

Climate Hope for Green-Schools

The last week of April 2018 saw four Climate Hope Forums take place in Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Limerick. Climate Action Officer Gráinne Ryan and the Green-Schools Team gathered 155 representatives from primary and secondary school students and teachers, local authorities and local councillors to join forces over the common interest in climate change. The aim was to strengthen the National Dialogue on Climate Action and to harness the collective wisdom, ideas and enthusiasm in the room to tackle the biggest challenge of all.



Each Climate Hope Forum started with a Climate Activist Test (direct from NASA!), a brief overview of climate change and then some inspiring stories from local Green-Schools or Climate Ambassadors who had a special message they wanted to share. The World Café facilitation tool was utilised to connect diverse perspectives, encourage collaborative dialogue and to focus the powerful conversation on collective solutions. Students were split up into groups based on their Green Flag and given four compelling questions – read their #ClimateHopes below.



1. How can we encourage every Green-School to stop using single use plastics?

Take a minute to think of all the plastic in your life, even the plastic you might use in one day. How much of this is used just once and then thrown away? From plastic bottles, bags, straws, yoghurt pots, takeaway cups, coffee pods and cutlery to the plastic smothering our fruit, vegetables, sandwiches and even gluing our teabags shut – all of it is individually wrapped for our convenience! 300 million tons of plastic is made each year from oil, a fossil fuel, half of which is single use plastic. Only 10% of plastic is recycled world-wide as it's a complicated process and only certain things can be made from recycled plastic. A lot of plastic ends up in landfill (15 million tons in Europe every year!) where it's either buried, or ends up in water, and sadly finds its way into the ocean. More than 8 million tons of plastic is dumped into our oceans every year. Plastic never biodegrades fully but breaks down into tiny pieces, releasing toxic chemicals that end up in our food chain and water supply, creating a soupy mess of plastic. So what can we do about it? We can start by cutting out single use plastic across the entire Green-Schools network in Ireland!

[Read our #ClimateHopes](#)

Outdoor Education

Screen a documentary or film such as A Plastic Ocean or watch Blue Planet 2 and then get outdoors to do a #2minutebeachclean with Clean Coasts or a #2minutestreetclean with National Spring Clean and your local Tidy Towns group. You will soon see firsthand how much plastic rubbish ends up in our environment. Get a local artist involved and create a sculpture from the plastic waste collected – display this in your school for everyone to see and be reminded why you are a #PlasticFreeSchool. You could even do a school survey before and after the screening and clean up to determine the students' knowledge, interest and motivation to act.



Ban the Bottle

Phase out plastic bottles in your school. Approach the Parent's Committee, the Student Council and the Board of Management to support you and ban single use plastic bottles. If your school gets lunch delivered then talk to the supplier and petition them to provide once-off reusable bottles and install filtered water taps in each classroom or hallway instead of single use plastic bottles. If your lunch provider won't switch to reusable bottles then you could fundraise or ask a local business or even your county council to subsidise the cost of the school bottles. Every class that stops using single use plastic bottles saves over 5,000 bottles a year! Try to harness the cool factor with branded, personalised or DIY design bottles. Target your schools' sports teams with branded bottles for matches.



Zero Waste Lunch

Create posters, deliver intercom announcements and present at your school assembly sustainable alternatives to single use plastic such as lunch boxes or paper bags instead of tin foil, cling film or plastic food bags. If you have a school magazine or website, write a feature piece on how to make a #ZeroWasteLunch. Secondary schools could talk to their canteen or local shops and petition them to provide a plastic free student lunch deal – switch to compostable plant-based packaging or give a discount/loyalty points if you bring your own cup, cutlery and lunch box or refill container. Primary schools could send home information to parents, encouraging them to buy ‘nude foods’ without packaging and run a classroom competition for the ‘best bin award’ – the staff room could join in on this one too to lead by example in the #PlasticFreeChallenge!



Get involved in Social Media!

