

Is Your School's Climate Action Fair?

KS3 | The Just Transition | Discussion & Enquiry

Climate action is urgent. But is it always fair? In this activity you will look at real evidence from the UK, think about who benefits from green choices and who gets left out -- and decide what a fair response to the climate crisis looks like.

The Facts and Figures

Read the data below. As you read, think: who is affected? Who bears the cost? Who benefits?

Getting to school

Cycling to school	Only 2% of UK pupils cycle to school. The government's 2026 target is 60% actively travelling to school by 2035. <i>Sustrans 2021 / Active Travel England 2026</i>
Cost saving	Families who cycle the school run save over £1,000 per year -- but a bike, helmet and waterproofs still cost money upfront. <i>Bikeability Trust, 2026</i>
Rural inequality	Pupils in rural areas often have no safe cycling route, and cycling infrastructure is much better in some parts of the country than others. <i>POST Parliament, 2025</i>

School food

Free school meals	2.2 million pupils in England are eligible for free school meals -- 26.5% of state pupils. 800,000 children living in poverty are still excluded. <i>House of Commons Library 2026 / Sustain 2026</i>
Packed lunches	Only 1.6% of packed lunches meet school nutrition standards. Families making 'unhealthy' choices are often working within very tight budgets. <i>University of Leeds</i>
September 2026	Free school meals extended to all Universal Credit households -- 500,000 more children. A step forward, but not yet universal provision. <i>DfE, 2026</i>

The global picture

School supply chains	Most school PE kits are made in factories in South and Southeast Asia. Chromebooks contain cobalt, most of which is mined in the
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	Democratic Republic of Congo. <i>Various, 2025-26</i>
Who pays the price	Countries in the Global South contributed least to climate change but face the biggest impacts: droughts, floods, crop failures, sea level rise. <i>IPCC, 2024</i>
Food prices	El Nino-linked disruptions are pushing up prices for rice, palm oil and sugar -- hitting farming communities in Southeast Asia and East Africa hardest. <i>World Food Programme, 2025-26</i>

Discussion Questions

Work in small groups. Use the facts above and your own experience. There are no single right answers -- the goal is to think carefully and honestly.

1. Who can actually cycle to school?

- › Think about your own journey. What would you need to be able to cycle?
- › What about pupils who live far away, or in areas without safe roads?
- › If only some pupils can cycle, is it fair to make this part of the school's green plan?

2. Is a sustainable packed lunch realistic for everyone?

- › What does a 'sustainable' lunch actually look like? How much would it cost?
- › What would make it harder for some families to provide this?
- › Should schools ask families to make greener choices, or is that the wrong kind of pressure?

3. Where does your school's stuff come from?

- › Think about your PE kit, your Chromebook, the food in the canteen.
- › Who made it? What conditions did they work in? What was the environmental cost?
- › Does your school's climate action plan say anything about supply chains? Should it?

4. What does a fair climate action plan look like?

- › Look at your school's climate action plan if you have access to it.
- › Whose needs does it centre? Whose might it be missing?
- › What would you add or change to make it more equitable?

5. The big question

- › *A just transition means moving to a green economy in a way that is fair to everyone.*
- › *Can your school have a just transition? What would it look like in practice?*
- › *What is one thing you would recommend your school does differently?*

Your Verdict

After your discussion, agree as a group:

- One thing your school's climate action is getting right from a fairness point of view
- One thing that could be more equitable
- One change you would recommend to make the plan fairer

Be ready to share your recommendation with the class.

Is Your School's Climate Action Fair?

KS3 | 60-90 minutes

About this resource

This activity introduces the concept of the just transition at the scale of a school. It asks pupils to examine real UK evidence about active travel and food poverty, connect their school's choices to global supply chains, and evaluate their own school's climate action plan through an equity lens.

It works well as a standalone enquiry lesson, as preparation for a student eco-council session, or alongside a school review of the climate action plan.

