School climate strikes: 1.4 million people took part, say campaigners

Activist Greta Thunberg, 16, says action proved ‘no one is too small to make a difference’

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More than 1.4 million young people around the world took part in school strikes for climate action, according to environmental campaigners.

Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish student whose solo protest last August prompted the global movement, said: “We proved that it does matter what you do and that no one is too small to make a difference.”

Children walked out of schools on Friday in 2,233 cities and towns in 128 countries, with demonstrations held from Australia to India, the UK and the US, according to the Fridays for the Future website. Further strikes are planned for 15 April.

Eyal Weintraub, an 18-year-old from Argentina who took part in the protests,
said: “We have reached a point in history when we have the technical capacities to solve poverty, malnutrition, inequality and of course global warming.

“The deciding factors for whether we take advantage of our potential will be our activism and our international unity.”

The strikes inspired by Thunberg drew widespread praise, with UN Women saying on Twitter: “She is proof that we need to listen to the young generation for a sustainable future.”

The executive director of Oxfam International, Winnie Byanyima, said: “Our children are walking out of school saying we have failed them. This is the kind of clarity and energy we need now.”

However, education ministers in the UK and Australia condemned the strikes and some commentators were critical. Madeline Grant, formerly of the Institute of Economic Affairs thinktank, asked: “Just how kind is it to shower praise on children who are fundamentally wrong?”

Thunberg posted a response on Facebook to “people who wants us to go back to school”. “The favourite argument here in Sweden, and everywhere else, is that it doesn’t matter what we do because we are all too small to make a difference. [But] Friday was the biggest day of global climate action ever, according to 350.org,” she said.

“People keep asking me ‘What is the solution to the climate crisis’? They expect
me to know the answer. That is beyond absurd, as there are no ‘solutions’ within our current systems.

“We need a whole new way of thinking. The political system that you [adults] have created is all about competition. You cheat when you can because all that matters is to win. That must come to an end.

“We need to start cooperating and sharing the remaining resources of this planet in a fair way. We are just passing on the words of the science. Our only demand is that you start listening to it, and then start acting.”

Climate strikes spread worldwide as students call for action

8 hours ago

Media caption
Climate change: Fears about effects of pollution and climate change
Thousands of school pupils worldwide have abandoned classrooms for a day of protest against climate change.
India, South Korea, Australia and the US are among the countries where teenagers are already on strike.
The day of action is expected to embrace about 100 countries. They are inspired by
Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who protests weekly outside Sweden's parliament.
Scientists say tougher measures are needed to cut global warming.
The Paris climate agreement of 2017 committed nearly 200 countries to keeping global temperatures "well below" 2.0C (3.6F) above pre-industrial times and to striving for a maximum of 1.5C.

What is a climate emergency?
BBC Newsround - climate protests live page
What does the Paris climate deal say?
Graphics: Where we are now on climate change

The globally co-ordinated children's protests - promoted through posts on Twitter and other social media - have been going on for several months.
On Thursday Greta Thunberg's campaigning earned her a Nobel Peace Prize nomination.
In January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the 16-year-old told top executives and politicians that "on climate change, we have to acknowledge that we have failed".

Image credit: REUTERS
Image caption: Société Générale bank in Paris: The banner says "Banks are dirtying our future - blockade them"
Ministers in some countries have voiced concern about children skipping classes. Australia's Education Minister Dan Tehan said "students leaving school during school hours to protest is not something that we should encourage".

UK Education Secretary Damian Hinds echoed that concern, and the government said the disruption increased teachers' workloads and wasted lesson time.

Young people protest across England

Classroom walk-out over climate change

But Environment Secretary Michael Gove backed the protesting children, saying in a video: "Dear school climate strikers, we agree."

"Collective action of the kind you're championing can make a difference, and a profound one," he said.
Delhi: The student protests are big in the capital and in Kolkata.
Tens of thousands of school students demonstrate across NZ calling for action on climate change

Lee Kenny
18:15, Mar 15 2019
Protesters gather outside parliament in Wellington as part of the march against climate change.

