

Data Protection in 2025: A Practical Guide for School Leaders

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Let's be honest—data protection isn't the topic most school leaders get excited about. But in 2025, with stricter expectations, smarter technology, and more scrutiny from regulators, it's a topic no school can afford to overlook.

The updated government guidance on [Data Protection in Schools](#) makes one thing clear: data protection is no longer just an IT or admin issue—it's a leadership issue. Whether you're running a MAT, leading a primary school, or managing a trust-wide digital strategy, your role in protecting pupil data has never been more important.

This article breaks down everything you need to know—from the legal must-haves to the practical tools—and how to avoid the biggest pitfalls.

What Hasn't Changed: Your Core Duties

Schools are still bound by the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, which means you must:

- Collect and use personal data lawfully and transparently
- Keep data accurate and secure
- Only store it for as long as it's needed
- Allow parents and pupils to request access to their data (via Subject Access Requests)

But compliance isn't just about having policies on paper. It's about creating a culture of safe and respectful data use in every part of school life—from safeguarding systems to communication tools.

[What data protection means for schools](#)

What's New in 2025?

1. The Digital Information and Smart Data Bill

This upcoming legislation will **simplify consent rules** and enhance data-sharing flexibility *without reducing pupil protections*. But it also tightens expectations on transparency, data rights, and oversight—especially when AI is involved.

[Updates to the Bill](#)

2. Generative AI in Schools

Using tools like ChatGPT or AI marking systems? You must now consider:

- Whether personal data is being shared with external providers
- If pupil profiling or decision-making is occurring
- Whether staff understand how AI works and what risks are involved

[AI and data protection in schools](#)

The Role of the DPO: Not a Box-Ticking Job

Every school or trust must have a Data Protection Officer (DPO)—but just appointing one isn't enough. Your DPO should:

- Advise on data decisions across the school
- Monitor compliance (policies, logs, audits)
- Be accessible to parents, pupils, and staff
- Report directly to senior leadership

They can't be someone with a conflict of interest, like your Headteacher or IT lead (unless they operate independently).

[Role of Data Protection Officers](#)

Policy and Practice: What You Must Have in Place

By 2025, all schools should have:

- A clear data protection policy
- A privacy notice for parents and pupils
- Procedures for handling data breaches
- Regular training for all staff, not just admin teams
- Evidence of ongoing record-keeping and data audits

[Data protection policies and procedures](#)

[Managing breaches of data](#)

Common Pitfalls (and How to Avoid Them)

- Staff using personal devices without secure email
- Unsecured spreadsheets of SEND or safeguarding data
- Data breach logs left blank despite near-misses
- SARs ignored or delayed because no one owns the process
- AI tools trialled without any data risk assessment

These aren't hypothetical—they're the real-world issues schools are being pulled up on. Good data practice isn't about perfection, it's about awareness, documentation, and response.

Your 5-Step Action Plan for 2025

1. **Audit:** Review what personal data your school collects, where it's stored, and who can access it
2. **Update:** Refresh your policies and privacy notices for clarity and compliance
3. **Train:** Make sure *every staff member* knows the basics—especially around breach response
4. **Check AI:** Any digital tool using pupil data must now be reviewed for AI or profiling risks
5. **Empower Your DPO:** Give them the access, support, and independence to do the job right

Final Word: It's Not Just Compliance—It's Trust

Parents trust your school with their child's most sensitive information. From health records to SEND support, from safeguarding alerts to classroom behaviour

data, schools are data-rich environments.

Getting data protection right isn't just about avoiding fines—it's about building confidence with families, pupils, and staff. In a world of smart tech and rising scrutiny, that trust is one of your school's most valuable assets.