



WESTCOUNTRY
SCHOOLS TRUST

Sustainability Strategy

2025 - 2030

Stronger Together...

Every Child in a
Great School

Life-changing Learning



Contents

Opener	05
What's Important to us?	06
Climate Education	08
Addressing the Skills Gap	10
Infrastructure	12
Operations and Supply Chain	15
Engagement	16
Summary of Targets	18

Our Strategic Priorities



Opener



Welcome to Westcountry School's Trust's (WeST's) Sustainability Strategy.

The need to act meaningfully against the climate crisis is now well-documented. 37% of UK public sector emissions come from education provision.

In response, the Department for Education (DfE) published their Policy Paper: Sustainability and Climate Change, outlining their approach to mitigating the impact of education provision to all ages across the UK. This policy paper outlines 5 pillars that can be used by education providers looking to align to this approach to structure their own sustainability strategies.

We have been working with Coreus Group to engage the necessary skills and experience required to develop a successful sustainability strategy, with careful consideration of the unique challenges faced by the education sector.

This document is a summary of our commitments, and is underpinned by a technical report detailing the extensive work that has gone in to defining our sustainability goals. If you would like more information please contact: admin@westst.org.uk.

We have chosen to mirror the DfE structure for our own sustainability strategy, ensuring we can maintain pace with the rest of the sector and support transparent communication to stakeholders of education. The final pillar, 'International', has been amended to 'engagement and governance' under recognition that this is more appropriate for our operational scope.

Finance is often referenced as a challenge to achieving sustainability goals. We recognise this, and are committed to finding a viable solution to progressing this sustainability strategy. We will continue to explore public funding mechanisms offered through national and local government following our recent success in the Salix; Low Carbon Skills Fund, Phase 5. We will seek to make the most of these opportunities. We also recognise that certain areas of our strategy require internal investment, and we are committed to building these requirements into our existing operational model.

This strategy covers the time period 2025-2030, and outlines the core areas of sustainability against which we are working hard to deliver improvements.

What's Important to Us?

We have engaged with our stakeholders to consider what's important to them specifically, and fed this into our sustainability targets.

We have taken the views of our stakeholders to identify which areas of environmental sustainability, social value and governance should be prioritised within this strategy. Together, these form a complete definition of sustainability, often referred to as ESG.

Material areas are largely consistent across our stakeholders. We also recognise that certain activities are more impactful to some than to others, and that stakeholders want to see visible changes to the way we do things for the benefit of future generations.

The fundamental pillars of ESG have been broken down to determine specifically which areas of sustainability should be prioritised according to our stakeholders.



Three main principles have informed this Sustainability Strategy:

- Materiality Assessment

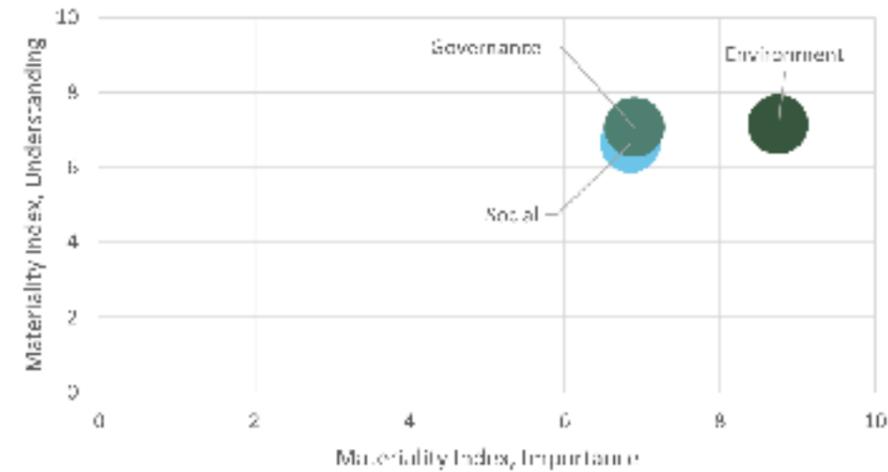
A review of the areas of sustainability that are important to, and can be influenced by, a given organisation.