From Southland to the Bay of Islands, tens of thousands of school pupils took to the streets today demanding action on climate change.

Around 40 demonstrations were planned in cities and towns across New Zealand as part of the international School Strike 4 Climate campaign.

Young people are calling on the Government to do more to reduce global warming before higher temperatures and rising sea levels have catastrophic consequences.
Demonstrators march from Te Ngākau Civic Square to Parliament Lawn. The student strike is the largest of its kind ever staged in New Zealand and organisers vowed more action is to follow.

For many it was their first foray into political activism, but armed with placards and banners, young people gathered in their thousands at Te Ngākau Civic Square in Wellington this morning.
Former Kāpiti College student Sophie Handford, the School Strike 4 Climate NZ's coordinator, calls the march to action.

Despite many being warned they would be marked absent from school, the student strikers marched on Parliament to send their message to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's Government.

The demonstration was organised as part of the School Strike 4 Climate NZ which urged Kiwi kids to miss lessons for the day to join the fight against climate change.

It was an overcast morning but spirits were high as pupils from across the region assembled in the city centre, chanting "want do we want? Climate Justice. When do we want it? Now!"

Shoppers, tourists and city workers looked on as the procession wound its way along Lambton Quay.

As they reached Parliament Lawn there was a festival
atmosphere as students banged drums, blew whistles and sounded horns.

A number of speakers addressed the crowd with words of encouragement or support before MPs James Shaw, Nicola Willis and Grant Robertson took part in a Q and A.

About 200 students from schools across Hawke’s Bay marched in Napier.

Climate Change Minister Shaw received a warm welcome as he took to the mic following yesterday’s attack which left him with a black eye.

He said the Government was committed to passing the zero carbon act this year and it would need to be done by June, "so that for the first time, we have a legally binding commitment to staying within 1.5 degrees [Celsius] of global warming because if we do not, we do not have a future".
He said the bill would form targets to cut New Zealand's climate pollution and form a politically neutral climate change commission "to keep us on track, to hold us accountable".

"It is time for the talking to stop and it is time for the action to start."

To the people who denied and obfuscated climate change, Shaw said: "It is real, it is us, it is bad, and we can fix it.

"So, keep it up. Stay strong. Keep holding us to account. It is only because of you that we are able to do the things that we need to do, this year, to fix this thing."

Prime

Minister Jacinda Ardern was a surprise visitor at the Student Strike 4 Climate Change in New Plymouth.

He said the crowd gathered on Parliament's lawns in the
The capital was the largest march for climate change.

The day of national action was spearheaded by former Kāpiti College student Sophie Handford, the School Strike 4 Climate NZ’s coordinator.

The 18-year-old said the number of students who attended the Wellington protest exceeded all expectations.

A protester expresses her sympathy to Climate Change Minister James Shaw after he was assaulted.

"We thought we might get around 500 people. There are so many people here, it's incredible.

"Every single one of these young people here today is playing a key part in democracy. These young people are the hope we have been waiting for."

The demonstration was one of a number of School Strike 4 Climate events that took place locally, with similar protests staged outside Kāpiti District Council and War Memorial Library in Lower Hutt.

A group of Thorndon Primary School students stood in front of the crowds and said "this is our planet and this is what we have done with it".

Addressing adults, they said choices needed to be made now because they were the ones who would witness the results of another generation's inaction.

Victoria University of Wellington's professor James
Renwick, who was awarded the Prime Minister's Science Communication prize for his work on climate change, said the globe needed "urgent action, starting right away".

Students used homemade banners to express their concerns over climate change.

"New Zealand is about the first country in the world to have these climate marches. So today, you are leading the world."

Taranaki protest

In Taranaki school students cheered and screamed when, in a surprise move, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern turned up to address them.
Thousands of young people marched on Parliament to call for immediate action on climate change.

Ardern is in New Plymouth to speak at the launch of a report into the potential of setting up a hydrogen industry in the region, and to launch Womad 2019 this evening.

