Creating great educational places and spaces

QIS BGA guide to developing a sustainability strategy for schools

Queensland Independent Schools
BGA
Block Grant Authority

Contents

Front Cover

Hillbrook Anglican School
Photographer - Angus Martin
Architect - BSPN Architecture and Vee Design

Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners

QIS BGA respectfully acknowledges past and present traditional owners and custodians, and the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians to the education of all children and people in this country that we all live in and share together.

QIS BGA also commits to supporting the ongoing journey of Reconciliation through education.

Creating great educational places and spaces
Resources for schools

Process & resource relationships
Using the diagram below schools can understand where they are in the process and also the relevant resources provided by the BGA to support them on their journey.

About the BGA

Queensland Independent Schools Block Grant Authority (QIS BGA) is a not-for-profit organisation responsible for administering State and Australian Government funding for school facilities in Queensland's independent schools.

The BGA seeks to support the improvement of educational outcomes for young Australians, as represented by the Mparntwe Education Declaration's two interconnected goals:

Goal 1
The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.

Goal 2
All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Empowering schools

QIS BGA recognises that an informed school leader and a student-centred approach to the delivery of the school-based built environment contribute to enhanced learning opportunities and the maximisation of educational outcomes.

QIS BGA seeks to support schools in creating learning environments that promote educational excellence and equity by providing funding, access to expert advice and practical resources to help lift the capacity of school leaders to contribute positively to the design, construction, and activation of new or refurbished educational facilities.

A suite of resources

QIS BGA has created a suite of practical guides and resources for schools to help:

- Build knowledge and capacity
- Champion quality in the design and delivery of built assets that enhance learning outcomes and deliver value socially and economically to schools and their communities.

By fostering an accessible and supportive approach and providing tailored guidance for schools, the BGA encourages the active participation of schools in the process of shaping their built environments.

The activities involved in designing, developing, and delivering built infrastructure can often seem complex and overwhelming.

An understanding of the role, relationship, contribution and outputs of key stages in the design and delivery process will help schools navigate and contribute to this process effectively and ensure that their infrastructure investments support long-term educational goals as well as operational efficiency and durability.

The process and resource relationship diagram on the next page has been developed to provide a simple overview of the interrelationships between the key outputs and approaches that will inform and influence the development of a school's-built environment.

A suite of resources
QIS BGA has created a suite of practical guides and resources. To find out more follow the link below
www.bga.qld.edu.au

Key Outputs

Strategic Plan
Should play a fundamental role in guiding the development and delivery of the built environment. It provides a long-term vision that aligns educational priorities, operational needs, and financial planning with physical infrastructure investments.

From a capital development perspective a school strategic plan should include a direction on the following at a minimum:

- Educational philosophy and pedagogical approach
- Curriculum areas (current & future)
- Student enrolment targets over the next 10 years
- The creation of safe and inclusive spaces beyond that required by law
- Sustainability
- How facilities will be used (or not) to support the School's engagement with the local community
- What financial ratios must be upheld to ensure the School's ongoing profitability, solvency, and sustainability.

Sustainability Strategy
Provides a structured plan to achieve long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability and create healthier, more inspiring, and future-ready learning environments.

Master Plan
Provides a strategic framework to guide development, ensuring facilities align with educational goals, operations, sustainability, and future growth requirements.
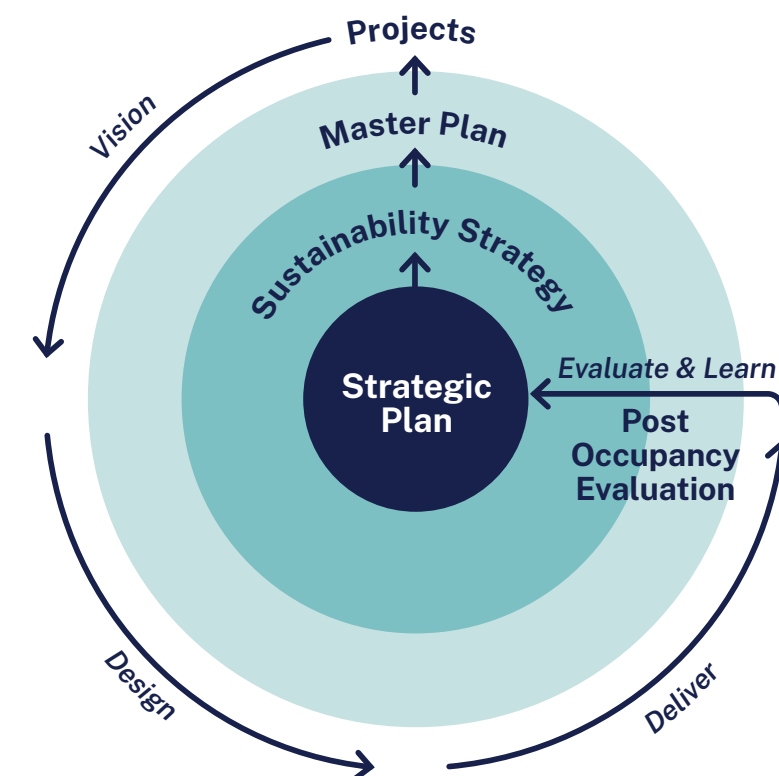
Projects
Is a focused and physically deliverable project (building or infrastructure) aligned with the direction set out in the master plan.

Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE)
Collates insights that assess a building's performance, functionality, user and operational efficiency following completion and occupation.

Approach

The four step approach illustrated in the diagram is a process embedded in the development of all the 'Key Outputs' listed above. The steps reflect theories and approaches used in systems thinking, user-centred design, classical architectural principles, and integrated delivery methods.

Vision
To define purpose & ensure strategic alignment

Design
To translate the ideas expressed in a vision into feasible plans for place

Deliver
Advances the detail of the plans (for buildings, spaces and infrastructure) to implement designs and direct construction in a staged manner.

Evaluate & Learn
The assessment of the impact of a capital project (user value, functionality, build quality), enabling the collection of 'lessons learnt' to inform improve the design and delivery of future projects.

Part 01
The value of sustainability in schools

Part 01 of this guide defines what sustainability is and its value to a school.

1.1
What is sustainability?

The term sustainability is a simple yet powerful idea.

It promotes the adoption of choices and actions aimed at minimising environmental impact, enhancing social well-being, and preserving resources for future generations. Embracing a sustainable mindset encourages individuals to recognise that even small, everyday actions can contribute to a healthier planet and the creation of stronger, more resilient communities.