- Impact Assessment

A data-driven look at which areas of operations carry the greatest sustainability impact.

- DfE Policy

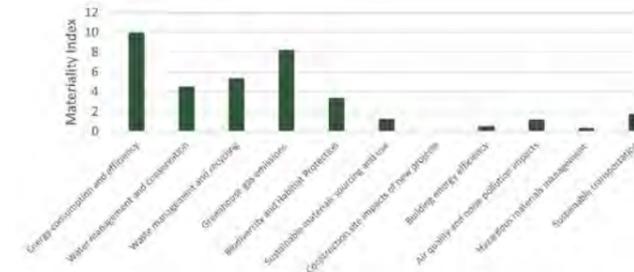
The Department for Education policy paper for sustainability and climate change, outlining sector expectations.



80% of student respondents stated that sustainability should be 'important' or 'very important' to their school. Identifying waste management, the management of green spaces and student welfare as priorities.

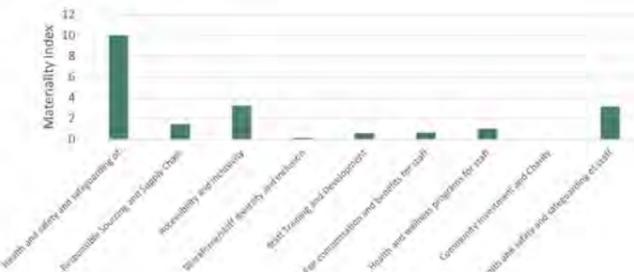
The Environment:

Energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, waste management and water management all emerge as environmental priorities for us. Many of these align to the priorities of the DfE policy paper on sustainability and climate change, as well as high-impact activities within operations. Targets to address the impact from these activities are outlined in this strategy.



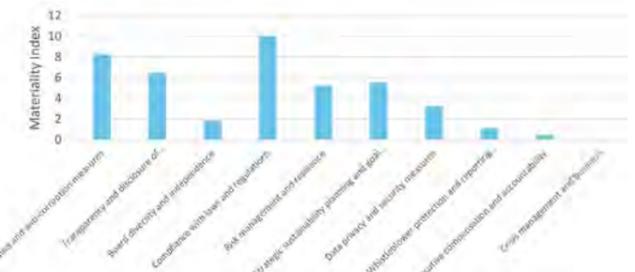
Social Value:

Health and Safety, and the safeguarding of our students stands out as a priority for our stakeholders with regard to social value. The safety and safeguarding of our staff is also important to our primary stakeholders, alongside accessibility and inclusivity. We are committed to addressing these areas as part of our broad sustainability agenda.



Governance:

Governance is particularly important for the implementation of our sustainability strategy, and presents opportunities to embed sustainability principles into our operations. Governance is also important for the viability and long-term success of our organisation. Our stakeholders recognise this, and identified legal compliance as particularly important, alongside ethics and anti-corruption, transparency and risk management.



Climate Education

As an education provider for children ages 4-16, we have a fantastic opportunity to ensure the importance of sustainability issues are appropriately taught to future generations.

Not only are our children going to be most affected by the impacts of climate change, they are also the population to whom the greatest responsibility for fighting the climate crisis will fall.

We will map the UN Sustainable Development Goals to its current teaching activity and identify opportunities for embedding climate literacy and sustainability principles. This will include all areas of the curriculum, and will take an innovative approach to delivering the UK teaching curriculum.

To deliver on these opportunities effectively, teaching staff are likely to need training and support to give them confidence to adapt their teaching content.

We are committed to supporting this, and in line with culture surveys and curriculum mapping, we will identify the necessary route to upskilling where the need is identified.

Learning Outdoors

Not only does climate education empower the next generation to live responsibly and sustainably, but when combined with outdoor learning there is much evidence to suggest it can enhance health and wellbeing, and encourage exercise.

As part of the curriculum mapping exercise, we will undertake a feasibility study on the adoption of outdoor education resources within its teaching activity.

