and Site Managers while retaining strategic oversight.
- Integrate environmental themes into curriculum, operations, and communications.

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- Promoting sustainability through teaching, assemblies, behaviour policies, and celebration of environmental achievements.
- Ensuring sustainability is visible and valued on the school website and communications.
- Engaging the wider community, including parents, parish partners, and local authorities, to support climate-related initiatives.

3.5 School Business Managers (SBMs)

SBMs provide the financial and operational coordination for sustainability efforts at the school level. Their core tasks include:

- Collecting and reporting on energy, water, and waste data via tools such as climateactionplan.org.uk.
- Supporting funding applications and other grant submissions by providing site-level cost and usage data.
- Ensuring cost-effective and sustainable procurement (e.g. eco-friendly supplies, waste contracts).
- Liaising with contractors and facilities providers to embed sustainability in service delivery.
- Supporting preparation of the sustainability section in the Headteacher’s report to the Governing Body.

3.6 Site Managers

Site Managers play a critical role in the day-to-day delivery of carbon reduction measures through building operations and maintenance. Their duties include:

- Ensuring lighting, heating, and ventilation systems are used efficiently (e.g. motion sensors, zonal heating).
- Leading site-wide waste segregation, recycling initiatives, and contractor compliance on disposal practices.
- Conducting routine checks to prevent energy wastage (e.g. monitoring exterior lights, closing vents, minimising heating leaks).
- Supporting biodiversity and grounds-based initiatives (e.g. butterfly gardens, tree planting).
- Logging meter readings and reporting anomalies or inefficiencies to SBMs or Headteachers.

3.7 Pupils (Eco Councils and Eco-Leads)

Pupils are central to a successful sustainability mission and should be actively engaged as advocates and leaders. Their involvement includes:

- Participating in eco councils or as designated Eco-Leads in their school.
- Contributing ideas and feedback on local climate action plans (e.g. walk-to-school campaigns, litter audits).

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- Presenting on progress and initiatives during school assemblies or Governing Body meetings.
- Leading initiatives such as energy patrols, recycling drives, or biodiversity projects.
- Participating in cross-school events (e.g. Eco Week, writing competitions, conferences).

4. Carbon Footprint & Baseline Assessment

Schools are encouraged to calculate and report their annual carbon footprint using:

- **climateactionplan.org.uk**
- Heat Decarbonisation Plans (HDPs)
- Energy Footprint Tool
- Smart meter data

Scope 1 and 2 emissions (heating, lighting, fuel) are prioritised, with efforts to measure Scope 3 (travel, food, procurement) where possible.

5. Targets & Milestones

These milestones align with national guidance including the Church of England Route map to Net Zero and DfE Climate Strategy. They may evolve as new data, funding, and technologies emerge. Schools should review targets annually as part of their school improvement planning cycle. All schools supported by ODBE are encouraged to meet the following:

Milestone	Target Date
<i>All schools report energy data and key actions annually</i>	Ongoing
<i>LED lighting and smart metering installed across estate</i>	2025
<i>All schools participate in Eco events and curriculum integration</i>	2025
<i>All schools assessed for PV suitability; 10+ schools with solar</i>	2027
<i>Electric vehicle charging hubs operational in key areas</i>	2028
<i>All schools contributing to net zero 2030 goal</i>	2030

Targets are embedded in the diocesan school improvement strategy and aligned with DfE guidance.

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6. Decarbonisation Measures & Priority Areas

Schools are expected to develop plans and take action across the following areas:

- **Buildings:** upgrade heating (heat pumps), install solar PV, batteries and improve insulation.
- **Lighting:** full LED conversion, motion sensors.
- **Waste:** implement 2025 segregation laws; reduce landfill reliance.
- **Travel:** promote walking/cycling, use electric minibuses, reduce school trips' carbon.
- **Curriculum:** align science, geography, RE with climate education themes.
- **Grounds:** create biodiversity zones, rain gardens, composting schemes.
- **Procurement:** favour sustainable suppliers, low-carbon food, and local contractors.

7. Funding & Resourcing

Schools should pursue capital and operational funding from:

- **SCA & DFC allocations** for eligible schools.
- **Salix Finance** for heat decarbonisation.
- **Community energy schemes**, including power purchase agreements.
- **ODBE guidance** on eligibility and application support.

Diocesan officers maintain awareness of funding rounds and circulate templates, examples, and match-funding pathways.

8. Monitoring, Reporting & Review

Each school must:

- Report progress twice annually to its Governing Body.
- Share carbon reduction and sustainability highlights on school websites.
- Participate in diocesan reporting cycles for benchmarking and case study sharing.
- Use recommended tracking tools, e.g. climateactionplan.org.uk or the Energy Toolkit.

Diocesan Officers will review progress twice annually and produce a sustainability report for Development Committee Review.

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9. Engagement, Training & Cultural Change

ODBE supports schools to foster an environmental culture by:

- Providing CPD on climate literacy, curriculum design, and carbon reporting.
- Running Eco Leads networks, Eco Weeks, and creative competitions.
- Promoting shared learning through conferences and showcases.
- Encouraging schools to work with parish, parent, and local authority stakeholders.

10. Risk Management & Dependencies

ODBE recognises challenges of:

- **Listed buildings** and heritage planning constraints.
- **Funding limitations.**
- **Supply chain gaps** for sustainable technologies and installations.
- **Workforce capacity** and staff training.
- **Variable control levels** (e.g. part owned sites).

Risk mitigation includes phased delivery, expert planning advice, and working within existing asset management and curriculum cycles.

11. Policy Review & Governance

- This policy to be reviewed annually by the ODBE Development Committee.
- School-level monitoring built into School Development Plans and Governance.
- Linked to DfE and Church of England policy updates.
- **Next formal review due: 1st July 2028.**

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We believe that caring for creation is essential for the flourishing of all children and communities. This policy reflects our intention to serve every school in a Christ-like way, through encouragement, guidance, and shared responsibility.

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Annexes

Resources for Schools:

- [Net Zero Carbon Schools | The Church of England](#)
- [Home | Energy Sparks](#)
- [Climate Action Advisors - Lets Go Zero](#)
- [Routemap_StakeholderPacks_Schools_V4FINAL.pdf](#)

Link to School Energy Questionnaire 2025:

<https://forms.office.com/e/0AHwNHFm3H>

Links to DfE Sustainability Strategy, Church of England Route Map

This policy aligns with the following frameworks:

- The Church of England’s Routemap to Net Zero Carbon by 2030 ([RoutemapToNetZeroCarbonFinal.pdf](#))
- The Department for Education’s Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy (2023) ([Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children’s services systems - GOV.UK](#))
- The Oxford Diocesan Synod’s declaration of climate emergency (2020) ([Diocese of Oxford declares a climate emergency - Diocese of Oxford](#))
- The Fifth Mark of Mission adopted by the Anglican Communion ([Microsoft Word - The Five Marks of Mission FINAL](#))

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