The widely accepted definition of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland Report (Our Common Future) published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). This report was produced in response to growing concerns about the environmental degradation, resource depletion, and global inequalities caused by unlimited development. It defined sustainable development as:

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Development, 1987)

The Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development has become the foundation for modern sustainability, influencing global agreements such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate policies and action internationally.

1.2
What is the value of sustainability in schools?

Schools play a crucial role in shaping future generations, giving them the power to make a lasting impact by modelling and teaching sustainable practices that drive meaningful change in the lives of students and the environments they learn in.

As awareness grows about the importance and benefits of integrating environmental and social responsibility in schools, adopting a sustainable approach is becoming increasingly important in ensuring long-term financial and operational resilience.

A strong commitment to sustainability can:

- Enhance a school's reputation
- Demonstrate leadership in fostering a responsible, future-focused learning environment
- Align a school with increasing financial and regulatory expectations. With financial institutions requiring sustainability transparency for loan approvals, governing boards are expected to report on environmental and social impacts. Larger entities are also legally required to disclose carbon emissions to comply with mandatory climate reporting taking effect in 2025.

By integrating sustainable practices into their operations and curriculum schools can:

Create healthier learning environments – By prioritising clean air, natural light, and green spaces, to improve student well-being, concentration, and academic performance.

Reduce costs and improve the efficiency of built assets – By supporting the delivery of energy-efficient buildings, water conservation, and waste reduction to lower operational expenses, allowing the reallocation of resources to education and extra-curricular programs.

Ensure long-term resilience and compliance – Being ready to respond to regulations on sustainability and climate reporting, schools that integrate sustainable practices will be better positioned to meet future requirements, secure funding, and remain adaptable to changing environmental and economic conditions.

Prepare students for the future – By teaching sustainability schools can ensure students are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate global challenges, fostering responsible decision-making and environmental stewardship.

Strengthen community engagement and reputation – Aligning with community values and enhancing their reputation as forward-thinking institutions.

1.3
About this guide and toolkit

The QIS BGA is strategically committed to supporting and funding well-planned sustainability initiatives.

The QIS BGA is strategically committed to supporting and funding well-planned sustainability initiatives in the design and construction of new and refurbished capital projects. It provides funding to support the inclusion of sustainable solutions to help schools realise both financial and social benefits over time.

The QIS BGA recognises that the sustainability ambition of projects can be impacted through the course of their design and delivery, with sustainability initiatives often removed due to budget constraints and the need to reduce upfront costs. While sustainable features can offer long-term financial, environmental, and social benefits, they sometimes require higher initial investment, and their value is often not fully understood, making them vulnerable to cost-cutting measures.

This guide, and supporting toolkit, have been developed through a collaborative process between the QIS BGA, a number of key education stakeholders and the global engineering and development consultancy Mott MacDonald. It has been produced to help build the capacity of school leaders and school communities to develop their sustainability strategies.

Its aim is to support schools to integrate sustainability in a meaningful and impactful way.
The guide includes advice and resources to help schools develop a sustainability strategy. A strategy may not be the end of a school's journey. A sustainability strategy can be further developed into a sustainability plan by introducing further detail to help map a pathway to your goals.

Output from part 03 of this guide

SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

Definition	Role	Timeframe
Provides a roadmap that supports a school to integrate environmental, social and economic sustainability objectives into daily operations, curriculum and its long-term vision.	Defines school specific sustainability priorities and helps engage the wider school community to value and participate in the journey.	Generally, 3-5 years, but can be up to 10 years.

Output beyond the scope of this guide

SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN

Definition	Role	Timeframe
Transforms a sustainability strategy into measurable outcomes by outlining clear steps, responsibilities, actions, timelines and targets.	Ensures the sustainability ambition defined in the sustainability strategy can be effectively implemented, tracked, and integrated into day-to-day activities and operations.	Typically 1 year.

02

Foundations for a sustainability strategy

Part 02 of this guide aims to introduce the foundations for the development of a successful sustainability strategy.

Hillbrook Anglican College
Photographer: Angus Martin
Architect: BSPN Architects and Vee Design

> # "
> *Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.*
>
> **Kofi Annan**

2.1
What is a sustainability strategy?

A sustainability strategy is a roadmap that schools can use to assist them in communicating and working toward their sustainability ambitions.

A sustainability strategy is a valuable tool for incorporating environmental, social, and economic sustainability into a school's daily operations, infrastructure, and curriculum. It will provide clear, long-term goals to help a school achieve its specific sustainability aspirations.

An effective sustainability strategy should provide a school with a clear framework to holistically integrate sustainable practices into its:

- Day to day operations
- Educational programme and curriculum
- Campus, buildings, facilities and infrastructure.

The process of developing a sustainability strategy will provide schools with the opportunity to:

- Develop a good understanding of their impact on the planet and develop initiatives to reduce these impacts.
- Ensure that sustainability is not just an aspiration but a structured, measurable commitment that benefits students, staff, and the wider community.

2.2
How to develop a successful strategy

The following are important considerations for schools as they commit to the development of a sustainability strategy:

Ensure there is strategic alignment and reporting

It is important to:

- Work with key people at your school to make sure your sustainability strategy aligns with your school's priorities and has buy-in from multiple stakeholders.
- Align your sustainability strategy with your school's broader strategic plan and master plan.
- Secure board-level support to reinforce the importance of your sustainability goals. If not already in place, include sustainability reporting in board discussions.
- Measure success quantitatively and qualitatively.

Engage key stakeholders and sustainability champions

It is important to:

- Work with a wide range of stakeholders across your school and potentially in the broader community.
- Make sure you identify a broad range of people to engage with and communicate what you are trying to achieve with your strategy.
- Understand any stakeholder concerns with the implementation of any proposed initiatives to help mitigate potential future issues.
- Work with facilities or asset management teams that may need to complete or manage audits or maintain sustainability initiatives to ensure their knowledge and concerns are heard.
- Provide staff release from the timetable to support activity and accommodate added responsibilities.
- Work with your stakeholders to understand what sustainability initiatives have been implemented in the past. Collect any information that you can about these initiatives and find out what was successful and what could have been improved.

Allocate budget and resources

It is important to:

- Allow sufficient time and budget to complete your sustainability strategy, including engagement with stakeholders (see 3.3) .
- Estimate the time and budget that will be needed and who will need to implement sustainability initiatives. If resources are available as your sustainability strategy develops this will help to keep the motivation rolling as your ideas are proposed.

Most importantly, be realistic about what you want to achieve and make sure you measure and share both your success stories and lessons learned!