By 2030, we expect to ensure pupils are given the opportunity to experience outdoor learning at least once. Through working in partnership with Arena Schools, we will seek to adopt outdoor learning of the curriculum to all primary education pupils as a minimum.



Addressing the Skills Gap



Mission:

Empowering children to impact positively on society



Our existing strategic mission that promotes the empowering of children to impact positively on society, we recognise their own role in addressing the skills gap required to deliver a more sustainable future.

Connected very closely to our climate education sustainability strategy goals, our work to address the sustainability skills gap comprises four main activities.

Sustainability Legacy

We will monitor the sustainability literacy of all departing pupils to understand the base level of sustainability knowledge of those taught within the trust.

We will explore solutions for establishing a baseline for sustainability literacy of departing students. Sulitest is one such example, which allows organisations to test the sustainability literacy of their pupils throughout their education. We will review and adopt a solution that aligns best with our trust.

Work Experience

For many young people, work experience provides a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of what careers might suit them as individuals.

We will develop a network of local businesses who work in the sustainability space, or have internal sustainability teams and can support in offering work experience to young people across the south west.

Apprenticeships

Leaning on a network of local businesses, we will identify routes for sustainability related roles that offer apprenticeship routes, and ensure this is embedded into the careers advice offers.

It is far more effective to lean on existing, successful processes than create new ones. Embedding sustainability principles into the existing careers offerings is a great way to support sustainability careers and address the skills gap.

Alumni Network

It is common for individuals to continue to identify with their school long after they depart for new opportunities. We will take this opportunity to connect those who embark on sustainability careers with current school pupils, to allow them to share lessons and provide advice and inspiration for those considering a sustainability career.

By developing a network for alumni to engage with, we will harness real experiences to inspire the next generation of sustainability leaders.

Infrastructure

Climate Resilience:

The connection between climate impact and corporate risk is increasingly well documented; our own stakeholders identified both risk management and greenhouse gas emissions as priority areas for impact mitigation. The DfE specifically reference climate risk assessments as a core area for education providers to consider.

We will commit to undertaking a climate resilience risk assessment to understand how documented risks, including those identified in the Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) government report, will impact on our own estate infrastructure and operational expenditure.

As a minimum, this will cover flooding, overheating, water scarcity and supply chains. The outcomes will inform our existing corporate risk register.

Biodiversity:

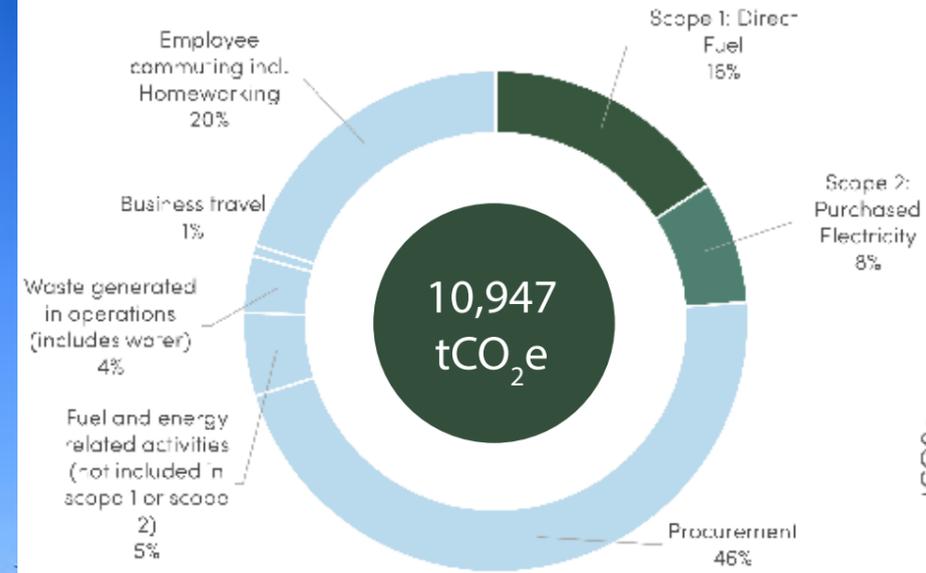
We will commit to undertaking a biodiversity net gain baseline assessment by the end of 2025 to better understand what opportunity there is for habitat creation and biodiversity enhancement across our estate.