But she made a quick detour to the New Plymouth School Strike 4 Climate Change at Puke Ariki Landing in the CBD and shared her thoughts on climate change.

"It is the biggest challenge we will tackle globally in my lifetime and in your lifetime," Ardern told the crowd of about 200 students.

The Prime Minister spoke to the crowd about the zero carbon act and plans to get to carbon neutrality by 2050. "Not because we want to, because we have to."

And despite the decision to stop offering any more permits for oil and gas exploration offshore being controversial in Taranaki, local students and parents alike cheered in
support of mentions of the plans.

"But that means we have a responsibility to work alongside your community and say what is the future path for Taranaki and the economy here," she said.

Ardern thanked the students for their efforts.

Among their many climate concerns, the group are calling for a zero carbon act to make New Zealand carbon neutral by 2050 and a commitment to cease all fossil fuel extraction.

They also want greater investment in renewable energy alternative and new regulation of the agriculture industry, which they say accounts for almost half of New Zealand's emissions.

The School Strike 4 Climate Action movement began in Sweden in August last year when 15-year-old Greta Thunberg missed school to protest outside the Swedish Parliament holding a sign that read: 'kolstrejk för klimatet (School strike for climate).

Since then it has grown into a worldwide collective.

Today it emerged that Greta Thunberg had been nominated as a candidate for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

'It's our time to rise up': youth climate strikes held in 100 countries
School and university students continue Friday protests to call for
From Australia to America, children put down their books on Friday to march for change in the first global climate strike. The event was embraced in the developing nations of India and Uganda and in the Philippines and Nepal – countries acutely impacted by climate change - as tens of thousands of schoolchildren and students in more than 100 countries went on “strike”, demanding the political elite urgently address what they say is a climate emergency.

In Sydney, where about 30,000 children and young people marched from the Town Hall Square to Hyde Park, university student Xander De Vries, 20, said: “It’s our time to rise up. We don’t have a lot of time left; it’s us who have to make a change so I thought it would be important to be here and show support to our generation.”

Coordinated via social media by volunteers in 125 countries and regions, the action spread across more than 2,000 events under the banner of Fridays for Future.
As dusk fell in the antipodes, the baton was passed to Asia, where small groups of Indian students went on strike for the first time.

In Delhi, more than 200 children walked out of classes to protest against inaction on tackling climate change, and similar protests took place on a smaller scale in 30 towns and cities. Vidit Baya, 17, who is in his last year at MDS public school in Udaipur, said: “In India, no one talks about climate change. You don’t see it on the news or in the papers or hear about it from government.

“This was our first strike as a nation and there were young people taking strike action in many cities. It is a fledgling movement but we are very happy with our action today. We are trying to get people to be more aware of climate change and the need to tackle it.”

Across Africa, there were strikes in several countries. In Uganda, Kampala international student Hilda Nakabuye addressed striking students in the capital.
In Johannesburg, pupils from St James preparatory school added their voices to the global demand for governments to act.
Janet Smith
@Janet_xasperate

The children of St James Preparatory in Johannesburg, South Africa, add their voices to the world #FridaysforFuture #ClimateStrike #Greenpeace

In Sweden, youngsters gathered in Stockholm’s central square to hear 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, the girl whose single-minded determination has inspired millions of people around the world and earned a nomination this week for the Nobel peace prize.

When she appeared, the crowd chanted her name and she earned cheers and applause by telling them: “We have been born into this world and we have to live with this crisis, and our children and our grandchildren. We are facing the greatest existential crisis humanity has ever faced. And yet it has been ignored. You who have ignored it know who you are.”

Political leaders in some countries criticised the strikes. In Australia, the education minister, Dan Tehan, said: “Students leaving school during school hours to protest is not something that we should encourage.” The UK’s education secretary, Damian Hinds, claimed the disruption increased teachers’ workloads and wasted lesson time.

But young people brushed off the criticism.

