

Waltham Forest Early Years Guidance

Climate Action: All schools and Early Years settings have a requirement from the [DFE](#) to have a Climate Action plan in place by end of 2025. This guidance will support Early Years Leads to develop their action plans in line with the [Waltham Forest Climate Charter](#) and a focus on teaching and learning.

The Early Years Climate Charter encourages early years settings to become leaders in climate education by fostering a sense of environmental stewardship in young children.

Climate action in the early years involves educating children about climate change, fostering a connection with nature, empowering them to act and develop a positive relationship with nature and their environment. It's about building environmental literacy and developing a sense of responsibility towards the planet. This can be achieved through practical learning experiences, engaging with the local environment, and promoting sustainability practices in early years settings.

Why?

The aim is to reduce the carbon footprint of early years settings through energy-saving practices, waste reduction, and promoting biodiversity and engaging young children and their educators in learning about climate change, sustainability, and the importance of protecting the environment.

Developing a climate action plan is an opportunity to instil environmental awareness and responsibility from a young age, shaping lifelong sustainable habits. It also helps create a healthier, safer environment for children to grow up in, by promoting eco-friendly practices within early years settings.



Getting started:

- First sign up to the [Waltham Forest Climate Charter](#) and the [National Education Nature Park](#)
- Create a Climate Charter lead or team to work closely with the setting leadership and raise awareness across your team and community
 - Explore the resources/websites below to support your sustainability journey and inform your action choices
 - Review what your setting is already doing towards sustainability e.g. energy use, waste, water, transport, food, nature and biodiversity
 - Set goals: decide what areas you would like to focus on over the next 3 – 5 years
 - Develop your action plan. There is no agreed format. Your action plan will need to outline specific actions, responsible persons, timelines and resources needed
 - Monitor and review progress against your chosen actions. You may wish to meet regularly (month/ termly) to review progress
 - Communicate and celebrate milestones – publish your climate action plan on your website/ learning platform, share progress with staff and families via meetings, events, newsletters or social media.

Curriculum

Your Climate Action Plan can be woven through your curriculum by embedding environmental awareness and sustainability into young children's daily learning and experiences, teaching them to be curious about their wider world, nature and planetary behaviour.

Communication and Language

Climate-related topics provide rich opportunities for new vocabulary (e.g., recycle, pollution, pollination, biodiversity, conserve). Children can talk about their experiences with nature and sustainability projects, enhancing their speaking and listening skills. Stories, songs, and discussions about the environment can support language development.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)

Climate action encourages children to develop care and respect for the natural world. It nurtures a sense of responsibility and empathy, teaching children to care for living things and the planet. Activities like recycling, gardening and cooking present opportunities that support collaboration and build social skills.

Physical Development

Outdoor, nature-based activities encourage outdoor play, promoting gross and fine motor skills, health and well-being e.g. gardening, nature walks, mark making in mud, collecting leaves, seeds, tiny pebbles, pinecones, acorns, conkers...

Literacy

Children are encouraged to engage in speaking, listening, reading, and writing/mark making through meaningful discussions and activities about caring for the environment. It builds vocabulary, comprehension, and early writing skills, while fostering collaboration and critical thinking in a real-world context.

Mathematics

Climate action activities involve practical maths skills, counting and comparing veg grown, seed size, measuring plant growth and rain water, counting recycled items, or sorting materials and collecting data on wildlife.

Understanding the World

Children will have hands-on experiences to learn about the environment, seasons, plants, animals and changes in nature; like planting & growing veg, composting, exploring weather patterns, going on insect hunts and visiting local green spaces. These experiences will nurture children's curiosity about how people can protect the planet and live sustainably.

Expressive Arts and Design

Children can explore creative ways to explore and express ideas about nature and the environment through art, music, and role-play. Activities like making recycled crafts or nature collages support creativity linked to sustainability themes.

Ideas to consider:



Increase connection with nature: Make the most of your outdoor spaces – onsite and in the community by planting small gardens, caring for indoor plants, watering local trees, organising nature walks in nearby parks, using sensory experiences to explore natural materials like soil, leaves and water.

Food and catering

From planning a healthy menu with seasonal veg to composting your waste, (onsite or with WF) eating seasonal foods, using foods grown on site, help children to learn about sustainable, seasonal healthy eating. Add preparing and making vegetable soup to your weekly routine, with supervised children chopping veg - leeks, potatoes, carrots, courgettes, whatever is in season and harvested from your veg plot– add chopped veg to the cooking pot with stock and herbs. Enjoy the cooked soup together.

