Post-Connect the Classroom Opportunity

11 February 2026

The DfE's 2026 evaluation confirms progress — and signals the next phase for schools

The publication of the Department for Education's *Connect the Classroom Evaluation* (February 2026) provides the clearest assessment yet of how one of the most significant recent investments in school connectivity has reshaped digital infrastructure across England.

The findings are broadly positive.

Internal wireless networks have improved.
Download speeds have increased.
Reliability has strengthened.
Blackspots have reduced.

But perhaps the most important outcome is less technical.

It is confidence.

And across conversations within The School Network community, it is that restored confidence that may prove to be the programme's most lasting impact.

A Programme That Delivered Its Core Aim

Connect the Classroom (CtC2) was designed to upgrade Wi-Fi access points and network switching in priority schools between 2022 and 2025.

According to the evaluation, it achieved that objective.

Among participating schools:

- Average download speeds increased across both primary and secondary phases
- Satisfaction with speed and reliability rose from around 60% pre-intervention to over 90% post-intervention
- Internet blackspots — including classrooms, halls and outdoor areas — reduced significantly
- Schools reported improved confidence in network security

For many schools, particularly primaries, the upgrade was described as "long overdue".

The technical foundation is now stronger.

From Reliability to Digital Confidence

What stands out in the evaluation is not simply performance data — it is behavioural change.

Improved reliability has enabled:

- Faster device logins
- Smoother lesson delivery
- Greater use of digital tools in non-classroom spaces
- Increased collaboration across Multi-Academy Trusts

The report notes that 40% of schools increased their use of cloud-based systems following the intervention, while nearly half of on-premises-only schools reported being more likely to transition to cloud in the future.

Across our School Network discussions, leaders describe a similar shift:

"We now trust the infrastructure enough to use it properly."

That trust matters.

Digital transformation does not accelerate without infrastructure confidence.

Engagement Gains — and Raised Expectations

The evaluation highlights improvements in pupil engagement, particularly where:

- Multiple devices can operate simultaneously
- SEND adaptations are easier to deploy
- Translation and accessibility tools are used consistently
- Outdoor learning environments now support connectivity

While attainment impacts are understandably more difficult to measure in the short term, engagement improvements are evident.

Technology is becoming more routinely embedded in everyday pedagogy.

With that comes raised expectations — from pupils, staff, governors and parents alike.

Where Pressures Remain

The report is positive — but measured.

Several structural pressures continue to surface.

Broadband into the building

CtC2 focused on internal wireless infrastructure. In some areas, particularly rural settings, external broadband capacity remains a constraint.

For some schools, the limiting factor has shifted from internal Wi-Fi performance to the speed and resilience of the connection entering the building.

Hardware affordability

The cost of devices remains the most cited barrier to technology use.

Improved connectivity does not remove:

- Device refresh pressures
- Capital constraints
- Outdated hardware cycles

Infrastructure can enable digital learning — but hardware determines access.

Digital strategy development

The evaluation notes increased awareness of DfE digital standards and improved monitoring.

However, it found no significant shift in schools having a defined digital strategy.

Across smaller primary and rural settings, long-term digital planning remains variable.

A Subtle but Important Shift

Before Connect the Classroom, connectivity challenges often limited digital ambition.

Now, in many schools, those foundational barriers have reduced.

The conversation is evolving.

Within The School Network community, leaders are beginning to ask:

- What does digital resilience look like long term?
- How do we plan infrastructure refresh cycles sustainably?
- Are we cloud-optimised and cyber-secure enough?
- How does connectivity support emerging AI tools and advanced EdTech?

The focus is moving from “fixing Wi-Fi” to “building digital maturity”.

What This Moment Represents

Connect the Classroom was an infrastructure programme.

Its legacy may be strategic.

It has:

- Stabilised internal connectivity
- Raised digital confidence
- Increased cloud adoption
- Strengthened cyber awareness

- Elevated digital standards within governance discussions

That creates a platform.

The next phase for schools is less about installation — and more about integration.

Less about speed — and more about sustainability.

Less about infrastructure — and more about strategy.

What School Leaders May Wish to Reflect On

As the system moves into this next phase, the evaluation raises a number of practical reflections for school and trust leaders:

- Is our broadband capacity and resilience aligned with growing cloud dependency?
- Do we have a clear 3–5 year device refresh and infrastructure lifecycle plan?
- Are we fully aligned with DfE digital and technology standards — not just technically, but strategically?
- Is cyber resilience embedded at board level, not simply operational level?
- Do we have a documented digital strategy that supports whole-school improvement priorities?
- Are we prepared, from an infrastructure perspective, for increasing use of AI-powered tools and data-rich platforms?

These are not urgent fixes.

They are maturity questions.

And maturity is built deliberately.

The Real Post-Connect the Classroom Opportunity

The evaluation confirms that the programme delivered tangible improvements.

But it also signals something broader.

Schools now operate on a more stable digital foundation than they did five years

ago.

That foundation enables:

- Greater collaboration
- More confident pedagogy
- Improved engagement
- Stronger governance oversight
- Preparation for emerging technologies

The infrastructure phase has progressed.

The strategic phase is underway.

At The School Network, we will continue to monitor how this next stage unfolds — sharing sector intelligence, practical insight and informed analysis as schools build on the platform now in place.

Because the most important outcome of Connect the Classroom may not simply be faster Wi-Fi.

It may be the confidence to plan what comes next.