The School Buying Reset 2026: Why Schools Need to Move Beyond Framework Dependency

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A new six-part series exploring how schools can build greater procurement confidence and access a wider, more competitive supplier market in 2026.

School buying has changed.

In 2026, school leaders, business managers, governors and MAT executives are making procurement decisions in a much tougher environment. Rising costs, growing SEND pressures, estates demands, staffing challenges and constrained budgets mean every pound spent on goods and services now carries greater weight.

Yet many schools are still relying on the same familiar procurement routes they have used for years.

Frameworks can play an important role. They can offer speed, structure and a route to compliant buying. But when schools rely on them by default, rather than as one option within a wider procurement strategy, they can become a ceiling on choice, competition and innovation.

That is the issue at the heart of **The School Buying Reset 2026**.

This new six-part editorial series has been created to help school leaders, school business managers and governors rethink how they buy, how they compare suppliers, and how they access a wider market with greater confidence.

It is not about telling schools to abandon frameworks.

It is about helping schools move beyond framework dependency.

What the Series Will Cover

Over the coming weeks, **The School Buying Reset 2026** will take readers through a clear and practical journey:

- Why procurement can no longer be treated as a purely administrative task
- What the Procurement Act 2023 really changes for schools and trusts
- The hidden costs of over-relying on frameworks
- A practical playbook for safely opening up competition and accessing a wider supplier market
- Where wider-market buying can deliver the biggest impact across key school categories
- How to build lasting procurement confidence year after year

The series is built around one central message:

Frameworks have a role, but they should not become the ceiling of school choice. Schools are not short of suppliers. They are short of procurement confidence and process.

Most schools default to familiar routes because they feel safer. That is understandable. Procurement carries responsibility, and no school wants to take unnecessary risks with public money, compliance or service quality.

But familiar does not always mean best.

In today's financial climate, schools need the confidence to test the market, compare suppliers properly, ask better questions and make buying decisions that reflect their own needs, priorities and pressures.

Why We're Doing This Now

Throughout 2025 and into 2026, our work with schools through **The School Network** has highlighted a clear and growing challenge.

School leaders and business managers want better value, stronger suppliers and more practical routes to market. But many are unsure how to use the new procurement landscape effectively, how far they can go beyond familiar frameworks, or how to engage a wider range of suppliers while staying compliant.

The Procurement Act 2023 has created a new opportunity for schools to think differently about supplier discovery, competition, transparency and value.

But legislation alone does not create better buying.

Schools need practical guidance, clear examples and repeatable processes they can use in real situations.

That is why we are launching **The School Buying Reset 2026**.

What You'll Get from the Series

Each part of the series will be practical, accessible and grounded in the realities of school life in 2026.

Across the six parts, we will explore:

- How to move procurement from admin to strategy

- How to understand the wider supplier market
- How to compare options more confidently
- How to build stronger specifications
- How to safely open up competition
- How to identify where wider-market buying can make the biggest difference
- How to build a repeatable approach to better buying year after year

By the end of the series, readers will have a clearer framework for making better buying decisions — decisions that reflect their school's needs, budget pressures, compliance responsibilities and long-term priorities.

How to Follow the Series

The first part of **The School Buying Reset 2026** launches next week.

To follow the full series and access related templates, checklists and additional resources, schools can join **The School Network**.

The School Network exists to help schools move from supplier search to supplier strategy.

This series is the starting point for a more confident, strategic approach to school buying.