Jean Hinchcliffe, 14, striking in Sydney, said on the Today programme: “I have been really frustrated and really angry about the fact I don’t have a voice in politics and I don’t have a voice in the climate conversation when my politicians are pretty much refusing to do anything ... So I decided to strike and ... suddenly us kids are being listened to and that’s why we continue to strike and feel it’s so important.”

In the UK, where an estimated 10,000 young people gathered in London and thousands more took to the streets in Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as other towns and cities, the environment secretary, Michael Gove, broke ranks with
Hinds and praised the action in a video message with other Conservative MPs.

“Collective action of the kind you’re championing can make a difference and a profound one,” Gove said. “Together we can beat climate change.

“It will require us to change the way in which our energy is generated, change the way in which our homes are built, change the way in which our land is managed and farming operates. But that change is absolutely necessary.”

In Tokyo, young people had earlier marched through the city’s Shibuya scramble crossing as part of the climate strike. About 130 people – including school and university students and other supporters – joined in the march, which started at the United Nations university and wound its way through the streets of the capital, including the busy Omotesando shopping street.

One of the organisers, Ten Maekawa, 20, led the crowd in chants of: “What do we want? Climate justice! When do we want it? Now!”

Maekawa said he believed it was important for youth to mobilise on the issue: “In 2030, the Earth will be in danger because of climate change. They’re responsible for the future, so it’s very important for the young generation to speak up about climate change.”

Students in Parliament Square, London. Photograph: Jack Taylor/Getty Images
In Florida, Marcela Mulholland, a 21-year-old student who in her lifetime has witnessed how rising sea levels are threatening her home and community, urged young people across the world to continue their campaign. “There’s no better way to find hope and meaning in this trying time than working alongside fellow people who share my grief for the world,” she said.

Elsewhere in the United States, young people carried hand painted signs sporting their own slogans: “Denial is not a policy” and “fight now or swim l8r”.

More than a hundred students marched across the Capitol’s lawn in DC, chanting “What do we want? Climate action. When do we want it? Now,” and were urged on by speakers organised by the Youth Climate Strike US. “It is time the world listens to these young people and pays attention to what we’re asking for,” said 16-year-old Maddy Fernands, the group’s press director.

The speakers included Minneapolis resident Isra Hirsi, the 16-year-old daughter of Ilhan Omar, one of the first two Muslim women elected to Congress in 2018.

“Yes, we are at a dark moment in our history, but we are the light that can bring change,” Hirsi told the crowd. “We must end the extraction of the dirtiest fossil fuel in the world and keep it in the ground.”
Thousands of scientists are backing the kids striking for climate change

Students around the world are walking out of school to urge governments to do more about global warming.

Matthew Warren
Since January, Vanessa Nakate has been spending Friday mornings on strike. Sometimes alone, sometimes with her friends or siblings, the 22-year-old has been protesting on the streets of the Ugandan capital, Kampala, coming in late to her job selling car batteries. She strikes at different locations around the city, one week setting up in front of a supermarket, another outside parliament buildings. But her protests have a singular focus: to draw attention to climate change and urge her government to take action.

This Friday 15 March, a few friends will join Nakate. But they won’t be alone. In about 1,700 cities in more than 100 countries — from Nepal to Vanuatu — thousands of young people are planning to walk out of schools to demand that
adults do more to combat climate change.

“I hope the strike is just like a massive, massive wake-up call for policymakers and CEOs of massive corporations,” says 18-year-old student Ummi Hoque, who learned about the strikes through friends and social media and will join a demonstration in London. She hopes that the protests will dispel stereotypes that young people are lazy, and encourage governments to make climate change — which will have its worst effects on future generations — their top priority.

And although some politicians have objected to children walking out of class, thousands of scientists around the world have thrown their support behind the movement.

“The idea of a climate strike is innovative. It’s provocative, and I think it’s the right form of non-violent civil disobedience,” says Gail Whiteman, a social scientist at Lancaster University, UK, and one of many academics who have voiced their support for the strikes.

