

Empowering School Leaders: Unlocking Facilities Management Opportunities in 2026

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As we enter 2026, UK school leaders are demonstrating exceptional foresight and resilience in managing estates and facilities. Network discussions highlight a proactive shift: leaders actively seek specialised **facilities management (FM)** partnerships that provide clarity, assurance, and risk reduction—while navigating tight budgets, capacity constraints, and rising expectations.

Challenges persist—ageing infrastructure with a **£13.8 billion** maintenance backlog across English schools (as reported by the National Audit Office in 2025), ongoing **RAAC** remediation (with full removal targeted by 2029), evolving compliance demands, staffing shortages in site teams, limited capital funding, and intense governance scrutiny. Yet leaders increasingly view these as catalysts for strategic improvement, particularly by leveraging expert FM support to deliver safer, more sustainable, and efficient school environments.

Key FM priorities shaping 2026 decisions

Leaders prioritise FM partnerships that are targeted, evidence-based, and school-specific:

- **Data-driven risk prioritisation** → Independent, up-to-date condition surveys (building on the ongoing Condition Data Collection 2 programme)

and expert analysis to pinpoint urgent needs, phase works responsibly, and build robust cases for funding—critical following the recent CIF 2026-27 bidding round, where strong evidence of need and compliant procurement were key to success.

- **Comprehensive compliance assurance** → Efficient management of health & safety, fire risk, asbestos, and **RAAC** obligations, minimising administrative burden on school teams.
- **Integrated sustainability and net zero support** → Practical guidance on implementing Climate Action Plans (now required following the September 2025 mandate), energy efficiency measures, decarbonisation projects, and alignment with DfE net zero expectations—helping schools reduce costs and meet environmental standards.
- **Transparent, value-driven costs** → Predictable modelling that delivers long-term savings and withstands scrutiny from governors, auditors, and inspectors.
- **Capacity-building expertise** → Flexible support that augments and upskills existing teams, addressing recruitment gaps without long-term dependency.
- **Phased, peer-aligned roadmaps** → Clear plans translating data into actionable steps, often drawing on approaches proven successful in comparable schools—many of which have secured CIF funding, advanced RAAC remediation, or made measurable net zero progress through similar collaborations.

Schools that have partnered early for professional condition surveys, CIF bid support, sustainability audits, and compliance reviews consistently report stronger outcomes: higher CIF success rates, smoother inspections, reduced energy costs, and greater governance confidence.

A prime window for transformative FM partnerships

January 2026 marks a pivotal moment. With the CIF 2026-27 round recently closed (applications submitted in late 2025), schools await outcomes while preparing for future opportunities. Sustainability requirements are now firmly in implementation phase post the Climate Action Plan mandate, RAAC remediation continues apace, and proactive estates management remains essential amid the £13.8 billion backlog.

This environment creates unparalleled demand for FM providers who deeply understand the UK education sector—those offering precision support focused on outcomes, peer-validated results, and genuine partnership.

Our **School Network** is the ideal platform for these connections: a trusted community where leaders share real-world experiences, access case studies of successful FM collaborations (from CIF wins to net zero milestones and RAAC projects), and engage directly with specialists committed to school priorities.

Facilitated, transparent introductions ensure quick progression from discussion to tailored solutions—delivering immediate value with minimal friction.

Your empowered next steps in 2026

You are leading during a time when the right FM partnership can transform operational challenges into strategic advantages: safer buildings, lower energy costs, stronger funding bids, smoother compliance, and greater focus on education.

Leaders already engaging through the Network are achieving:

- Enhanced CIF outcomes through expert-backed evidence and bid preparation.
- Tangible progress toward net zero with funded, practical sustainability projects.
- Reduced risk and burden via proactive, data-led FM approaches.

Act now: post your current priorities (whether post-CIF planning, Climate Action Plan implementation, RAAC updates, or compliance refresh), learn from peers' successes, and connect with FM experts aligned to your needs. Turn 2026 into a year of confidence and achievement.