For new construction projects, we will adhere to the latest requirement to deliver a 10% increase in biodiversity net gain as a minimum.

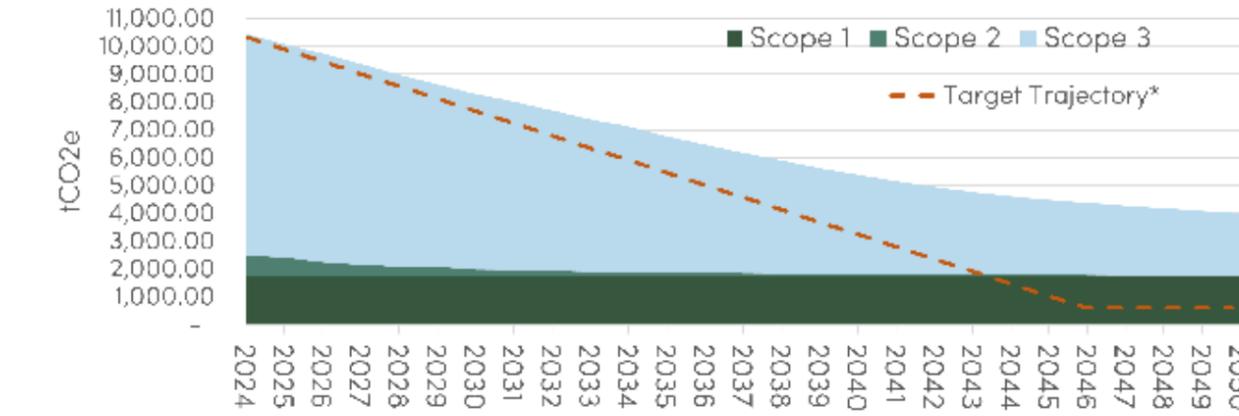
Accessibility of the Estate:

We understand the importance of accessibility for both our pupils and our staff.

We are committed to being an accessible organisation, and will conduct a review of the accessibility across each of our school sites to identify and overcome and physical barriers for those with mobility challenges.



Our 2022/23 Baseline



Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mitigating the impact of our infrastructure on the climate is now critical; the built environment is now responsible for 39% of global greenhouse gas emissions. 33% of our total carbon footprint arises from our built environment. We are progressing with our heat decarbonisation plan, expected to be published in February 2025, to mitigate the impact of our built environment on the climate. We will look to engage with government funding on this agenda to achieve continuous progress, aligning to best practice as defined by industry to ensure we reduce our emissions and remain financially viable. Achieving net zero across all three scopes ahead of the government target of 2050 is dependent on ambition, stakeholder engagement, and available resources to deliver significant changes.

We are committed to achieving net zero across Scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions as per the Greenhouse Gas Protocol by 2046. We are committed to developing a comprehensive climate action plan by the end of 2025 that will outline the interventions required to achieve this overarching target in a cost-effective manner.

Our greenhouse gas emissions profile, as with many education providers, extends beyond the built estate. 46% of total emissions arise from our supply chain. Our leaders' own values reference the importance of collaboration, and we are committed to working with our supply chain to reduce their emissions for the benefit of future generations. By 2023 we will reduce the emissions from our supply chain by 30% compared to a 2022/23 baseline, contributing to our overall target to achieve net zero by 2046.

Employee commuting and homeworking amounts for 20% of our total carbon footprint. Addressing this is notoriously difficult for an organisation that requires staff to be on site, such as teachers. Flexible working provides benefits to stakeholders directly, and can support the mental wellbeing of staff cohorts alongside reducing emissions from

*Our target trajectory indicates a 95% reduction in emissions compared with our baseline performance, in line with the Science-based Targets Initiative (SBTi) definition of net zero. This definition considers the anticipated residual emissions from our operations, which will need to be offset in line with best practice to achieve net zero targets.