Whether its facebook, twitter or instagram, whatever the platform of choice, more and more schools are joining social media and using it as a tool to share their ideas. Why not contact other schools and encourage them to stop using single use plastics too?! Check out the @GreenSchoolsIre page on facebook, twitter or instagram or for a great school example look up Newpark Comprehensive's 'Plastic Outta the Park' campaign for some inspiration. Here are a few suggestions you could search for: #PlasticFree #SayNoToPlastic #StrawFreeSchool #NudeFoods #ZeroWasteLunch #SickOfPlastic #DitchTheDisposables #Refuse2Use #PlasticFreeChallenge

Find Out More

<http://www.plasticfreechallenge.org/>

<https://plasticoceans.org/>

Green-Schools

 An Taisce

2. How can we encourage everyone to cycle to school?

The 2016 Census showed that 60% of primary students and 43% of secondary students still travel by car to school. 10% of primary students and 28% of secondary students use public transport, while 24% of primary students and 21% of secondary students walk to school. Cycling to school ensures you are awake and alert, able to concentrate when you arrive at school and it also enables you to fit some exercise in your day which is good for your physical and mental health. There were over 56,000 cyclists commuting to work in 2016 but cycling to school is a measure that is noticeably missing from the CSO data.

The Green-Schools Travel Team is successfully achieving a slow and steady increase in sustainable transport across Ireland but we want every Green-School in Ireland to join in and get #OnYerBike! In 2017, 89% of students said they would prefer to travel sustainably. More than 30,000 students took part in WOW Day (Walk on Wednesday), over 5,000 students Cycled on Wednesday (COW Day) and 4,000+ students Scooted on Wednesday (SOW Day). 3,500 students undertook #CycleRight training, 2,500 workshops were delivered by Green-Schools Travel Officers, 840 Scooter Parking spaces and 320 Cycle Parking spaces were installed on school grounds. Overall, cycling increased from 3 to 4%, with 16% of all students cycling to school at least once a week.

2017 in numbers



2026 WOW days, **651** COW days, **1007** SOW days



521 Park 'n' Stride days

102 Walkability Audits, **54** Cycleability Audits



210 the number of print and broadcast items featuring Green-Schools Travel



194 Walking Buses

[Read our #ClimateHopes](#)

Uniform

Strict uniform policies discourage cycling in general but also discriminate against women and girls who often have to wear skirts. Everyone should be able to cycle to school safely and comfortably, whether that means wearing their PE tracksuit, leggings, shorts or practical waterproof gear. Changing into your dry uniform before class is often more convenient especially during the rainy Irish winter! Uniform policies could also be adapted to include a high-vis vest as standard for incoming students.



Infrastructure

Safe cycle lanes are a necessity in every city, town and village – this will increase the tourism potential as well as keep your students safe and healthy. Better bike shelters and secure bike racks with cameras would encourage those that already have bikes to cycle to school more often. Link in with your local Tidy Towns group and get signage in the local area that highlight safe passing distances, student safety and their right to the road. If you're really ambitious you could even try to introduce a bike-to-school scheme or borrow-a-bike like the sponsored schemes in Dublin (Just Eat) or Galway, Cork and Limerick (Coca-Cola Zero). Students that live further afield could be encouraged to Park & Cycle from a bike station to school. There should always be room for bikes on public transport: Trains, Darts and the Luas should have a carriage for cyclists with safe bike racks and standing or folding seats. Buses can also be fitted with bike racks at the front or back.



Incentives

Reward schools that increase their cycling numbers with good helmets, bag carrier racks, bike lights, locks and Cycle Right/Dr. Bike training workshops. Ask your local bike shop to sponsor the 'Golden Bike Award' – the student who cycles to school for the most days each year wins a new bike! The class with the highest numbers of cycling students each month wins accessories to bling their bikes.



Freedom

Highlight the convenience and freedom associated with having a bike, it will probably save you time and be more flexible in terms of the time you have to leave, where you can go and you won't have to rush to catch your carpool lift, bus or train. Get in touch with your local cycling group and create a time map with your school at the centre. Avoid traffic jams, feel more awake and be able to concentrate when you get to school. Encourage parents to let their children cycle by giving them piece of mind through the text-a-parent bike scheme when they arrive alive to school.



