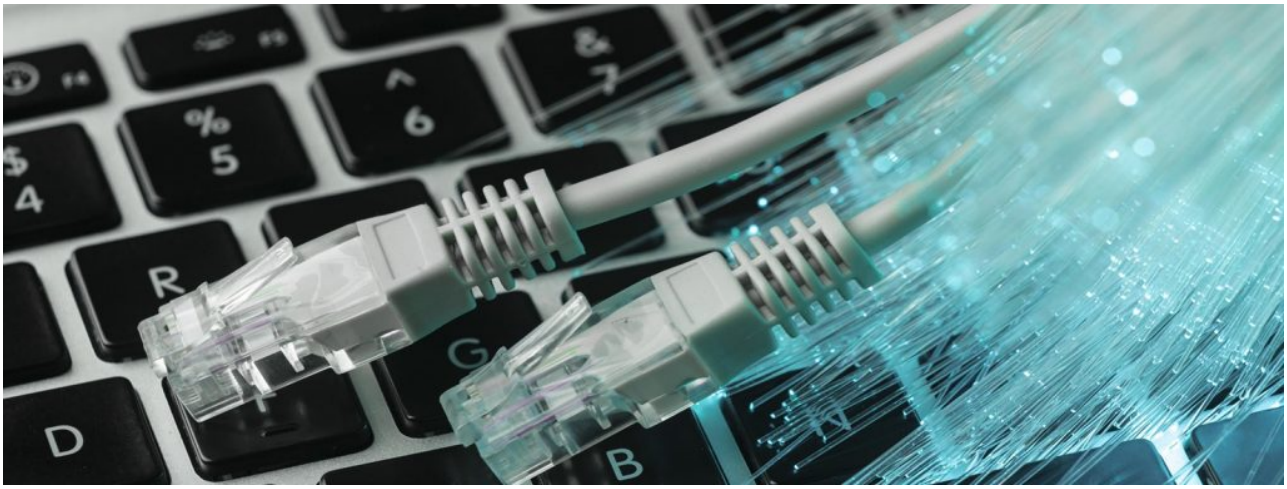
Digital Standards by 2030: What 2,500 UK School Leaders Are Saying

9 October 2025



In an increasingly digital education landscape, UK schools are facing the monumental challenge of meeting the Department for Education (DfE)'s 2030 digital standards. But where do schools currently stand? What support do they need? And what are their greatest concerns?

To help answer these questions, we researched and surveyed over 2,500 ICT leaders, digital transition leads, and COOs from primary and secondary schools across the UK. This large-scale insight is based entirely on feedback from our school network, offering an honest and grounded picture of where things stand—and where they need to go.

This article highlights what schools are doing, struggling with, and prioritising over the next 6–12 months. Whether you're a school leader, trust CEO, digital coordinator or governor, these insights are designed to support informed decision-making and peer learning across the sector.

Key Finding 1: Only 16% of Schools Meet All Six DfE Digital Standards

From broadband and wireless connectivity to cybersecurity, filtering, and inclusion, the DfE has outlined six core standards to be achieved by 2030. Yet, only 16% of schools report full compliance today.

40% are partially compliant, having met between 3–5 standards, while a concerning 44% are either in the early stages or have barely started.

Rural schools, in particular, face infrastructure barriers such as delayed fibre (FTTP) rollouts. Meanwhile, larger MATs are progressing faster, often due to better centralised support.

Key Finding 2: Budget, Connectivity and Skills Gaps Are the Top Challenges

In open-ended responses, three barriers stood out:

- Lack of reliable FTTP access (especially in rural areas)
- High total cost of ownership (TCO) for upgrades, often exceeding £45k
- Shortage of technical skills among school staff

One respondent summed it up: “Single firewalls can’t handle ransomware; we need MCS-certified partners for layered cyber and connectivity.”

Key Finding 3: Demand for Funding Support and Trusted Specialists

80% of schools called for easier access to DfE funding schemes like Connect the Classroom. Schools also expressed strong demand for:

- Certified FTTP/wireless installers (72%)
- Cybersecurity training/templates aligned with NCSC (68%)
- Ready-to-use filtering/resilience solutions (64%)

Tools that help with budget planning—such as TCO calculators—were also in demand.

Key Finding 4: Confidence is Low; Urgency is High

While 63% of schools say time and resources are significant challenges (rated 4 or 5 out of 5), only 20% feel confident they can meet the 2030 deadline.

Interestingly, those who had received Connect the Classroom funding were 20% more confident than those who hadn’t, suggesting the critical role of financial and delivery support.

Key Finding 5: Immediate Priorities for Schools (Oct 2025 – Apr 2026)

When asked what they were focusing on next, schools highlighted:

- **FTTP/wireless upgrades** (40%)
- **Cybersecurity resilience** (30%)
- **Staff and leadership capacity** (15%)
- **SEND/inclusion tech pilots** (10%)
- **Exploration of AI tools** (5%)

This shows a sector focused on getting the basics right quickly, while still keeping an eye on inclusive and future-facing tools.

Accessing Support: Funding Pathways and Procurement Flexibility

Schools do not have to navigate these challenges alone. Several funding routes are available to ease the financial burden of digital transformation:

- **Connect the Classroom (DfE)** – Up to £45 million available for wireless and network upgrades
- **Condition Improvement Fund (CIF)** – For eligible academies requiring capital investment
- **DSIT Innovation Funding** – For projects integrating innovative EdTech and inclusion tools
- **Local Authority/Trust Capital Grants** – May vary by region or trust

Additionally, under the **Procurement Act 2023**, schools and trusts have greater flexibility to procure tailored digital and cybersecurity solutions. This allows for outcome-focused procurement processes that prioritise local context, inclusive access, and whole-school impact—helping leaders choose what works best for them.

We strongly encourage schools to explore these options with their business managers, trust procurement leads, or local advisors.

Why This Matters: Insights to Share, Not Just Data to Store

These findings reflect a system under strain but moving forward. By sharing the honest views of school leaders nationwide, we hope this article becomes a valuable reference point for others navigating similar challenges.

Use it to:

- Benchmark your school’s progress
- Learn how others are handling digital transitions
- Advocate for support internally or locally

We encourage all school leaders, governors, and suppliers to reflect on these results, use them to guide conversations, and share with peers.

Let’s not work in silos — the road to digital standards is better travelled together.