It is important to work with a wide range of stakeholders across your school and potentially in the broader community.

A Sustainability Framework for schools

A Sustainability Framework* has been developed to support schools in the development of their Sustainability Strategy.

The Framework:

- Defines five areas of focus or themes to aid the translation of sustainability as a concept into practical, measurable initiatives for schools. The five themes ensure environmental, social, and economic factors are all considered.

- Has been developed to support schools to explore and develop the priorities for their Sustainability Strategy. All five themes should be considered, even if actions are focused in only a few areas.
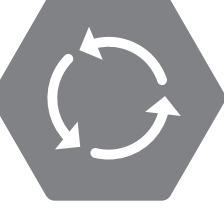
The Framework diagram

The diagram illustrates the key focus areas for sustainable development within a school. At its core, the diagram features an image of students in an outdoor learning environment, emphasizing the human and educational aspects of sustainability. Surrounding this central image are the five interconnected sustainability themes, each represented by a distinct color-coded segment.

School Sustainability Framework

Framework image
Hillbrook Anglican College
Photographer - Angus Martin
Architect - BSPN Architects and Vee Design

Theme	Value proposition
Energy and Carbon This theme considers energy and carbon consumption across a site with the view to reduce the need for electrical energy from the grid, go fossil fuel free and reduce embodied carbon in materials used on-site.	Changing behaviours and operations can bring energy bills down 25%. *Reference: How to Save Energy at School: The ABCs of Energy Savings*
Total Water Cycle This theme considers onsite water use with the goal to reduce reliance on potable water use. Reduction in water demand as well as installation of rainwater tanks and distribution systems or grey water systems are common sustainable solutions.	Up to 70% of water used in schools is lost through leaks. *Reference: 10 Easy ways to save water at school*
Cool and Healthy This theme focuses on the provision of cool and healthy environments that reduce energy use and improve learning outcomes. Options include natural ventilation and daylighting as well as ensuring materials used on site do not have negative impacts on student health or ability to learn.	Healthy buildings can lead to increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, and improved cognitive function among occupants.
Zero Waste and Circular This theme focuses on the reduction in material use in construction and operation and providing solutions that reduce the use of virgin material through sharing, reuse and recycling.	Up to 86% of that waste can be reused or recycled. *Reference: How to Reduce Waste in The Classroom? Management Waste*
Nature Based Solutions This theme explores the inclusion of nature-based solutions across a school to improve resilience and reduce reliance on human-made, engineered assets on a school's campus.	Bringing nature into schools can make spaces healthier, provide learning opportunities, relieve stress and cool the environment.

*Developed by Mott MacDonald

Part 03
Developing a sustainability strategy

Part 03 of this guide provides a step-by-step process to support the effective use of the sustainability framework in the development of a schools sustainability strategy.

03

Springfield Anglican College
Photographer: Scott Burrows
Architect: Fulton Trotter

> # "
> *The primary sustainability rule is to harmonise with nature instead of opposing it*
> "
>
> **Paul Hawken**
> **The Impact Investor**

3.1
Adopt an effective process

There is no single formula for creating a sustainability strategy for a school, as every school has its own unique needs and circumstances.

This guide provides practical advice and actionable steps to support schools in developing their own unique sustainability strategy. The recommendations, considerations, and activities have been structured to offer a clear and logical approach to the process.

The guide does not offer a one-size-fits-all solution. Rather it offers a flexible framework, and resources designed to help schools:

· Shape their own individual approach
· Build the right team
· Implement a strategy that aligns with their specific goals, resources, and experience levels.

The guide has been developed with a clear understanding that every school is unique!

A successful sustainability strategy will respond to each school's location, size, budget, and capacity, ensuring a meaningful and achievable sustainability journey is possible.

3.2
Culture eats strategy for lunch

Fostering a culture of sustainability—where everyone is engaged, understands the goals, and is committed to the strategy—is key to ensuring success.

The following are top tips to help schools achieve success:

Empower sustainability champion(s)
Appoint and empower a sustainability champion to lead the implementation of the sustainability strategy and track progress. Ensure they have the time, budget and support needed to drive meaningful change. Refresh the role as often is needed to ensure there is continued motivation, fresh ideas and energy to drive action.

Work together for better outcomes
Collaboration across the school community and with other schools can lead to improved outcomes. Set challenges and share stories – and make sustainability fun!

Reward and celebrate success
Recognise and celebrate sustainability achievements just as you would academic or sporting success. Foster a culture where sustainability leaders are valued and empowered and make environmental initiatives engaging and aspirational for students. To embed sustainability into daily operations, integrate it into staff KPIs to ensure sustainability goals become a core part of a school's business-as-usual approach.

Ensure all voices are heard
Listening to stakeholder concerns is crucial for a school sustainability strategy as inclusivity and engagement drive long-term success. Not everyone will be a sustainability champion, but those who voice concerns often highlight practical challenges, overlooked perspectives, or potential barriers to implementation. Addressing these concerns can lead to more effective, widely supported, and well-integrated sustainability initiatives. It also fosters a collaborative culture, where all members of the school community feel heard and are more likely to engage positively with sustainability efforts.

First Nations engagement

Indigenous engagement can play an important role in the development of a sustainability strategy. Engaging with First Nations people of significance in your local area opens opportunities for cultural connection and broad sustainability outcomes.

This theme can be included as a pillar in the sustainability framework. For this guide it has been dealt with separately as the engagement on this topic should be directly with local indigenous groups.

Ways of doing this include:
- Open a line of communication to develop a relationship where you can get advice so that everyone at the school can improve cultural awareness.

- Development of an engagement policy to clarify how indigenous groups will be engaged with, under a variety of options i.e. if you are building a new building and want to seek input about the development.

- Community engagement with indigenous groups to provide feedback for you school and how they could connect.

- Connecting with local indigenous groups to inform or align your school's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

3.3
Recipe for an effective sustainability strategy

An effective sustainability strategy can turn a school's sustainability ambitions into action - directing efforts, enthusiasm and ambition into meaningful outcomes, and provide a framework for learning, adaptation, and continuous improvement.

This section of the guide provides answers to some commonly asked questions. It offers practical advice to help schools navigate the initial stages of planning and developing their sustainability strategy.

What are the characteristics of a successful sustainability strategy?

