

Making Every Pound Count: Strategic Guidance for Your 2025-26 Capital Spend

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Where Should You Focus Your 2025-26 Capital Allocation?

A Practical Guide for School and Trust Leaders

With the release of 2025-26 School Condition Allocations (SCA), leaders across England's Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and local authority schools are entering a vital planning phase. These capital funds are an opportunity to address long-standing estate issues, safeguard pupils and staff, and invest in more sustainable, compliant environments.

But they must be used wisely — and quickly.

What the 2025-26 Allocation Means

The Department for Education (DfE) has provided each eligible trust or authority with an allocation based on school condition, pupil numbers, and other weighted factors. The purpose of these funds is clear:

"To keep school buildings safe and in good working order — tackling poor building condition, building compliance, and health and safety issues, and improving environmental sustainability."

— DfE Condition Grant Methodology 2025-26

These are not discretionary upgrades or aesthetic improvements. They are for addressing essential risks and compliance gaps that could disrupt learning or compromise wellbeing.

Where Most Trusts Will Focus SCA Spending

From national guidance, historical funding trends, and strategic priorities, we can confidently say that the following areas will be front and centre for most MATs:

Priority Area	Why It's Critical
Building Condition	Structural integrity, roofing, windows, classroom safety
Health & Safety	Fire alarms, emergency lighting, evacuation planning
RAAC Remediation	Urgent removal or mitigation of unsafe concrete types
Mechanical & Electrical	Boilers, rewiring, heating systems, energy reliability
Decarbonisation	LEDs, insulation, solar panels, sustainable heating
Accessibility Upgrades	Ramps, lifts, compliant toilets, safeguarding adaptations
Compliance	Asbestos removal, electrical testing, building regulations

These aren't optional — they are critical interventions needed to keep buildings open, compliant, and fit for purpose.

What These Projects Look Like

Based on recent CIF and SCA-funded work, here's a snapshot of typical project scopes and spend:

Project Type	Typical Budget Range
Roof replacement	£300,000 - £800,000
Heating system overhaul	£200,000 - £500,000
Window and door replacement	£100,000 - £400,000
Fire detection/alarm upgrades	£50,000 - £200,000
Toilet refurbishment / DDA access	£30,000 - £150,000
LED lighting upgrades	£50,000 - £150,000

Project Type	Typical Budget Range
Solar PV installations	£100,000 - £250,000

These figures provide useful benchmarks as leaders assess what can be delivered within current-year allocations.

A New Era of Procurement Flexibility

Since the Procurement Act 2023 came into effect, schools and trusts now benefit from greater autonomy in how they source and award contracts.

Under the new rules:

- You are not restricted to framework-only suppliers, provided you meet transparency and accountability thresholds.
- Direct awards and competitive flexible procedures are now explicitly allowed where justified.
- You can focus on best-fit, best-value partners — not just pre-listed names.

This is especially relevant for urgent, safety-critical works such as RAAC, fire safety, or asbestos remediation — where traditional procurement may introduce avoidable delays.

For works that must be delivered by March 2026, this flexibility is not just welcome — it's essential.

Planning Timeline — May to August is Key

Most capital projects (especially larger ones) are planned and procured between May and August, with delivery targeted for June to March.

Use this window to:

1. Review estate data and site reports (CDC2 or in-house audits)
2. Prioritise by risk and regulation (fire, structural, electrical, DDA)
3. Engage suppliers early to scope, quote, and mobilise
4. Keep a record of procurement rationale under the new Act

Final Reflections: Lead with Confidence

Your 2025-26 allocation is a rare opportunity to invest in the long-term safety,

sustainability, and resilience of your school estate.

Approach it with a clear vision:

- Make the urgent unavoidable
- Treat compliance as the foundation, not the finish line
- Let safety and impact drive spend — not ease or habit

By acting with urgency and clarity, you'll ensure every pound contributes to a safer, smarter learning environment.

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