

# UK Schools: Solar, LED & Full Decarbonisation Without Disruption

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## **From Vision to Reality: How UK Schools Can Deliver Solar PV, LED Upgrades & Full Decarbonisation This Summer 2026 - Without Disruption**

Last week's feature in *The School Network* highlighted the powerful opportunity for UK schools to embrace rooftop solar PV, LED lighting, and low-carbon technologies in 2026 - backed by the DfE's refreshed Education Estates Strategy, the £710 million Renewal and Retrofit Programme, and mandatory Climate Action Plans.

Many estates leads and school business managers have since asked the practical next question:

**“How do we actually make this happen - safely, on time, and with zero disruption to teaching - in the critical summer 2026 window?”**

The answer is clear, proven, and already being delivered at scale by specialist partners who understand live school environments. With the Retrofit Programme pilots launching in April, CIF 2026-27 outcomes expected in spring, and the six-week summer holiday fast approaching, now is the moment to move from ambition to action.

In this follow-up expert co-feature, we outline exactly how schools can deliver solar PV, LED upgrades, and the first phase of full decarbonisation this summer - without compromising safeguarding, pupil experience, or staff wellbeing.

**Good Eco Group** - the education-sector specialist with 19+ years' experience and more than 120 schools upgraded in the last three years - shares the proven delivery model that made their landmark Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust project a success.

### **The 2026 Delivery Timeline: Why Summer Is Non-Negotiable**

School estates teams that want to secure funding, complete works, and see savings from September 2026 must follow a tight but achievable schedule:

- **February-March 2026** — Free site assessments, energy modelling, funding roadmaps, and board approval
- **April 2026** — Retrofit Programme applications open + CIF outcomes released
- **May-June 2026** — Detailed design, procurement, DNO grid applications, and final safeguarding plans
- **July-August 2026** — Full installation during the six-week summer break
- **September 2026** — Commissioning, performance monitoring, and updated Climate Action Plan

Delaying even by a few weeks risks missing the prime delivery window or losing access to this year's funding streams.

### **Real-World Proof: The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust (21 Primary Schools)**

In summer 2025, Good Eco Group completed one of the largest coordinated education decarbonisation programmes in the UK: a full LED lighting upgrade across **21 primary schools** in the Vine Schools Trust - delivered **entirely within the six-week summer holiday**.

#### **Scope of Works**

- Complete internal and external LED replacements (classrooms, corridors, halls, kitchens, plant rooms, and outdoor areas)
- Detailed energy and site assessments to baseline electrical demand

- Design and preparation for roof-mounted Solar PV systems to maximise future on-site generation
- Integration with existing infrastructure and careful management of asbestos risks on several sites
- Full grid connection coordination ready for Phase 2 renewables

**Approach** A single central project team managed every site with identical standards. All works were scheduled around strict safeguarding protocols, site access rules, and term-time restrictions. In-house engineering teams handled design, installation, testing, and handover - ensuring every school was handed back ready for the new academic year.

## **Outcomes**

- Annual carbon reduction: 68-69 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e
- Annual energy cost savings: £105,000+
- Average energy reduction: 61%
- Average payback period: 3.11 years
- New lighting lifespan: 10-13+ years
- Compound annual savings across the Trust: £1 million

*Suthan Santhaguru, Director of Finance, Vine Schools Trust, said:*

*“With 23 schools in our trust, it’s vital we address our collective carbon footprint and act on sustainability. By switching to solar energy and LED lighting, we expect to save £150,000 annually.”*

This project proves that large-scale decarbonisation across multiple sites is not only possible during the summer break - it is the smartest and safest way to do it.

## **Good Eco Group’s 7-Step Proven Delivery Process**

Good Eco Group’s education-specialist model removes risk and complexity for busy school leaders:

1. **Free Whole-Estate Assessment** - Roof surveys, energy modelling, and decarbonisation roadmap (no obligation)
2. **LED-First Strategy** - Reduce base load first so Solar PV can be right-sized for maximum ROI

3. **Tailored Funding Roadmap** - Stacking Greener Good Fund (pay-as-you-save), Salix, CIF, Great British Energy, and AIA tax allowances
4. **Out-of-Term Scheduling & Safeguarding** - Central coordination with every school's unique access and safety requirements
5. **In-House Expert Installation** - Dedicated education teams (no sub-contractors) for consistent quality
6. **Seamless Commissioning & Monitoring** - Real-time dashboards and ongoing performance support
7. **Phase 2 Planning** - Battery storage, heat pumps, and fabric upgrades already designed in from day one

This structured approach has been refined over 9,500+ UK projects and is trusted by multi-academy trusts nationwide.

### **Overcoming the Biggest 2026 Challenges**

**“We can't afford any disruption”** → All works completed out-of-term. Schools reopen with brighter, more efficient buildings and zero lost learning time.

**“Coordinating multiple sites feels overwhelming”** → One project team handles everything - exactly as delivered for the Vine Trust and the national Drax Foundation programme (75+ schools upgraded since 2023).

**“Grid and planning delays kill projects”** → Good Eco manages all DNO applications and approvals in-house.

**“Board approval is difficult in tight budgets”** → Greener Good Fund makes projects cost-neutral or cashflow-positive from month one, with repayments fully covered by energy savings.

### **What Happens After Summer 2026?**

The first phase (LED + Solar PV) creates the perfect foundation. Many trusts then move immediately to Phase 2: battery storage for evening/weekend resilience, air-source heat pumps for heating decarbonisation, and smart controls for ongoing optimisation - all planned and costed from the initial assessment.

### **Practical Next Steps for School Leaders**

1. Book your **free 2026 site assessment and funding roadmap** this

- month (limited summer slots remain).
2. Review your Climate Action Plan and align it with a summer delivery window.
  3. Compare funding models side-by-side - including why school-owned systems almost always beat PPAs long-term.
  4. Secure early board approval using clear payback and carbon data.

*James Heath, Marketing Manager at Good Eco Group, explains:*

*“Schools don’t need to navigate this alone. Our education-specialist teams deliver end-to-end - from funding applications to commissioning and monitoring - so estates teams can focus on education while we deliver measurable carbon and cost reductions.”*

## **Time to Move from Vision to Reality**

Summer 2026 is the delivery moment that will define the next decade of your school estate. The funding, the policy support, and the proven delivery model are all in place right now.

Whether you manage one site or twenty, the combination of LED lighting, rooftop solar PV, and flexible pay-as-you-save finance delivers immediate savings, long-term resilience, and a powerful sustainability story for your pupils, parents, and Ofsted.

**Ready to secure your summer 2026 delivery slot?** Contact Good Eco Group today for a no-obligation, education-specific assessment and 2026 funding roadmap. With their track record on projects exactly like the Vine Schools Trust, you will be in expert hands from day one.

Let’s make this the summer your schools move decisively toward net zero.

*Co-featured in partnership with Good Eco Group - leading providers of energy efficiency and decarbonisation solutions for the UK education sector. Visit [goodecogroup.com](http://goodecogroup.com) or email [education@goodecogroup.com](mailto:education@goodecogroup.com).*

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