A sustainability strategy is a physical or online document that summarises your school's sustainability ambitions. It should:

- Start with a vision that defines clearly what is to be achieved
- Adopt a holistic approach to ensure key environmental, social, and economic factors are addressed
- Incorporate background research, details of your sustainability team and initiatives for implementation.
- Clearly articulate sustainability initiatives with short, medium and long-term goals
- Outline how initiatives will be implemented
- Include a procedure for review so that any deviations from the vision can be rectified early.

How long will it typically take to develop a sustainability strategy?

The time it takes to develop a strategy will vary depending on:

- How big the school is
- How much information is available at the project outset
- Whether a sustainability strategy has been developed before
- What level of detail the strategy is intended to cover.

The QIS BGA offers a workshop series to support schools in the development of their sustainability strategy. This program includes two days of interactive workshops along with additional engagement between sessions to support the process.

For those unable to attend the workshop, it is recommended to set aside approximately two dedicated days to focus on developing the strategy independently. This allows sufficient time for thoughtful planning, priority setting, and alignment with a school's sustainability goals.

What timescale should a sustainability strategy cover?

A well-structured sustainability strategy should incorporate both short and long-term goals, with a vision that generally spans 3 to 5 years or longer (up to 10 years).

A sustainability plan typically spans up to one year, with monthly or quarterly milestones for regular review and measuring of progress.

How often should a sustainability strategy be revised?

Regular check-ins help ensure a sustainability strategy is being effectively implemented. Weekly check-ins provide opportunities to monitor progress, while monthly achievement goals help maintain momentum. Additionally, conducting a quarterly strategy review allows for necessary adjustments, ensuring the strategy remains relevant and effective.

How does the sustainability strategy align with other rating systems and frameworks i.e. Green Star or NABERS?

A sustainability strategy will be unique to a school. However, a school may choose to incorporate third-party certification programs, such as Green Star or NABERS, to benchmark performance against similar schools. These rating systems provide credible validation of sustainability efforts and demonstrate measurable progress in key areas like energy efficiency, water management, and indoor environmental quality.

What support is available for schools developing a sustainability strategy?

Schools can develop their sustainability strategy internally or choose to engage a sustainability consultant for expert guidance and support throughout the process.

The QIS BGA annually offers a workshop series for sustainability leads to support schools in the development of their sustainability strategy. This program provides valuable insights and practical tools to help shape and refine strategies.

Schools are encouraged to keep an eye out for the Expression of Interest (EOI) announcement early each year to participate.

3.4
A step-by-step guide to building a sustainability strategy

Effective preparation and planning are key to creating a clear, structured, and achievable sustainability strategy.

A six-step process is outlined to guide schools in developing and implementing their strategy successfully.

Step	1 Project preparation, planning and approach	2 Choose your team	3 Understand your school	4 Set your vision	5 Work through the Sustainability Framework	6 Finalise your strategy
Objective	Set up to create a successful sustainability strategy.	Establish a team for the development of the sustainability strategy.	Collect useful information that you will need to develop your sustainability strategy	Develop a collective understanding of what your sustainability strategy will strive to achieve.	Use the sustainability framework to develop the sustainability strategy: • Energy and carbon • Cool and healthy • Nature based solutions • Zero waste and circular • Total water cycle	Write up your strategy and choose some key priorities and projects for your school to focus on.
Toolkit resources	• Preparation checklist	• Team checklist	• Information checklist	• Megatrends cards • Worksheet activity • Vision checklist	• Audit checklists • Resource cards • Worksheet activities • Detailed audit templates (for energy and carbon, total water cycle)	• Strategy worksheet

Sustainability Toolkit

Click here to view the online sustainability toolkit resources

1

Project preparation, planning and approach

To create a successful sustainability strategy some groundwork should be done to set the project up for success:

Engage with senior leadership and get endorsement

Senior leadership are responsible for authorising sustainable initiatives, along with other actions within a school environment. Ensuring leadership members are involved in the process of establishing and implementing sustainability initiatives is essential to maintaining transparency and increasing confidence in the strategy. Understanding their perspective and incorporating it into the journey allows for a cohesive strategy to be established. Making sure that you have buy-in at senior management levels is important for endorsement.

Remember that senior leadership may not be limited to the educational structure and could also include governance boards/councils or other affiliated bodies that can influence or contribute to the successful development of a sustainability strategy.

Research past or existing sustainability initiatives and plans

Understanding the extent of sustainability initiatives already in place helps identify the baseline case for the journey ahead. Identifying successes and weaknesses can help guide the journey moving forwards.

It is also important to maintain and revitalise any existing plans which may need additional attention, incorporating them in the journey will help navigate a holistic approach to sustainability. Collecting background material to assist in the development of the strategy will ensure that the strategy can be developed smoothly. This section provides some ideas for project preparation.

Engage with a variety of stakeholders

A variety of stakeholders means more ideas, more motivation and more drive.

Widening the number of people and positions involved helps create more opportunities and allows diverse perspectives to be heard and responded to. It also helps facilitate an understanding of the capabilities of various audiences, to enhance inclusivity and provide a strategy which can be adopted by a range of people.

### Set aside budget and allocate time for strategy development

Some budget and time will be needed to develop a successful strategy. If you plan to develop the strategy in-house then you need to allow for you sustainability team to:

- Have hours funded to meet to develop the plan.
- Have time to collect information and quotes to develop the plan. Time will vary depending on the complexity of your school and the plan however a rough estimate might be a weeks worth of time for your sustainability lead with at least a few hours allocated for each sustainability team member to attend workshops.

Sustainability consultants can also be engaged to help develop the plan. In this scenario the consultant team would likely takeover many of the tasks that would otherwise be done by your inhouse sustainability lead.

Checklist

☐ Engage with senior leadership

☐ Research past or existing sustainability initiatives and plans

☐ Engage with a variety of stakeholders

☐ Set aside budget and allocate time for strategy development
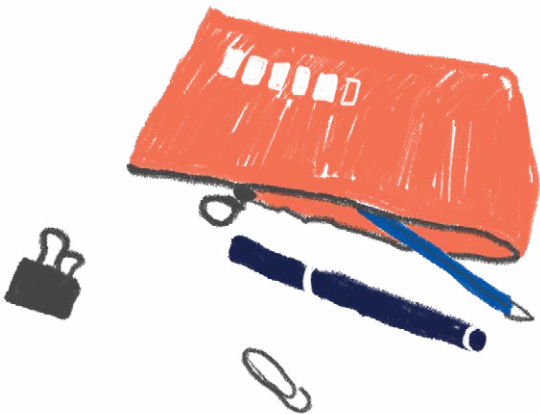
Sustainability Toolkit

Refer to the sustainability toolkit for a downloadable version of this checklist

2

Choose your team

A team is required to lead the development of a school's sustainability strategy. The size and composition of this team will depend on the school's size and level of sustainability awareness but should include representatives from key groups.