Bike Week Stunt

Organise a Cycle Train or road takeover during bike week – this is where part of a road is closed once a year or even once a month with the help of the Gardaí and the whole school meets at a central location in the town and everyone joins in a guided cycle to school – to show the local community how many young people would like to cycle to school and have a right to the road! This is also a good opportunity to cycle with friends and tackle any cycle stigma when you get to school.



Find Out More

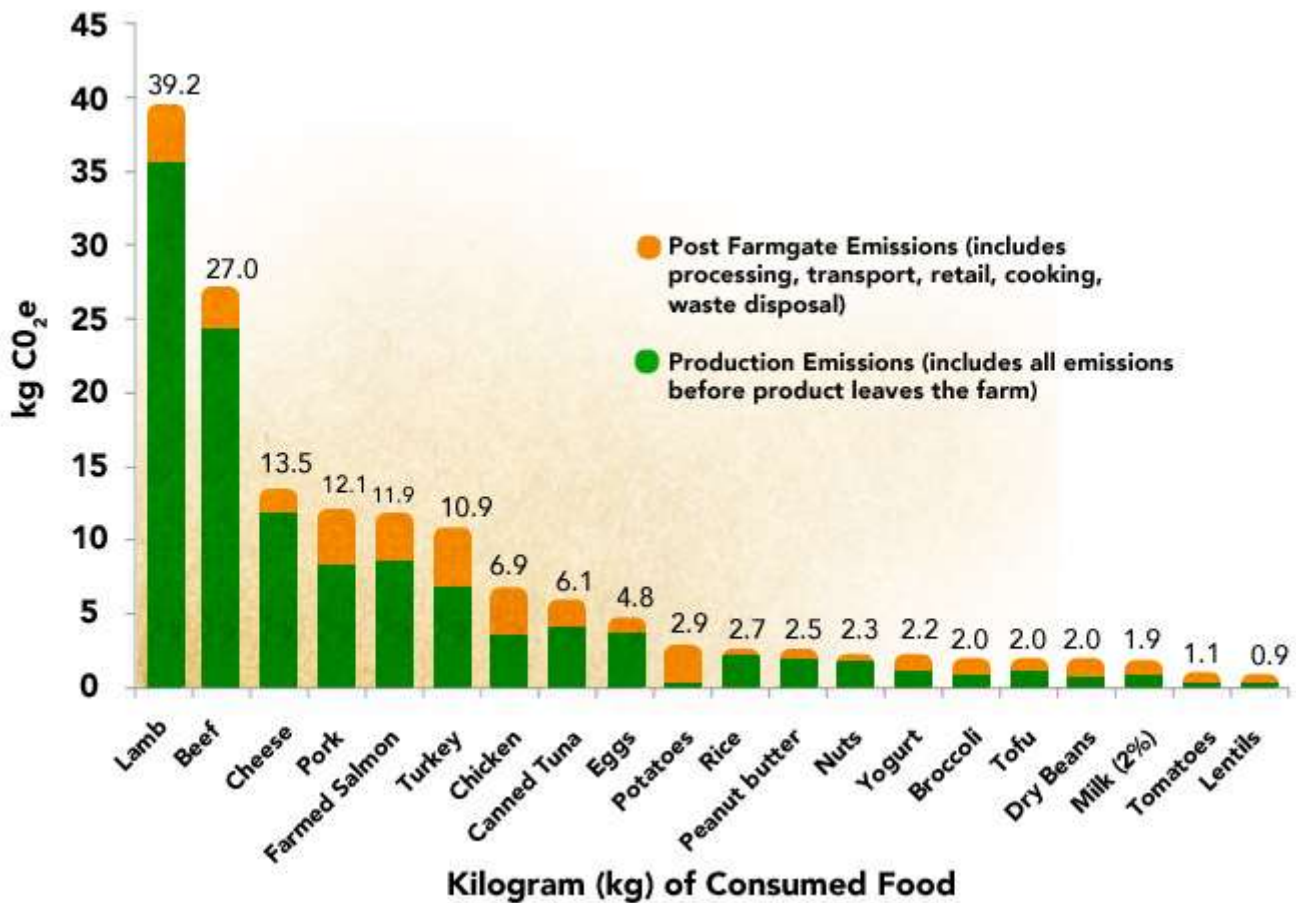
<https://greenschoolsireland.org/travel/>

Green-Schools

 An Taisce

3. How can we encourage everyone to eat less meat and dairy?

Worldwide, people are eating a lot more meat due to a steep decline in prices and according to the World Health Organisation this will bring a range of environmental and public health risks. Cancer, heart disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes are all associated with the over-consumption of meat. The space and resources required for meat production is vastly larger than that of other crops: the number of people fed in a year per hectare field ranges from 22 for potatoes and 19 for rice to 2 for lamb and just 1 for beef. Furthermore, a huge amount of energy, water and cereal grain produced today is diverted to livestock instead of human consumption. It can take up to 12kg of grain to produce 1kg of beef. There are millions of starving people on this planet and more than enough cereal grain but the majority of it is fed to cattle, pigs and chickens. Lastly, the total carbon footprint of plant protein is significantly lower than meat per kg of consumed food – so let's give it a go in every Green-School in Ireland!



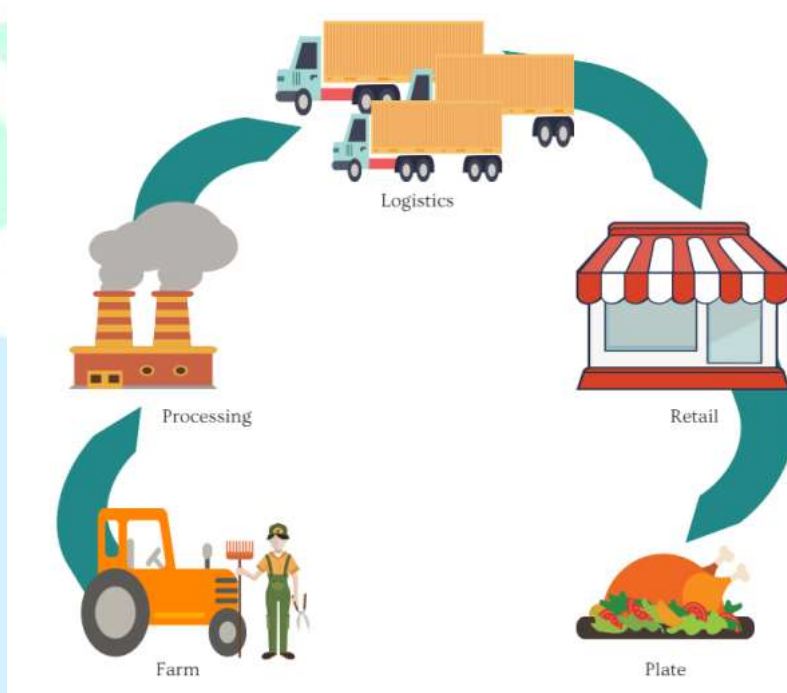
Green-Schools

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[Read our #ClimateHopes](#)

From Farm to Fork

Ask local farmers to bring in some crops and talk about how they grow them or do one better and visit a local producer to see firsthand the effort involved, value the food we eat and become aware of the nutrition, food miles and food waste associated with the produce. Think about where your lunch comes from and encourage suppliers to stock local nutritious produce and ask your parents to buy from local farmers.



Meatless Monday

Run a campaign in school that asks people to go without meat or dairy for one day a week! Let people know what healthy alternatives they can use by sending a letter home to parents with new recipe ideas. Create an online presence with a hashtag such as #MeatlessMonday #GanFeoilFriday or #MeatlessMáirt. Persuade people to join your campaign by sharing well-known celebrity, blogger and roll-models that also support #MeatlessMonday. If your school has a canteen or lunch is delivered, make sure you ask the supplier for meat free options.



Tasty Treats

Hold a vegetarian or vegan taste testing or competition in your school! Ask the Happy Pear brothers (or your local café) to sponsor the event and give their cookbooks or a voucher for the restaurant as the top prize. Make your own school meat and/or dairy-free cookbook with the best recipes from your students and send an e-copy to every family.



Have Fun With It!

Educate people on the physical and environmental health benefits of reducing their meat or dairy intake in a light-hearted or humorous manner. Take inspiration from St. Colman's Community School on facebook and create a video, sketch or intercom announcement explaining the benefits of a plant-based diet. Have a pun or poster competition in your school to raise awareness of the vegetarian/vegan diet.



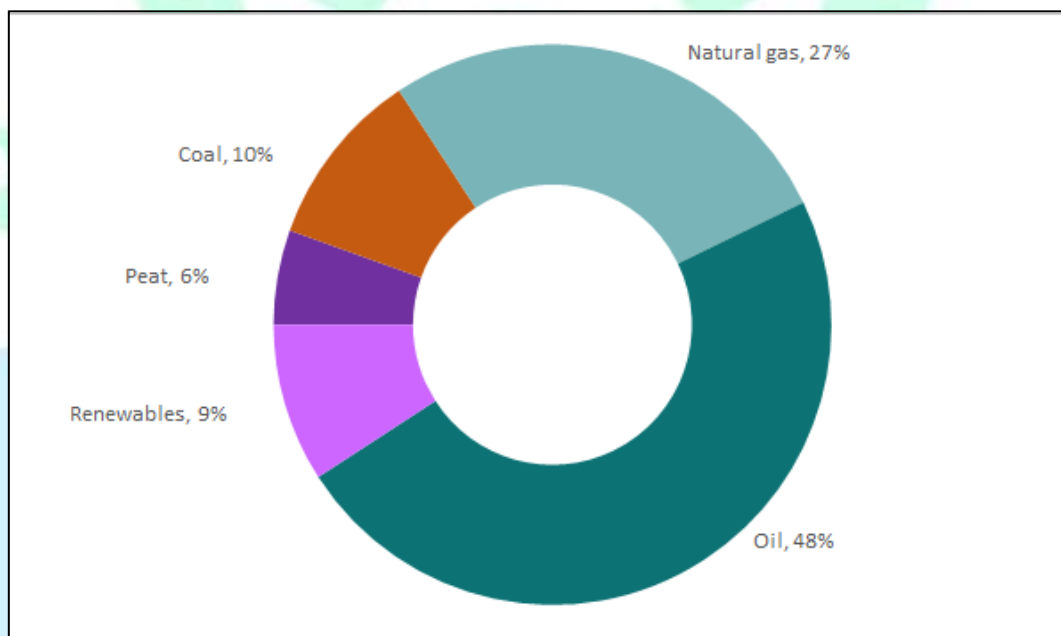
Find Out More

www.meatlessmonday.com/

4. How can we encourage every school to use renewable energy?

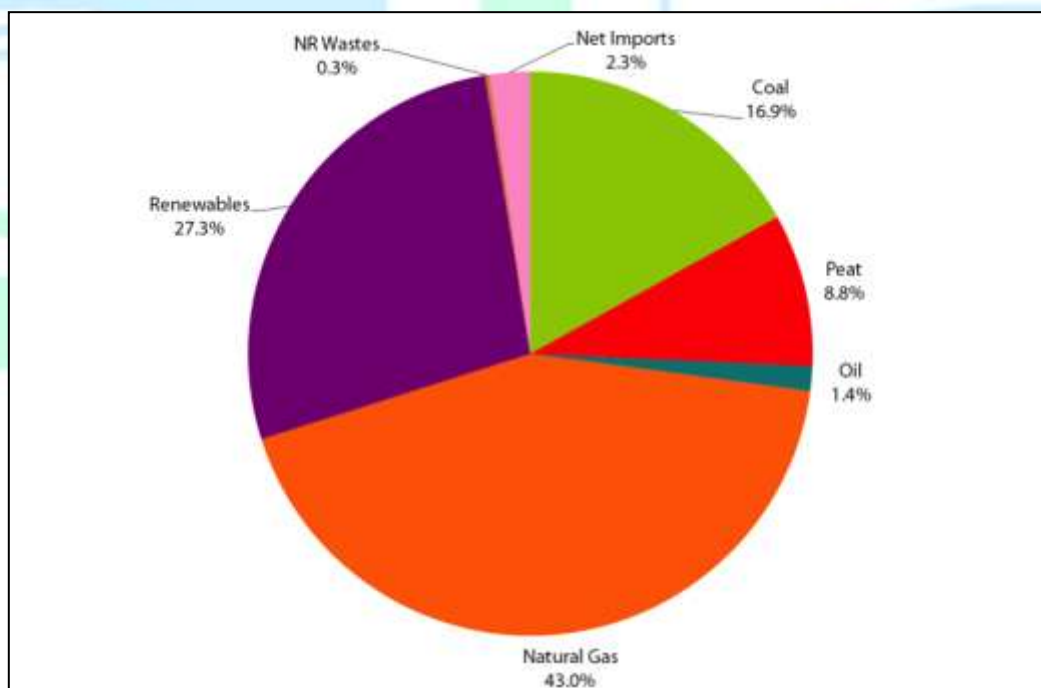
Non-renewable fossil fuels such as gas, oil, coal and peat or turf are formed over millions of years and burnt in a flash releasing tonnes of greenhouse gases into our atmosphere and polluting our air in the process. The European Renewable Energy Directive (2009) sets a mandatory target for Ireland of 16% of gross final energy consumption to come from renewable energy sources by 2020, in 2015 this was at 9%.

Ireland's gross final energy consumption including imports, SEAI 2015.



In response, Ireland's National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP) has targets of 40% for electricity generation (this was 27% in 2015), 12% for heating and 10% for transport in terms of the contributions of renewable energy. Renewable electricity in Ireland mainly comes from wind, but we also have massive potential for hydro (water), solar (sun), biomass (waste) and biogas. We asked our Green-Schools if they would like to run on renewable and the answer was a resounding yes!

Ireland's electricity generation, SEAI 2015.



[Read our #ClimateHopes](#)

Sun Smiles

Imagine if every school in Ireland had thermal solar panels on the roof which heat the school from sunlight, even on a cloudy day, or PV solar panels that provide electricity during sunshine hours. It's a practical, simple solution and contrary to what most people think, Ireland's solar potential is huge. France declared a new law in 2015 that ensures all new buildings in urban zones must have a green roof (plants) or solar panels. Why not petition An Bord Pleanála to waive the planning permission for solar panels on schools. Or petition the government to grant small, interest-free loans, subsidised by SEAI and linked to Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC), for renewable electricity solutions such as solar panels or mini wind turbines. The excess electricity produced when schools are closed could be stored or sold back to the local community electricity grid at a reduced rate and pay off the loan each year during the 185 days school is closed - summer, mid-terms, weekends etc.



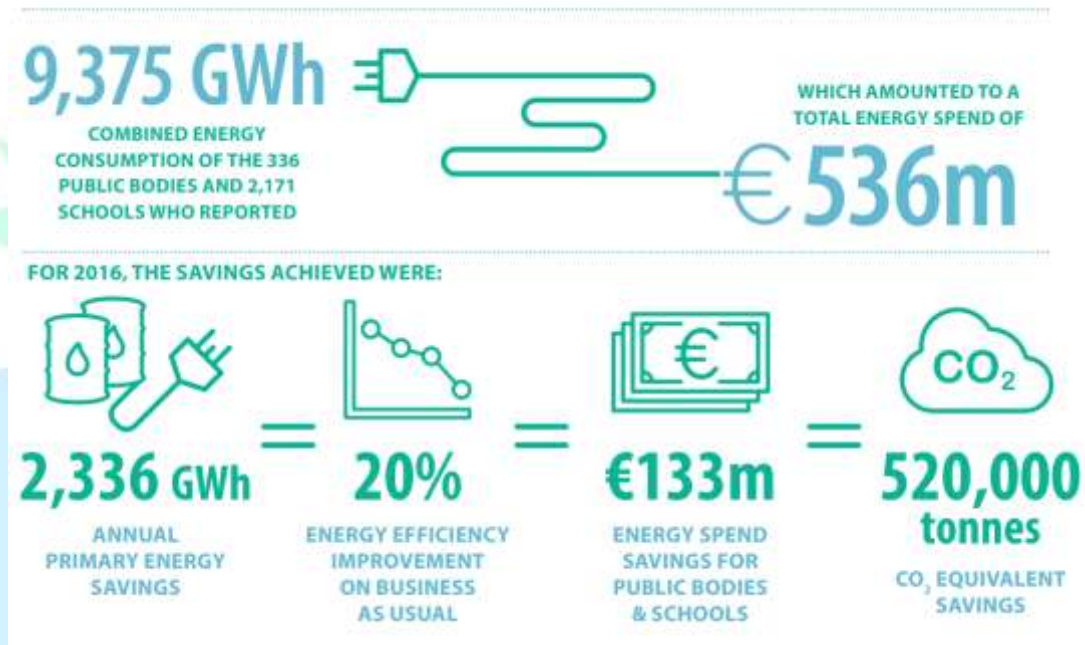
Earth Day Fundraiser

Take inspiration from Earth Day and hold a 'zero energy' hour once a month and for the full Earth Day every year. Educate people on renewable energy, the long term economic and environmental benefits. Some fundraiser ideas include a sponsored silence, phone-free day, race, recycled fashion show, raffle, bake sale, book sale and teachers – v- students match. Organise training for school management to get them on board by having your statistics researched and show the payback timelines for schools with renewable technology.



Pitch to Switch

Monitor how much energy per student each school uses and award local or national grants or prizes such as solar panels, retrofitting or something applicable for the size and type of school who demonstrates the biggest energy consumption savings each year. The National Energy Efficiency Action Plan to 2020 sets a target for schools to improve their energy efficiency by 33%. As part of this, schools are required to report annually on their energy usage to SEAI. In 2017 over 2,000 schools and 336 public bodies reported their energy consumption.



Pedal Power

'Human Powered' schools may not be that far into the future! Fitting pedals under desks in Martin Middle School, North Carolina not only helped students to concentrate and stop fidgeting, but also ensured they were exercising, combating childhood obesity and having the huge potential to produce enough electricity to power lights and other classroom equipment.



Find Out More

www.seai.ie/sustainable-solutions/community-projects/

Do you share our #ClimateHopes?

Now that you've read our best and most hopeful Green-Schools' actions to combat climate change, it's time to take action – you may already do some of these in your school so pick a new one, be ambitious and have #ClimateHope! We would love to hear from you if you take any of these actions or would like to attend the next round of regional teacher training or Climate Hope Forums with your students.

Twitter: @GreenSchoolsIre <https://twitter.com/GreenSchoolsIre>

Facebook: @GreenSchoolsIre <https://www.facebook.com/GreenSchoolsIre/>

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Green-Schools would like to sincerely thank all of the wonderful students, teachers, city, council and in particular library staff, as well as the local councillors and fantastic Climate Ambassadors who made a huge effort to come to the Climate Hope Forums and engage with us in Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Limerick.

Dublin Climate Hope Forum 20th April 2018 in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council



Cork Climate Hope Forum 25th April 2018 in Cork County Library HQ



Waterford Climate Hope Forum 26th April 2018 in Carrickphierish Library



Limerick Climate Hope Forum 27th April 2018 in the Granary Library



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