Operations and Supply Chain

Inclusivity and Diversity:

Accessibility and inclusivity was identified as a key area of focus, particularly by our staff. We are already committed to reporting our gender pay gap annually, and will use the resulting insights to increase the balance of women in senior roles.

Our workforce already comprises a high proportion of female staff, and 70% of roles in the upper pay quartile are held by female members of staff. However, the profile of role seniority still differs significantly to that of men. Alongside reporting our gender pay gap, we commit to balancing the diversity profile, such that we continue to promote gender balance in senior roles.

As a mechanism to achieve this, we will identify our minority groups, and connect existing leaders with those who experience professional barriers to progression.

We will also continue to improve our existing inclusive hiring practices in line with best practice to mitigate the risk of unconscious bias and improve the resilience of our workforce.

Supply Chain Engagement:

Reducing the emissions impact of a supply chain requires us to engage effectively with our supply chain, and understand what challenges they are experiencing with their decarbonisation journeys, so that collectively we can look to address them.

We will adopt mechanisms for supply chain engagement to allow feedback of our responsible procurement processes, and request appropriate sustainability and emissions data from the supply chain as part of the procurement process.

This information will be used for strategic procurement initiatives to ensure responsible procurement practices are adopted.

We will review the opportunity to procure through frameworks that acknowledge sustainability credentials as part of their selection process.

We will also commit to becoming a member of at least one framework steering group, ensuring we remain part of the wider solution for supply chain engagement.

Responsible Procurement:

The impact of our supply chain extends beyond emissions. The importance of considering social value within supply chains is explicitly referenced in the DfE policy paper on sustainability.

We will identify the staff members who have influence over procurement and purchasing activity, and develop their expertise in sustainable and responsible procurement to allow for the adoption of best practice across the organisation.



Engagement and Governance

Engagement and Governance are vital for the success of sustainability strategies. Buy in from stakeholders is essential for making the necessary fundamental changes to operations required to mitigate our impact on the environment and climate, and make positive contributions to society.

Governance and Leadership is one of our core strategic pillars for the trust, and drives all our schools to greater success and allows them to flourish independently. Clear communications, transparent systems of accountability and a strategic approach to improvement all present a fantastic mechanism to drive our sustainability strategy forward. By embedding sustainability into our existing governance frameworks we can ensure responsibility is held by the appropriate stakeholders, we can monitor progress, and we can learn lessons as we strive for best practice. This approach also means financial sustainability is considered alongside environmental and social sustainability, ensuring initiatives are financed effectively, resourcing is considered within our commitments and our targets are ambitious, and achievable.

Transparent disclosure of our sustainability commitments was identified as an area of focus for our sustainability strategy. Stakeholders want to know about our progress towards a more sustainable future, and we will continue to report on our progress throughout the implementation period across key KPIs for our targets. We will use existing communication channels and touch points with our stakeholders to determine the most appropriate progress reporting.

“Wellbeing: A state of complete physical and mental health that is characterised by high-quality social relationships.”

DfE Staff Wellbeing Charter

Engagement

- We will conduct bi-annual surveys across our staff and student populations to understand the culture of our organisation with regard to sustainability. We want to know to what extent our stakeholders know about all the good we're doing, and how they feel we can further raise awareness for the cause.
- We will significantly enhance the profile of sustainability within the organisation, where success for this will be measured through culture surveys. We will use existing touch points to raise awareness for the strategy, provide guidance on sustainable behaviours (at work and in personal lives) and ensure transparent progress reports are delivered on an annual basis.

Governance

- We will embed sustainability into all layers of strategic governance to ensure that sustainability is addressed appropriately for strategic decision making.
- We will review our existing governance processes and identify thresholds for which sustainability consideration is mandatory alongside other decision metrics such as cost, legislation and quality.
- Placing sustainability at the centre of decision making across the organisation will support awareness for this agenda, contributing to our efforts to communicate transparently across the organisation, and boost engagement for sustainability initiatives.