Not all team members need to be heavily involved—some may take an active role in shaping the strategy, while others may act as advisors or reviewers. Consider what is practical for your school. For the initial sustainability strategy, aim to establish a small core team to streamline decision-making. However, ensure broad consultation across the school community to gain support, foster engagement, and build a strong culture of sustainability through the process.

Team roles and responsibilities

Senior-level representative(s) responsible for reviews and approvals

Senior-level representatives should be included in the team to review and approve decisions. Their broader perspective allows them to assess the wider impact of proposed actions and identify areas where additional support may be needed. Additionally, their involvement helps generate interest and engagement, ensuring the sustainability strategy receives the necessary attention and commitment from the broader school community.

Sustainability Lead

The Sustainability Lead should be an enthusiastic and motivated individual who can effectively present ideas, engage diverse stakeholders, and coordinate the development of the sustainability strategy. They will be responsible for guiding the strategy development and implementation process, and fostering a culture where sustainability is deeply embedded in the school's core values.

Teachers, parents and senior students

Other members of the school community can bring valuable perspectives to the sustainability team. Engaging diverse voices helps identify practical and impactful initiatives that can be integrated into everyday school life. Involving teachers, parents, and senior students ensures can inspire others, nurturing support to make sustainability a natural and lasting part of the school's culture.

Local community members

The impact of a school's sustainability strategy can extend beyond its boundaries. By embracing sustainability schools can inspire broader change. Sharing the journey can encourage collaboration and support from the community. Local stakeholders may offer valuable resources, expertise, or partnerships, to enhance the strategy's success and long-term impact.

Checklist

Establish your sustainability team:

☐ Senior-level leadership representative(s) responsible for reviews and approvals

☐ Sustainability lead

☐ Teachers, parents and senior students

☐ Local community members

Sustainability Toolkit

Refer to the sustainability toolkit for a downloadable version of this checklist

3

Understand your school

The following provides a list of useful resources that can be collected and reviewed. They will offer essential information to support the development of a sustainability strategy:

Site plan

Site plans of internal and external spaces and their associated purpose can help participants identify the physical scope for sustainability initiatives. Having visual material and representation of the school available can promote discussion to identify where opportunities and challenges may be i.e. built infrastructure, areas of high traffic, no access zones, zones of high volume etc.
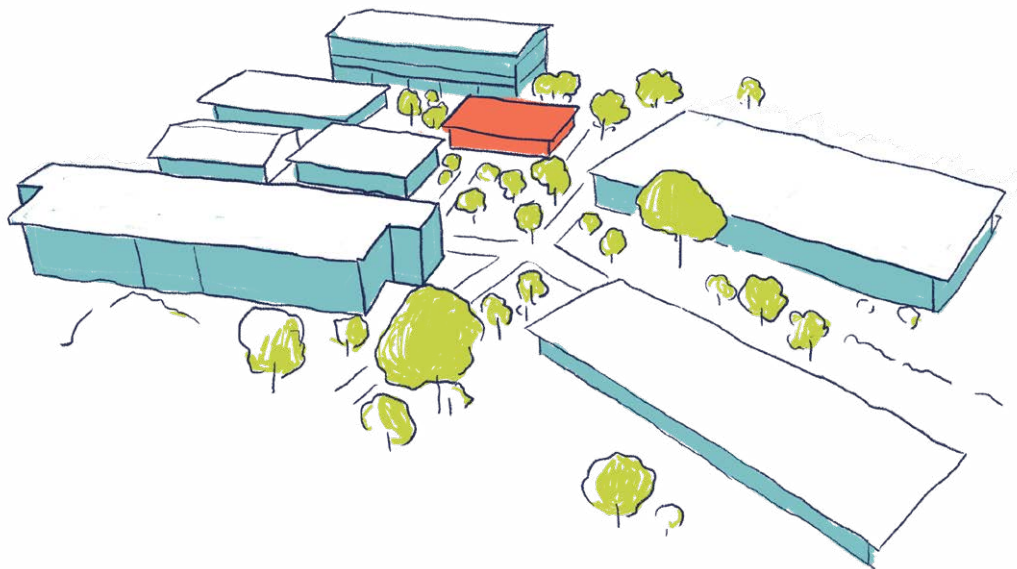
As built drawings

As built drawings (with details of building materials, colours and glazing etc.) offer details to help identify opportunities to enhance and optimise the existing site and built assets. Understanding the baseline of what works well, and what improvements can be made allows for existing structures to be utilised effectively and reduce the need for further works, resulting in less disturbance and financial setbacks.

Bills and readings

Keeping track of energy and water bills, as well as regularly recording meter readings, can help identify patterns in use. This information is valuable because it can show when and where savings might be possible. For example, it might lead to an upgrade to more efficient appliances or the adoption of simple habits to cut down on usage. In schools, this information can even support bigger changes — like switching to a different energy source or connecting to a shared energy or water supply system, often referred to as a district system, that can serve multiple buildings at once and are often more efficient and sustainable than individual setups.

Metering

It is often said that if you can't measure it, you can't reduce it. Where possible try to understand what metering and monitoring is available at your school. Ideally this will be in the form of single line diagrams that show clearly what and where meters are but if this information is not available developing a list of meters would be an important the first step.

Appliances

A record of appliances in place is important for safety reasons but can also illustrate where high demand or usage may be arising from. Understanding the efficiencies of appliances and their peak time span has an impact on total usage. Ensuring replacements and repairs are in place can maximise efficiencies.

Sustainability initiatives

Understanding the success factors of established sustainability initiatives, already in place or that have been in place, is important to maintain or revitalise them. Aid may be required to ensure success, or the strategy may need further enhancement or kickstarting.

Checklist

- [ ] A site plan of your school showing all areas and space use types.
- [ ] As built drawings of buildings on site showing building materials, colours and glazing where possible.
- [ ] Energy and water bills and readings from all meters.
- [ ] Meter details, ideally single line diagrams of energy and water metering
- [ ] Details of any appliances including energy and water use where possible
- [ ] Information of existing or past sustainability initiatives

Sustainability Toolkit

Refer to the sustainability toolkit for a downloadable version of this checklist

4

Set your vision

A sustainability vision that aligns with your school's broader priorities and addresses its specific challenges is more likely to succeed.

It is important to establish a vision. A vision supports opportunities to consider sustainability within a broader context and focus on where you want to have the most impact.