Learning outcomes

- Pupils can explain the concept of the just transition in their own words
- Pupils can apply an equity lens to familiar sustainability initiatives
- Pupils can evaluate their school's climate action plan and make a justified recommendation
- Pupils can connect local climate inequalities to the global picture

Curriculum links

Geography (KS3)

- Human geography: economic development, inequality, sustainability
- Geographical skills: using data and making evidence-based arguments

Citizenship (KS3/4)

- Rights and responsibilities: environmental and social justice
- Community and identity: who benefits, who bears costs, how decisions get made

PSHE

- Understanding social inequality; active citizenship; local and global connections

Science (KS3)

- Climate change; human impacts on the environment; sustainable development

Running the session

Starter (10 minutes)

Ask pupils: 'Name one thing your school does for sustainability. Who can do it? Who might find it harder?' Take two or three quick responses -- you do not need to resolve the question yet, just activate the thinking.

Facts and figures (15 minutes)

Give pupils time to work through the facts and figures on the pupil sheet -- individually first, then share in pairs. Draw attention to the three areas: transport, food, and global supply chains. Ask: what surprises you? What do you already know?

Key teaching point

Families packing non-compliant packed lunches, or pupils who cannot cycle, are not making 'bad choices'. They are responding to real constraints. The just transition question is: whose constraints are we designing our climate action around?

Discussion questions (25-35 minutes)

Groups of 3-4 work through the discussion questions. Not all groups need to take all questions -- you can assign different questions to different groups and share findings at the end.

Common sticking points to look out for:

- 'But we can't help where our stuff is made' -- yes, but we can notice it, talk about it, and make it part of the curriculum
- 'Isn't it the government's responsibility?' -- yes, and also: what can a school do? Both are true
- 'Our school already has a green plan' -- great: the question is whether that plan has an equity lens

The verdict (10-15 minutes)

Each group produces three statements using the verdict template. Groups share their recommendations. You can collate these on a shared document or whiteboard. If the school has a student eco-council, these recommendations could genuinely feed in.

Extension / homework

Pupils research one aspect of the school's supply chain -- the PE kit brand, Chromebook components, one canteen ingredient -- and report back on what they found and what it means for the school's sustainability work.

Handling sensitive moments

The food discussion can touch on real family experience. Some pupils in the room may be eligible for free school meals; others may know this about their peers.

Suggested framing

'We are looking at systems and policies here, not individual choices. The question is not what any particular family does -- it is what the system asks them to do, and whether that is fair.'
Frame the discussion at the structural level, not the personal one.

If pupils raise their own family experience -- with food costs, cycling barriers, or work patterns -- receive it seriously and use it to enrich the discussion. These are exactly the real-world connections this activity is designed to surface.

Background: what is the just transition?

The just transition is a framework for thinking about how we move to a green economy in a way that is fair. It was developed by trade unions in the 1990s in the context of workers in fossil fuel industries, and has since been taken up by the United Nations, the UK government, and climate justice movements worldwide.

At its simplest: the people who bear the costs of decarbonisation should not be the same people who have already borne the costs of the fossil fuel economy. Workers who lose jobs in coal or steel should not be left behind. Communities built around oil and gas should not face economic collapse without support. Countries in the Global South, which contributed least to emissions, should not face the worst impacts without help.

Translated to the school level: the pupils who find active travel difficult, who cannot afford sustainable food, whose family finances are most stretched -- these pupils should not be the ones for whom climate action feels like an additional burden. Equity is not a secondary consideration. It is the point.

References

[Bikeability Trust -- Cycle to School Week 2026 \(June 2026\)](#)

[POST Parliament -- Active travel briefing \(March 2025\)](#)

[House of Commons Library -- School meals and nutritional standards: England \(July 2026\)](#)

[House of Commons Library -- Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals \(July 2026\)](#)

[Sustain -- Healthy school food for all \(2026\)](#)