Legal Compliance

- Legal compliance and the safeguarding of our children and staff was identified as a specific priority for our stakeholders following a materiality assessment. We have therefore pulled these elements out as a separate pillar alongside Governance, highlighting their importance to our organisation specifically.
- We will also commit to reporting safeguarding, and health and safety incidents that impact our staff as part of this reporting system. We will report a baseline value by the end of 2025, and then act on this baseline to understand an appropriate target for 2030.
- The DfE recently published their own Staff Wellbeing Charter for the education sector to act as a framework to promote the highest possible standard of wellbeing and mental health. We will adopt the charter and monitor progress against each of the commitments as part of its annual sustainability reporting.



Summary of Commitments

ESG Pillar	Summary of Commitment	Due Date	Responsibility
Environmental	Achieve Net Zero across Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions by 2046.	2046	Estates & Operations
	Develop a Climate Action Plan that covers Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions to be implemented from 2025, with consideration for, interim decarbonisation targets, high impact areas of operations, maintenance programmes, supply chain and public funding cadence.	2025	Estates & Operations
	Complete a baseline biodiversity net gain assessment by the end of 2025, and from this define a % increase target that will deliver a meaningful net gain in biodiversity up to 2030.	2025 (2030)	Estates
	Commit to a Climate Resilience risk assessment and align to our existing risk management process.	2030	Estates & Operations
	Continue to develop and promote flexible both formally and informally to all staff.	2030	HR
	Introduce a responsible procurement section into procurement policy and process documentation.	2030	Procurement
	Review our procurement processes and identify opportunities to collect supplier-specific emissions data from the supply chain, preferably obtaining their emissions intensity, tCO2e/£.	2030	Procurement
	Undertake a curriculum mapping exercise to identify opportunities to embed sustainability and climate content into the existing curriculum.	2030	Teaching
	Carry out a feasibility study to adopt a mechanism to promote sustainability education through outdoor learning for all taught ages.	2030	Teaching
	We will implement a sustainability literacy exit assessment for all pupils, and act on the results to determine how sustainability literacy can be improved for our pupils.	2030	Teaching & Careers

ESG Pillar	Summary of Commitment	Due Date	Responsibility
Social	Join the membership of at least one education procurement framework and promote responsible procurement within this setting.	2030	Procurement
	Review the existing procurement process and individuals who contribute, and identify specific practices to be adopted and upskilling requirements.	2030	Procurement
	Launch and develop a network of local businesses who can offer work experience placements for students considering careers in sustainability, and actively promote these opportunities. Use this same network to consider apprenticeship routes for leavers seeking careers in sustainability, and promote within the student population.	2030	Careers
	Develop an alumni network to better connect alumni with current pupils, and harness the expertise of those in sustainability careers to inspire future generations. Consider how this network could be used for good for other career pathways, too.	2030	Careers
	Develop a leadership mentoring scheme for professionals from minority groups, including amongst gender and ethnicity.	2030	WTI/HR
	Continue and develop inclusive hiring practices, and adopt unconscious bias training for all managers by the end of this strategy.	2030	HR
Governance	Embed findings of the climate risk assessment into existing corporate risk structure and process. Ensure all mitigating activity is assigned a specific responsible individual.	2030	ELT
	Make use of Class Charts to survey and report on sustainability culture amongst the student population, inclusive of secondary students upwards as a minimum, and to cover their comfort in discussing sustainability principles, the degree to which they feel sustainability is a priority within their school, their satisfaction on the extent to which sustainability is embedded in their education, and their interest in a sustainability-related career.	2030	Teaching
	Create bi-annual sustainability culture surveys for all staff, covering core base knowledge of sustainability, staff comfort on discussing sustainability principles, and confidence in applying sustainability to day to day activities.	2030	HR/Estates
	Enhance the profile of sustainability within the organisation. Success to be measured through aforementioned culture surveys, including the existing mechanism for engaging with staff on culture.	2030	HR & Teaching
	Embed sustainability into all layers of strategic governance to ensure that sustainability is addressed appropriately for strategic decision making.	2030	ELT
	Report on existing safeguarding incident rate of children as part of organisation sustainability reporting.	2030	Teaching
	Commit to the principles of the DfE Staff Wellbeing Charter and report on progress against each of the core themes outlined.	2030	HR/Schools

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