There are many ways to set a vision. Ideally several stakeholders will be involved in the process so that there is buy-in across multiple parties. Vision setting is commonly a workshop activity. Depending on the size of the school and how much time is available the workshop should typically be between 1 hour and a half day.

Developing your vision
The exercises suggested below can be used to support the development of your vision:

Megatrends Exercise
When setting a vision, its good practice to do some "blue sky" thinking to consider a broader context and trends that might shape the future of your school. This exercise supports thinking about the future context for your school and some of the consequences of these trends.

Step 1
Review the Megatrends Cards for each framework categories.

Step 2
Write down any other trends that might have an impact on your school. Consider a 3-5 or up to 10-year horizon.

Step 3
Choose the top 2-5 trends that will have influence on your school

Step 4
Write down the challenges and opportunities that your school might have in relation to the chosen trend.

A worksheet is provided in Sustainability Toolkit that will guide you through this exercise.

Review the broader school vision, strategy and goals
A sustainability vision that aligns with your schools' broader areas of focus and addresses challenges that your school has is more likely to be successful. Familiarise your sustainability team with the school's vision, strategy and goals. This exercise might include hearing from the principal or the board on their priorities.

Set your vision
Use the outcomes of the exercises above to create a short vision statement. This statement should be one or two sentences long and describe the long-term (3-5 or 10 years) goals of the sustainability strategy. Good vision statements should be concise and aspirational.

Sustainability priorities
To support your vision, consider what your immediate priorities are. These should reflect the areas in which you think you can have the most impact and that will be the initial focal areas for your strategy. It is likely that these will change over time as your strategy is implemented.

Checklist

☐ Consider the global megatrends

☐ Consider the influence that these trends may have on the context of your school.

☐ Review the broader school vision, strategy and goals

☐ Set a sustainability vision

☐ Set sustainability priorities

Sustainability Toolkit

Refer to the sustainability toolkit for a downloadable version of this checklist and toolkit items:

- Vision Checklist
- Megatrends Cards
- Vision Worksheet Activity

5

Work through the Sustainability Framework

A sustainability strategy should consider a broad range of themes, opportunities and initiatives.

A Sustainability Framework has been developed to support schools in the development of their Sustainability Strategy.

The Framework:

- Defines five areas of focus or themes to aid the translation of sustainability as a concept into practical, measurable initiatives for schools. The five themes ensure environmental, social, and economic factors are all considered.
- Has been developed to support schools to explore and develop the priorities for their Sustainability Strategy. Schools should consider each category even if they choose to focus actions in one or a few categories.

Nature Based Solutions

School Sustainability Framework

Energy and Carbon

Zero Waste and Circular Economy

Total Water Cycle

Cool and Healthy

Structure

The following pages present clear steps for the effective exploration of each theme. Each theme is presented using a consistent structure with information and advice relative to the theme provided against each of the following headings:

?	**Why is this important?**
⟳	**What has been done before?**
⚗	**Audit considerations**
⤨	**What are the challenges? (site specific)**
💡	**What are the opportunities?**
$	**Funding sources**
📋	**Setting priorities**
⚒	**Available rating tools**
ⓘ	**More information**

A worksheet is available for each theme in the sustainability toolkit to guide schools through the process. Each theme should take between 1 hour and a day to complete depending on the level of detail. This process could be completed in a workshop with the sustainability team or by the sustainability lead.

How to navigate this section

- Use the sustainability toolkit for information to help you explore each of the five themes.
- What is the significance/ use profile of this theme for your school? If not already done you may need to conduct an audit.
- What are the main challenges for your school?
- What are key opportunities for your school?
- What initiatives could you implement – Be clear about how and when?
- Is this a priority for your school?

A sustainability strategy should address a holistic range of topics even if it chooses to focus on a particular theme

Energy and Carbon

This theme considers energy and carbon consumption across a site with the view to reduce the need for electrical energy from the grid, go fossil fuel free and reduce embodied carbon in materials used on-site.

Complete a deep dive into **Energy and Carbon** and understand where your school can focus sustainability efforts in this category. The following topics will form the basis of your deep dive considerations and discussions, and notes, findings or ideas can be recorded in the worksheet found in the sustainability toolkit.

Why is this important?

Operational energy is a significant cost for schools. In Queensland only around a third of energy is produced from renewable energy leaving the remaining two thirds to be produced by carbon emitting fossil fuels. Reducing energy and carbon is the most direct way that most schools can help to mitigate climate change.

What has been done before?

Do some research to see if energy and carbon reduction initiatives have been run at your school before. What was successful? And what didn't work well and why? Review case studies to consider what has been done at other schools or in similar buildings.

Audit considerations

Conduct an energy and carbon audit for your school to understand and quantify energy and carbon consumption. You can do this in-house or engage a specialist consultant to help you. The Audit checklist in the sustainability toolkit provides a list of elements and characteristics you might like to consider during your audit.

If you are developing your sustainability strategy for the first time you may choose to complete a high-level desktop audit using the audit checklist only.

Alternatively, if you would like to take your audit a step further, the sustainability toolkit also contains a detailed audit template that can be utilised to establish deeper, measurable data that may help you to support future benchmarking.

Even if you only undertake the desktop audit checklist now, you can nominate completion of the detailed audit template as a future task in your strategy.

What are the challenges? (site specific)

What are the big energy and carbon demands that your school has, and which energy and carbon uses are hard to reduce. How might your school's energy and carbon use be more or less than other schools? Why?

What are the opportunities?

What opportunities could your school undertake to decrease energy and carbon use. Use the energy and carbon recourse cards for inspiration.

Funding sources

Consider available funding for the proposed initiatives. Note at time of publishing there is an ISQ BGA funding round available for energy and carbon initiatives.

Setting priorities

Set your sustainability priorities for energy and carbon. Make sure you set goals and consider who and how these will be implemented.

Available rating tools

There are several rating tools available that can help you to address and rate energy and carbon. You may choose to use one of these ratings tools as part of your sustainability strategy.

- NABERS is a rating scheme that rates annual operational energy and allows you to benchmark against similar buildings. An embodied carbon (total carbon emissions generated to produce all the buildings and materials in your school) assessment can also be done using the NABERS rating scheme. Both operational and embodied carbon emissions must be reduced to address climate change.
- Green Star is a holistic rating scheme used for new builds or refurbishments or performance. One of the categories addresses energy and carbon.
- Climate Active is an Australian Government run accreditation allowing organisations to achieve climate active certification by offsetting carbon emissions.

