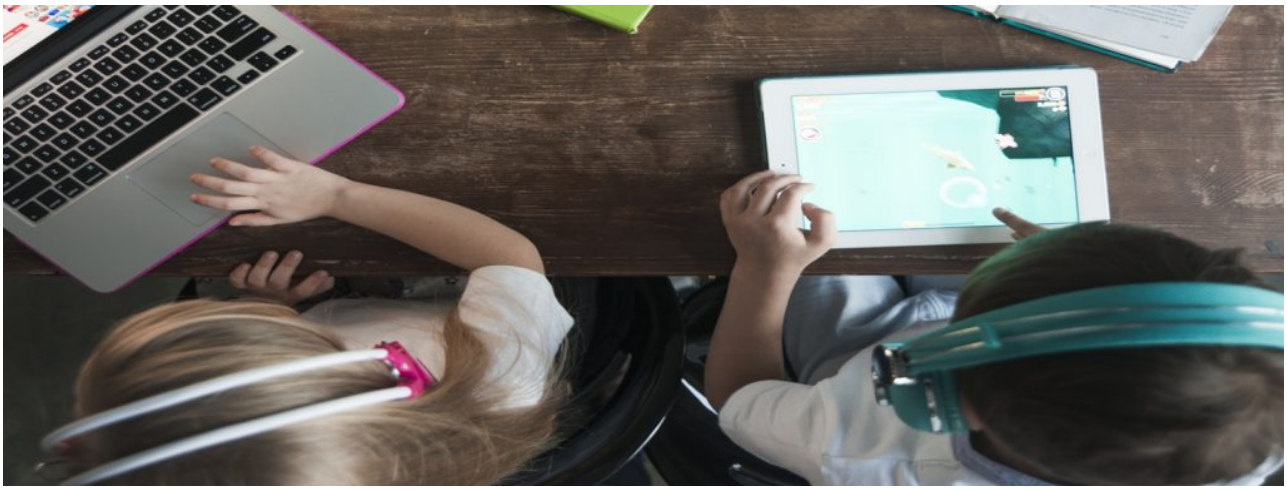
£45M Investment and New Digital Standards Proposed for Schools

24 March 2025



No Child Left Behind? Let's Make Sure That's More Than a Slogan

When the UK Government announced its renewed push to close the digital divide in education—pledging more laptops, more connectivity, and a firm stance that *"no child should be left behind"*—it struck a chord across the education sector.

The plan, outlined in January's announcement, commits to building on the 1.5 million laptops and tablets already distributed to disadvantaged pupils and puts digital access at the heart of future-facing education. There's no doubt this is an important—and long overdue—step.

But for school leaders, MATs, and procurement teams working on the ground, a familiar question quickly follows:

How do we turn big promises into day-to-day realities that actually work in schools?

And more importantly: how do we do it *better* than before?

From Short-Term Fixes to Sustainable Strategy: Why the Procurement Act 2023 Is a Wake-Up Call for School Leaders

We've been here before. Devices arrive. Funding lands. But without the right infrastructure and procurement systems in place, even the best-intentioned

policies risk falling short.

What the *"No Child Left Behind"* pledge highlights is not just a digital gap—but a systems gap:

- Schools struggle with procurement delays even when funding is available
- Devices are often distributed without deployment plans or support models
- Suppliers can't always scale when demand surges
- Local partnerships are underused
- Schools working alone are at greater risk of poor outcomes

If we want to close the digital divide for good, we need to stop treating procurement as a formality—and start seeing it as a strategic enabler.

That's where the Procurement Act 2023 comes in.

The Procurement Act 2023: Turning Policy into Progress

Coming into force from October 2024, the Procurement Act 2023 is designed to simplify and modernise public sector procurement. And it could be a game-changer for schools—*if they're ready for it*.

Key changes include:

- A single, unified procurement platform to simplify sourcing
- New principles prioritising value, transparency, and collaboration
- Flexibility to work with a broader range of suppliers—not just those on existing frameworks
- Greater autonomy for schools and trusts to tailor procurement to local needs

In other words: schools no longer need to feel boxed in by slow, outdated systems. With the right guidance, the Act empowers schools to source smarter, act faster, and invest in longer-term digital success.

So What Needs to Change? 5 Key Shifts School Leaders Should Prioritise

1. **Logistics Still Block Progress**

Funding is crucial—but many schools still face major hurdles when it comes to navigating procurement rules, understanding framework limitations, and

managing contracts. The Act can help, but only if schools rethink their approach.

2. **Devices Without Support = Wasted Potential**

A device in a child's hands is only the beginning. Schools need access to deployment guidance, tech support partners, and clear refresh plans to ensure sustainability.

3. **Suppliers Need to Scale—Fast**

During peak periods, even good suppliers struggle to deliver. Schools must work with agile partners through flexible networks that allow rapid response to surges in demand.

4. **Communities Are Underused Assets**

Local partners—from refurbishers to broadband providers—can help fill gaps. Yet most remain untapped. Schools should be empowered to think locally, not just nationally.

5. **Procurement Networks Work—So Use Them**

We've seen schools thrive when they collaborate through trusted procurement networks. Whether it's bulk buying, shared support, or supplier vetting—networks reduce risk and improve outcomes.

Independent Sourcing: The Smart School's Advantage

The best part? The Procurement Act 2023 doesn't just allow independent sourcing—it actively encourages it. Schools can step away from rigid, legacy frameworks and build relationships with suppliers that align with their needs, values, and budgets.

At *The School Supply Network*, we help schools:

- Navigate the new procurement landscape
- Access specialist suppliers who offer deployment support—not just devices
- Build coordinated strategies with other schools and trusts
- Go from reactive buying to proactive digital planning

Final Thought: The Policy Is in Place. Now the Practice Has to Catch Up.

The Government's commitment to ensuring no child is left behind is more than welcome—it's necessary. But it's only the first step. The next steps depend on how schools, suppliers, and procurement teams respond.

By embracing the Procurement Act 2023 and rethinking how we source, support, and scale digital access, we can stop firefighting—and start building real digital resilience in our schools.