Grow your own Develop a fruit and veg patch. Use growing foods to spark awe and wonder of the natural world and deliver all areas of the curriculum for all children. The [RHS](#) have lots of tips and ideas to get you started.

Gorilla gardening- make seed bombs and plant them in your outdoors and the local area. [The Wildlife Trust](#) has a fun recipe.

Build a [composting bin](#) and [wormeries](#) to teach everyone about recycling, caring for the environment, the cycle of life and to support learning about the natural process of turning food scraps and garden waste into nutrient-rich soil.

Biodiversity: Review your outdoor spaces and how much wildlife they attract. This action may include tracking populations of certain bird species, the presence of pollinators like bees and butterflies, or the diversity of plant species. Monitoring this information over time will give you helpful insights into the health of your local ecosystems and will help you to identify and prioritise actions to improve biodiversity e.g. creating bug hotels, bird feeders, introducing growing areas, and pollinator planting. Use a large cardboard box to create a bird watching station and collect data on birds visiting the nursery garden. Introduce the idea of biodiversity and pollinators to develop children's understanding of the important role insects and plants play in keeping our environment healthy and thriving

Go on a nature hunt/walk in the local area, in all seasons, will show first hand weather patterns, how nature changes throughout the year and familiarise children with the local flora and fauna. "[Plant blindness](#)" is a term used to describe the tendency of people—especially children—to overlook or ignore plants in their environment, failing to recognise their importance in ecosystems, culture, and daily life. It means people don't really notice plants or appreciate how vital they are. Increased urbanisation and time spent with devices means that "nature deficit disorder" (the harm caused to humans by being alienated from nature) is on the rise.

[Water audit:](#) Explore different ways you can harvest and use rainwater to water plants and support water play in your outside areas. Water butts are great for this, providing the children do not drink the water!

Review emissions – this is about behaviour change and shifting mindsets- reviewing how we all travel into the nursery, can anyone swap cars for walking...

Conduct a waste audit – Reflect on opportunities to harvest rainwater, recycle/ reuse old uniform/ clothing, old electronics, food – If food was a country, it would have the third biggest carbon footprint after the USA and China. ([Source BBC](#)) Talk about litter. [Green Bottoms](#) offer a scheme to collect used nappies & wipes to repurpose and turn into clean energy.

DIY resources – make binoculars from craft tubes, bind collected sticks, long grasses and leaves foraged on nature walks with string to create own paint brushes. Create mud painting stations in your outdoor areas with free access to soil, water and encourage children to paint with found objects (pinecones, twigs, shells, pebbles, grasses, sticks and twigs, leaves, seed heads).

Useful websites and resources

[The Waltham Forest Climate Charter](#)

[DFE Sustainability Leadership and Climate Action Plan in education guidance](#)

[Sustainability Support for Education](#)

[Eco Schools – Early Years Seven Steps](#)

[Unesco – Education for Sustainable Development](#)

[Earth Warriors](#)

[Nature Education Park](#)

Read Dr Diane Boyd's [sustainability matters in early childhood resource](#), developed and written in partnership with NCFE

Read the [London Early Years Foundation sustainability strategy](#)

Useful websites to support curriculum delivery

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/school-gardening/resources/getting-started/early-years-settings>

[Making the most of outdoor environments](#) – Community Playthings

[Connections with Nature: Frobel Trust](#) – free downloadable resources

[NDNA water saving activity](#)

[National Geographic – composting](#)

[Woodland Trust](#) & [Wormeries](#)

The World and Our Role

suggested book list

Introducing young children to stories about climate action and the natural world fosters a sense of wonder and responsibility, laying the foundation for a lifelong connection with the natural world.

Stories have the power to transform complex environmental concepts into relatable experiences, enhancing children's understanding. By engaging with such stories, children can develop a deeper understanding of their role in preserving the planet, cultivating both knowledge and a positive relationship with the Earth

Here are links to a wide variety of books that will support you to deliver your Climate Action Plan and provide a curriculum that sparks awe and wonder of the natural world, offering opportunities for children of all ages to develop a deep relationship with the natural world.

[Books For Topics](#) – A comprehensive book list on Environment

[National Trust](#) – children's books on nature

[Axel Scheffler's National Trust](#) planting books

[Waterstones](#) nature book list for young children

[Hygge in the Early Years](#) Nature based book list

[Booktrust](#) – books about finding nature on your doorstep

[Environment, climate change and eco topic books](#)

[Early Years - Eco Schools](#) – further information

[Early Years Climate & Environment Book Package 2-4 Years – Micro Climate Books](#)

[Creating an Eco-Friendly Early Years Setting: A Practical Guide : Hadland, Cheryl: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