More information

Use the sustainability toolkit to find out more information on energy and carbon. Toolkit items available:

- Energy and Carbon Audit Checklist
- Energy and Carbon Resource Cards
- Energy and Carbon Worksheet Activity
- Energy and Carbon Detailed Audit Template (Optional)

Sustainability Toolkit

Total Water Cycle

This theme considers onsite water use with the goal to reduce potable water use. Reduction in water demand as well as installation of rainwater tanks and distribution systems or grey water systems are common sustainable solutions.

Complete a deep dive into **Total Water Cycle** and understand where your school can focus sustainability efforts in this category. The following topics will form the basis of your deep dive considerations and discussions, and notes, findings or ideas can be recorded in the worksheet found in the sustainability toolkit.

Why is this important?

Reducing potable water consumption can save money for schools. Many schools have sports fields or pools that have high water demands which may need solutions such as water storage or new filtration systems however simple water saving solutions are available for other uses.

What has been done before?

Consider the water saving solutions that have been implemented or considered in the past. What has or hasn't been successful and why? Is there a culture of water efficiency?

Audit considerations

Conduct a total water cycle audit for your school. You can do this in-house or hire a consultant. You can do this in-house or engage a specialist consultant to help you. The Audit checklist in the sustainability toolkit provides a list of elements and characteristics you might like to consider during your audit.

If you are developing your sustainability strategy for the first time you may choose to complete a high-level desktop audit using the audit checklist only.

Alternatively, if you would like to take your audit a step further, the sustainability toolkit also contains a detailed audit template that can be utilised to establish deeper, measurable data that may help you to support future benchmarking.

Even if you only undertake the desktop audit checklist now, you can nominate completion of the detailed audit template as a future task in your strategy.

What are the challenges? (site specific)

What are the big water demands that your school has and which uses will be hard to decrease. How might your school's potable water use be more or less than other schools? Why?

What are the opportunities?

What opportunities could your school undertake to decrease potable water use. Use the total water cycle recourse cards for inspiration.

Funding sources

Consider available funding for the proposed initiatives. Note at time of publishing there is an ISQ BGA funding round available for total water cycle initiatives.

Setting priorities

Set your sustainability priorities for total water cycle. Make sure you set goals and consider who and how these will be implemented.

Available rating tools

There are several rating tools available that can help you to address and rate water consumption. You may choose to use one of these ratings tools as part of your sustainability strategy.

- NABERS is a rating scheme that rates annual water use and allows you to benchmark against similar buildings.
- Green Star is a holistic rating scheme used for new builds or refurbishments or performance. One of the categories addresses potable water consumption.

More information

Use the sustainability toolkit to find out more information on total water use. Toolkit items available:

- Total Water Cycle Audit Checklist
- Total Water Cycle Resource Cards
- Total Water Cycle Worksheet Activity
- Total Water Cycle Detailed Audit Template (Optional)

Sustainability Toolkit

Cool and Healthy

This theme focuses on the provision of cool and healthy environments that reduce energy use and improve learning outcomes. Options include natural ventilation and daylighting as well ensuring materials used on site do not have negative impacts on student health or ability to learn.

Complete a deep dive into **Cool and Healthy** and understand where your school can focus sustainability efforts in this category. The following topics will form the basis of your deep dive considerations and discussions, and notes, findings or ideas can be recorded in the worksheet found in the sustainability toolkit.

Why is this important?
Schools that are comfortable and healthy reduce operating costs and improve learning outcomes for students.

What has been done before?
Consider any initiatives that have been done to improve the comfort and health of students.

Audit considerations
Conduct a detailed review of the quality of indoor environment at your school. There may be some overlaps with your energy and carbon initiatives such as building sealing, insulation or quality glazing. Products such as paints, engineered wood and carpets used in buildings can sometimes contain substances that can reduce occupant concentration, known as "sick building syndrome". Non-toxic materials and indoor plants can improve air quality. Your audit may choose to use on-site testing to measure air-quality. You can do this in-house or engage a specialist consultant to help you. The Audit checklist in the sustainability toolkit provides a list of elements and characteristics you might like to consider during your audit.

If you are in the first few years of having a sustainability strategy you may choose to complete a high-level desktop audit and complete the more detailed cool and healthy checklist as an initiative to implement as part of your strategy.

What are the challenges? (site specific)
What are the big indoor air quality challenges that your school has, and which initiatives might be difficult to implement. How might your school's indoor environment quality be use be better or worse than other schools? Why?

What are the opportunities?
What opportunities could your school undertake to improve indoor environment quality. Use the cool and healthy recourse cards for inspiration.

Funding sources
Consider available funding for the proposed initiatives.

Setting priorities
Set your sustainability priorities for cool and healthy buildings and spaces. Make sure you set goals and consider who and how these will be implemented.

Available rating tools
There are several rating tools available that can help you to address and rate indoor environment quality. You may choose to use one of these ratings tools as part of your sustainability strategy.

- NABERS is a rating scheme that rates indoor environment quality and allows you to benchmark against similar buildings. This rating requires on-site testing to measure air quality.
- Green Star is a holistic rating scheme used for new builds or refurbishments or performance. One of the categories addresses healthy buildings.
- WELL Buildings is an international rating scheme available to certify healthy buildings.
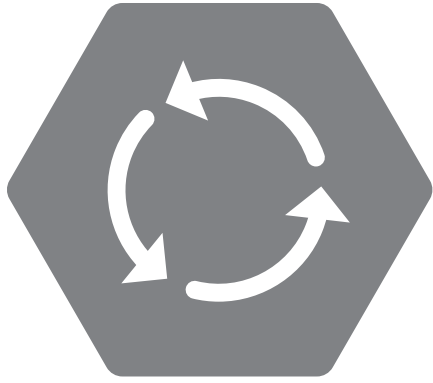
More information
Use the sustainability toolkit to find out more information on cool and healthy schools. Toolkit items available:

- Cool and Healthy Audit Checklist
- Cool and Healthy Resource Cards
- Cool and Healthy Worksheet Activity

Sustainability Toolkit

Zero Waste and Circular Economy

This theme focuses on the reduction in material use in construction and operation and providing solutions that reduce the use of virgin material through sharing, reuse and recycling.

Complete a deep dive into **Zero Waste and Circular Economy** and understand where your school can focus sustainability efforts in this category. The following topics will form the basis of your deep dive considerations and discussions, and notes, findings or ideas can be recorded in the worksheet found in the sustainability toolkit.

