



Baroness Barran

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System & Student Finance
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Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP
Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee

Sent by email only

18 December 2023

Dear Philip,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November 2023, setting out the Committee's observations and recommendations following the Department for Education's appearance at the Environmental Audit Committee. The Secretary of State has asked that I respond on her behalf.

We appreciate your acknowledgement of the department's success in developing a Sustainability and Climate Change strategy and embedding the necessary governance to deliver it.

We share your concern for the impact of flooding, overheating and water scarcity on schools. We appreciate that you recognise the positive steps we are taking on this front, including publishing a risk framework in January 2024 and a full risk assessment in January 2025. We will utilise the data from this risk assessment to work with education settings (schools, colleges, and nurseries) via our Sustainability Leadership Hub, which is due to go live by May 2024. This will help the system to meet the strategic commitment for all settings to have a climate action plan in place by 2025. To further support this we are also funding a climate ambassador network to directly assist schools with this planning. The provider for this network will be announced by the end of December.

The Committee is right to acknowledge the scale of the challenge that transitioning the education sector to net zero represents. As you note, our centrally delivered programmes are already energy efficient 'net zero ready' buildings, more resilient to climate change, more energy efficient than required by building regulations, reducing carbon emissions and operating costs while improving the learning environment. However, this alone will not enable the education estate, which is managed by over 3,000 responsible bodies, to meet net zero targets by 2037.

For those settings to date, we have provided guidance including the Schools and FE Colleges Design Brief and Specification 21, the Building Bulletins and Good Estates Management for Schools and Energy Efficiency guidance. Looking forward, we are working through our innovate, test, and invest approach to accelerate retrofitting of the education estate. We were pleased to be able to outline the wide range of pilots and pathfinders we have underway in order to put us in the best place to understand the funding required to accelerate action from SR25 onwards.

The department is aware of schemes such as the Church of England Net Zero Carbon Programme and is actively exploring how alternative funding models might be utilised for the wider school estate through the DfE's net zero accelerator scheme. We continue to work with DESNZ to ensure that the education sector achieves fair and proportionate access to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Nevertheless, this government since 2010 has invested more in the estate than ever before, with over £15 billion since 2015, including £1.8 billion in 2023-24. Future capital funding for the school estate will be set out at the next Spending Review in the normal way.

We will continue to develop our evidence base on the most effective approaches to decarbonisation and resilience. This will inform the department's future planning, including how our sustainability commitments best align with wider capital investment in the estate. To this end, we agree in principle with the Committee's recommendation that the department should publish a detailed roadmap to achieving our sustainability targets – we aim to do so by Autumn 2024.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Diana Barran', written in dark ink.

BARONESS BARRAN
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE