**[Schools and climate](https://www.dawn.com/news/1856597/schools-and-climate)**

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AS a mother of two school-going children, the record-breaking heatwave experienced in Karachi this year has heightened my concern about the growing impact of climate change on our children’s health, safety, and education. According to the Asian Development Bank, heatwave days in Pakistan increased by 31 days annually between 1980 and 2007, with coastal temperatures rising by one degree Celsius. Pakistan’s temperature rise is set to exceed the global average, making this relentless heat our new reality. Despite this, educational institutions have remained disturbingly inactive. With climate risks now the norm, the education ministries and schools must step up, take decisive action, and ensure our children have a safe and supportive learning environment in the face of this escalating crisis.

Schools, as microcosms of society, are on the front line of this crisis. The intense heat is more than uncomfortable — it’s harmful, impacting students’ health and learning. Reports of dehydration and heat-related illnesses highlight our education system’s inadequate infrastructure, with many schools lacking proper ventilation and shade. The response from institutions and policymakers has been sluggish, relying on temporary fixes like adjusted timings. It’s time for meaningful, structural changes.

The 2022 floods destroyed over 30,000 schools, underscoring the vulnerability of our educational infrastructure. This crisis is an opportunity to rebuild climate-resilient schools. We must implement a uniform building code that prioritises climate adaptation — improving ventilation, installing reflective roofs, and creating shaded areas. Schools should lead in sustainability by adopting solar panels, which reduce energy costs, cut reliance on non-renewable sources, and ensure power during outages, providing a more comfortable learning environment for our children.

The National Climate Change Policy adopted in 2021 overlooks the impact of climate change on educational institutions, leaving them without clear guidelines for adapting to rising temperatures and extreme weather. This gap highlights the urgent need for the climate change and education ministries to collaborate on long-term strategies that go beyond short-term solutions like reduced school hours or rainy season closures, which disrupt education. Private schools should engage consultants to develop sustainable plans that address climate risks and protect the education and well-being of our future generations.

Educational institutes must align with new climate realities.

All education ministries must revise the academic calendar to align with new climate realities. Adjusting summer and winter vacations to account for delayed winters and earlier peak summers will better protect students’ health and ensure effective learning, rather than relying on temporary schedule changes. Schools also play a crucial role by making small but impactful adjustments, such as planting trees and creating green spaces all around school premises. Research shows that vegetated areas lower temperatures, creating cooler, more comfortable spaces. This is a cost-effective way for schools to enhance the learning environment, while fostering ecological awareness among students.

The standard school uniform needs a redesign to suit the hotter climate. Lightweight, breathable fabrics and mandatory caps during peak summers should become standard to enhance student comfort and safety. Schools must ensure that uniform vendors meet quality standards to protect all students adequately. Schedu­ling school activities also requires immediate revision. Out­do­­or sports and other activities should be held during cooler parts of the day to minimise heat-rel­a­ted illnesses. Scho­ols can enhance outdoor areas by pla­­-nting trees and ins­talling canopies to provide ample sha­de, ensuring a safer environment for students.

Curriculum reforms are crucial for shaping how students understand and respond to climate change. By integrating comprehensive environmental education, students will not only learn about climate impacts but also develop the skills to take sustainable actions. Practical experiences, like gardening and recycling, foster environmental stewardship and a deep connection with nature.

Schools can lead by example, demonstrating sustainable operations and green infrastructure as real-world applications of classroom lessons. This approach ensures students practice sustainability daily, embedding these critical values in their lives. By embracing these changes, Pakistan’s schools will not only become safer and more conducive to learning but will also prepare students to lead sustainable lives in a climate-challenged world.

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*Published in Dawn, September 3rd, 2024*