Peak protest
The day is set to be the biggest moment yet for a grassroots movement that has developed into a global phenomenon in only a few months. Most protestors — including Nakate — have been inspired by Swedish teen Greta Thunberg, who kick-started the movement when she began regularly walking out of classes in August 2018 to sit outside the
Swedish parliament in Stockholm with a sign reading “school strike for climate”.

Following Thunberg’s example, thousands of young people from Belgium to Australia have taken part in strikes over the past few months. But this Friday’s event promises to be the largest so far — a global effort spearheaded by young activists in each country and through social-media hashtags such as #fridaysforfuture and #YouthStrike4Climate.

Thunberg has become the figurehead for the youth protests — an expression of anger at adults’ inaction against the climate crisis. “You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes,” she said in a speech at the 2018 United Nations climate conference in Katowice, Poland.

**Academic support**

More than 12,000 scientists have signed a statement started by researchers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland in support of the strikes, saying that those countries are not doing enough to keep global warming well below 2 °C — the aim of the 2015 Paris climate accord. Young people’s concerns are “justified and supported by the best available science”, it says.

In New Zealand, more than 1,500 academics have released a similar statement. And last month, a letter from 224 UK academics published in The Guardian newspaper stated that
the young strikers “have every right to be angry about the future that we shall bequeath to them, if proportionate and urgent action is not taken”.

“As adults we have abjectly failed,” says Kevin Anderson, a climate scientist at the University of Manchester, UK, and Uppsala University in Sweden, and a signatory of the Guardian letter.

Before most of the children who will be striking were born, scientists knew about climate change and how to respond to it, says Anderson. But a quarter of a century later, people have collectively failed to act — and humanity is running out of time if it is going to restrict warming to 2 °C, he adds.

**Teachable moment**

Not everyone is so enthusiastic about the strikes. Some politicians — including UK Prime Minister Theresa May — and school leaders have expressed concern that the protests are interfering with children’s education. “While we support the right of young people to express themselves, first and foremost, pupils should be in school during term time,” said Sarah Hannafin, senior policy adviser for the United Kingdom’s National Association of Head Teachers, in a statement. School leaders can’t condone children missing out on education, she says, and schools provide a safe platform for teaching children about positive social action.
Whiteman is surprised by the “stuffy” responses of some of those objecting to the strikes. “Education happens in many places,” she says. Teachers could use the moment to discuss relevant aspects of literature or history with their students — who are making history themselves, she says.

Hoque, who also attended a strike in February, says that her teachers are backing the students, and have even asked them to tell the class about their experiences when they return to school. “Young people can be the motivators, but at the end of the day, we don’t have the ultimate power. It’s the policymakers,” she says.

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'There is no planet B': best placards from the youth climate strike

Young people in more than 100 countries press politicians to act on climate change

Main image: Young people demonstrate against climate change in Nice, France. Photograph: Eric Gaillard/Reuters
Fri 15 Mar 2019 17.29 GMT

Edinburgh, Scotland
Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Wellington, New Zealand
Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images
Wellington, New Zealand
Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images
*Sydney, Australia*

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Kolkata, India
Photograph: Piyal Adhikary/EPA
- **New Delhi, India**  
  Photograph: Altaf Qadri/AP

- **Lausanne, Switzerland**  
  ‘The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything’ - Albert Einstein  
  Photograph: Jean-Christophe Bott/EPA
Cape Town, South Africa
Photograph: Nic Bothma/EPA
Rome, Italy

Students hold a papier-mache panda, an inflatable Earth and a placard reading: ‘Time is running out’
Photograph: Andreas Solaro/AFP/Getty Images
Nice, France
Photograph: Eric Gaillard/Reuters
•

**Berlin, Germany**

Photograph: Felipe Trueba/EPA
Paris, France
Photograph: Gonzalo Fuentes/Reuters
**Vienna, Austria**

The placard says: ‘The climate is more hopeless than my high school graduation’

Photograph: Georg Hochmuth/AFP/Getty Images
Düsseldorf, Germany
Photograph: Wolfgang Rattay/Reuters


Brighton, UK
Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

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