

DfE's 10-Year Education Estates Strategy

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How UK Schools Can Deliver Full Decarbonisation (LED + Solar PV + ASHP) This Summer 2026 - Net Zero Ready, Data-Ready and Zero Disruption

Following last week's feature in The School Network on the opportunities created by the £710 million Renewal and Retrofit Programme, the DfE has now published its landmark **Education Estates Strategy: A Decade of National Renewal** (11 February 2026).

This 10-year plan, backed by **£38 billion** in capital investment - the highest level since 2010 - marks a decisive shift away from reactive "patch and mend" maintenance toward proactive, data-driven estate renewal. Structured around three pillars (Manage the estate, Improve and renew the estate, Build and rebuild), the Strategy explicitly calls for energy efficiency upgrades, renewables and low-carbon heating to make every school **net zero ready**, while introducing the new "Manage Your Education Estate" digital service.

Many estates leads and school business managers are now asking the bigger practical question:

"How do we actually turn this new 10-year Strategy into reality - delivering LED lighting, rooftop Solar PV **and** air-source heat pumps (ASHP) this summer - while becoming fully compliant with the new School Estate Management Standards and

ready for the digital platform?”

The answer is clear, proven and already being delivered at scale by education-sector specialists who understand live school environments.

With Retrofit Programme pilots launching in April 2026, CIF 2026-27 outcomes imminent, the new digital service now live, and the six-week summer holiday fast approaching, now is the moment to move from national vision to school-level delivery.

In this latest expert co-feature, the **Good Eco Group** - the education-sector decarbonisation specialist with 20+ years' experience and more than 120 schools upgraded in the last three years - shows exactly how schools can deliver a complete first-phase decarbonisation programme this summer, fully aligned with the DfE's new Strategy and with zero disruption to teaching.

The 2026 Delivery Timeline: Aligned with the New National Strategy

Schools that want to secure funding, complete works, generate immediate savings and submit compliant estate returns from autumn 2026 must follow this tight, achievable schedule:

- February-March 2026 — Free site assessments, energy modelling, digital estate readiness review and board approval · April 2026 — Renewal and Retrofit Programme pilot applications open + CIF 2026-27 outcomes released · May-June 2026 — Detailed design, DNO applications, BMS integration planning and full safeguarding/digital compliance plans · July-August 2026 — Full installation during the six-week summer break · September 2026 — Commissioning, live monitoring dashboards operational, and automatic data feed into the new “Manage Your Education Estate” platform

Real-World Proof: From LED & Solar Success to Full ASHP Delivery

Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust (21 Primary Schools - Summer 2025) Good Eco Group completed a full internal and external LED lighting upgrade across 21 schools entirely within the six-week summer holiday, with full preparation for Phase 2 rooftop Solar PV. **Results:** 61% average energy reduction, £105,000+ annual savings, 68-69 tonnes CO₂e cut per year, and a

3.11-year average payback.

Southminster C of E Primary School - Salix Funded 168kW ASHP Decarbonisation Programme (Phase 1 of 3-site rollout) the Good Eco Group is currently delivering a landmark full gas-to-heat-pump conversion at Southminster C of E Primary School - the perfect demonstration of the complex retrofit capability the new Strategy demands.

Scope of Works • Complete removal and disposal of existing gas boilers and legacy plant • Installation of 168kW air-to-water heat pump systems serving multiple buildings • Construction of a new dedicated plant room • Integration of advanced Building Management System (BMS) controls • Full electrical infrastructure upgrades • DNO capacity upgrade coordination with UK Power Networks • Site civils and enabling works including substation relocation • Delivered as Principal Contractor with full safeguarding compliance

This project proves Good Eco Group can manage end-to-end heating decarbonisation - including electrical upgrades, digital controls and grid liaison - in active school settings.

Good Eco Group's 7-Step Delivery Process - Now Fully Aligned with the DfE's Digital Platform

1. Free Whole-Estate Assessment & Digital Readiness Review - Roof surveys, energy modelling and preparation for the "Manage Your Education Estate" platform
2. LED-First Strategy - Reduce base load first so Solar PV and future ASHP systems are optimally sized
3. Tailored Funding Roadmap - Expert stacking of Salix, CIF, Greener Good pay-as-you-save finance, Great British Energy and AIA tax allowances
4. Out-of-Term Scheduling & Full Compliance - Central coordination with every school's safeguarding and new estate management standards
5. In-House Principal Contractor Installation - Dedicated education teams handle everything (no sub-contractors)
6. Seamless Commissioning & Digital Monitoring - Real-time dashboards built to feed data directly into the DfE platform for effortless annual returns
7. Phase 2 & 3 Planning - Battery storage, full heat pump rollout and fabric

upgrades designed and costed from day one

Overcoming the Biggest 2026 Challenges

“We can’t afford any disruption” → All works completed out-of-term. Schools reopen with brighter, warmer, net-zero-ready buildings. “New digital reporting and standards feel overwhelming” → Our dashboards make compliance automatic. “Grid, DNO and complex coordination is too much” → Fully handled in-house as Principal Contractor - exactly as at Southminster. “Board approval in tight budgets” → Pay-as-you-save + Salix stacking makes projects cost-neutral or cashflow-positive from month one.

What Happens After Summer 2026?

Phase 1 (LED + Solar PV + ASHP readiness) creates the perfect compliant foundation. Many trusts then accelerate straight into full Phase 2 and 3 works - expanded heat pumps, battery storage and fabric upgrades - all pre-planned and aligned with the 10-year Strategy.

Practical Next Steps for School Leaders

1. Book your free 2026 Whole-Estate Assessment and Digital Readiness Review this month (limited summer slots remain).
2. Align your Climate Action Plan with the new School Estate Management Standards.
3. Compare school-owned funding models side-by-side (why they beat PPAs long-term).
4. Secure early board approval with clear payback, carbon and compliance data.

James Heath, Marketing Manager at the Good Eco Group, explains: “The new DfE Education Estates Strategy has raised the bar. Our education-specialist teams deliver the complete technical solution - plus the digital compliance the Strategy now requires - so estates teams can focus on education while we deliver measurable carbon, cost and compliance results.”

Time to Turn National Strategy into School Reality

Summer 2026 is the delivery window that will define the next decade of your estate under the DfE’s 10-year plan. The funding, the digital tools, the policy

support and the proven delivery model are all in place right now.

Whether you manage one site or twenty, completing LED, Solar PV and ASHP works this summer will make your schools net zero ready, data compliant and future-proof - with immediate savings and a powerful story for pupils, parents and Ofsted.

Ready to be among the first schools fully aligned with the DfE's Decade of National Renewal?

Contact the Good Eco Group today for a no-obligation, education-specific assessment and 2026 funding + digital roadmap. With our track record on projects exactly like the Vine Schools Trust and Southminster C of E Primary School, you will be in expert hands from day one.

Let's make this the summer your schools move decisively from strategy to reality.

Co-featured in partnership with the Good Eco Group - leading providers of energy efficiency and full decarbonisation solutions for the UK education sector. Visit goodecogroup.com or email education@goodecogroup.com.

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All figures and outcomes drawn from the Good Eco Group project data and DfE publications as of March 2026. Individual results vary by site; full feasibility assessments recommended.