Why is this important?
Materials consumption on earth is higher than ever however materials are limited, and landfills are filling up. It is important to reduce the use of virgin materials and eliminate waste by embracing a circular economy.

What is a circular economy?
A circular economy is a system that minimises waste and maximises resource efficiency by reusing, recycling, and regenerating materials instead of following a "take, use, dispose" approach.

What has been done before?
Consider your schools waste collection and recycling programs including current, past and future initiatives. What has or hasn't been successful and why? Consider also your schools building and fitout waste and how this has been addressed.

Audit considerations
Conduct a waste audit for your school. You can do this in-house or engage a specialist consultant to help you. The Audit checklist in the sustainability toolkit provides a list of elements and characteristics you might like to consider during your audit.

If zero waste and circular economy is a focus for your school the NABERS rating scheme mentioned later in the ratings section provides a procedure that can be followed to conduct an audit.

What are the challenges? (site specific)
What are the hard to address waste streams at your school in operation or in construction and fit out. How might your school's waste be different to other schools? Why?

What are the opportunities?
What opportunities could your school undertake to improve construction, fitout and operational waste. Use the zero waste and circular economy recourse cards for inspiration.

Funding sources
Consider available funding for the proposed initiatives.

Setting priorities
Set your sustainability priorities for zero waste and a circular economy. Make sure you set goals and consider who and how these will be implemented.

Available rating tools
There are several rating tools available that can help you to address and address and rate waste. You may choose to use one of these ratings tools as part of your sustainability strategy

- NABERS is a rating scheme that rates operational waste and allows you to benchmark against similar buildings. This rating requires a waste audit following the NABERS protocol.
- Green Star is a holistic rating scheme used for new builds or refurbishments or performance. Credits in this tool address operational and building and construction waste. New fitouts tool also includes a category focused on circularity.

More information
Use the sustainability toolkit to find out more information on zero waste and circular economy. Toolkit items available:

- Zero Waste and Circular Economy Audit Checklist
- Zero Waste and Circular Economy Resource Cards
- Zero Waste and Circular Economy Worksheet Activity

Sustainability Toolkit

Nature Based Solutions

This theme explores the inclusion of nature-based solutions across a school to improve resilience and reduce reliance on human-made, engineered assets providing services on a school's campus. Bringing nature into schools can make spaces healthier, provide learning opportunities, relieve stress and cool the environment.

Complete a deep dive into **Nature Based Solutions** and understand where your school can focus sustainability efforts in this category. The following topics will form the basis of your deep dive considerations and discussions, and notes, findings or ideas can be recorded in the worksheet found in the sustainability toolkit.

Why is this important?
Nature in schools has multiple benefits including mitigating climate change, improving resilience, improving air quality, improving acoustic performance and providing mental health and aesthetic benefits.

What has been done before?
Review any nature-based initiatives that have been done at your school. These might include landscaping, vegetable gardens, green walls etc. What has been successful/unsuccessful? why?

Audit considerations
Conduct a nature-based solutions audit for your school. You can do this in-house or engage a specialist consultant to help you. The Audit checklist in the sustainability toolkit provides a list of elements and characteristics you might like to consider during your audit.

What are the challenges? (site specific)
Have there been any key challenges for your school for incorporating more nature-based solutions? Why? How might your school's incorporation of planting be different to other schools? Why?

What are the opportunities?
What opportunities could your school undertake to increase nature-based solutions? Use the nature-based solutions recourse cards for inspiration.

Funding sources
Consider available funding for the proposed initiatives.

Setting priorities
Set your sustainability priorities for nature-based solutions. Make sure you set goals and consider who and how these will be implemented.

Available rating tools
There are several rating tools available that can help you to address and address nature-based solution. You may choose to use one of these ratings tools as part of your sustainability strategy

- Green Star is a holistic rating scheme used for new builds or refurbishments or performance. Credits in this tool address nature and ecology.
- Living Building Challenge is a challenging rating scheme that looks for net positive solutions and has several credits that address nature.

More information
Use the sustainability toolkit to find out more information on nature-based solutions. Toolkit items available:

- Nature Based Solutions Audit Checklist
- Nature Based Solutions Resource Cards
- Nature Based Solutions Worksheet Activity

Sustainability Toolkit

6

Finalise your strategy

Once the sustainability vision has been defined and each category in the sustainability framework has been considered the sustainability strategy can be finalised and documented. A sustainability strategy should be concise and focus on the defined priorities and on action to be undertaken.

The process should take between 2 hours and 1 day to complete depending on the level of detail and could be completed in a workshop with the sustainability team or by the sustainability lead and then circulated to the team for comment.

Content of a sustainability strategy

Vision statement
Include your vision statement and the list of priorities identified following a review of the 5 themes provided in the sustainability framework (step 5). Make sure the vision is a guiding statement that focuses in on what you want to achieve in the longer term (3-5 or up to 10 years).

Sustainability Framework
Write a short summary of the current status of your school and the opportunities that your school has identified and will focus on for each of the sustainability framework themes set out in step 5 of this guide.

Sustainability team
Record details of everyone who is part of the sustainability team including their role. Identify how much time individuals can commit and the role they want to play in implementing the strategy so that expectations are clear.

Key action items
Set a reasonable number of sustainability initiatives to be implemented as part of your sustainability strategy. The number may vary based on the size of your sustainability program but 2-5 initiatives would be a good number to start with.

These initiatives may focus on one theme from the sustainability framework or could come from different themes but they should align with your vision statement and priorities.

Each action item should:

- Be time bound (3-6 months)
- Be clear about what it is trying to achieve
- Consider how the school can support the initiative and build a culture of sustainability
- Have measurable outcomes
- Be achievable
- Be clear on roles and responsibilities in implementation
- Consider costs or resources required to achieve success

Sign off
Include a section for sign-off from key stakeholders in the sustainability strategy. At a minimum this should be the sustainability lead and the leadership support i.e. the principle or responsible person from the School Board.

Sustainability Toolkit

A worksheet is available in the sustainability toolkit to guide you through this process.

3.5
Other resources

The following provides a selection of useful additional resources

External resources
A considerable amount of valuable sustainability information is available on the internet, and can include Government websites and publications such as:

- QLD Education's Sustainable schools
- UK Department for Education's Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems - GOV.UK
- Sustainability School Strategy - Sustainability Manager Project, co-financed by the European Union.
- United Nations SDGs THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development

Examples
A growing resource of real-life examples with helpful information is available:

Sample sustainability strategy
- Highgate School, UK Environmental-Sustainability-Initial-Strategy-Plan-web.pdf

Example audits