

# Schools & Academies Show Highlights

20 November 2025



## Schools & Academies Show Birmingham 2025: Day 1 Recap

### A Powerful Start to a Transformative Event

**As media supporters covering the Schools & Academies Show 2025, The School Network was on the ground yesterday for an exhilarating Day 1 - and what a launch it was!**

The NEC buzzed with energy from the moment doors opened, as thousands of school leaders, MAT executives, governors, teachers, and suppliers descended for the UK's leading education policy and practice event.

Expanded to two days and co-locating the EdTech Summit, Independent Schools Conference, and the innovative new Higher Education Transformation Expo, yesterday set the tone perfectly: policy-driven, practical, and packed with forward-thinking discussions on the sector's biggest challenges and opportunities.

If you were there, you'll know the atmosphere was electric - overflowing theatres, lively exhibition halls, and conversations that sparked immediate ideas. If you missed it (or want to relive the highlights), here's your detailed recap of Day 1, straight from the show floor.

## **A Record-Breaking Opening: Policy, Innovation, and Collaboration in Focus**

Day 1 centred on big-picture strategy, emerging policy, and innovative solutions, drawing a diverse crowd eager to tackle funding pressures, workforce issues, SEND reform, AI integration, and sustainable growth.

Key themes that dominated:

- The forthcoming Schools White Paper and what it means for shared responsibility in SEND
- Ethical AI adoption and EdTech's role in enhancing (not replacing) teaching
- MAT growth strategies that prioritise pedagogy and quality
- Governance empowerment, staff wellbeing, and distributed leadership models
- Financial sustainability for trusts, including outsourcing decisions and data-driven insights

The co-location shone through, with school leaders networking alongside higher education professionals – bridging gaps from classroom to campus.

## **Standout Sessions and Insights from the Theatres**

Theatres were standing-room-only for many sessions, delivering CPD-accredited content that's immediately actionable.

Highlights included:

- **SEND Reform Spotlight:** A high-energy panel featuring Kids charity CEO Katie Ghose emphasised that “supporting children with SEND is everyone’s responsibility.” The call was clear – the Government’s White Paper must embed this shared commitment across the system.
- **EdTech Debates:** Provocative discussions on AI’s potential pitfalls and promises, with experts urging balanced adoption focused on ethics and teacher training.
- **MAT Growth Masterclass:** LEO Academy Trust leaders shared proven strategies for sustainable expansion: intentionality, using growth to enhance pedagogy, maintaining quality first, and building capacity ahead

of scale.

- **Governance and Leadership:** NGA sessions explored empowering governors with specialist skills, collaborative leadership models, and why focusing on children keeps everyone motivated. One standout quote: "People shine when they talk about children."
- **Finance and Operations:** Practical talks on academy trust finances - from GAG pooling to rigorous KPIs for in-house vs. outsourced functions - plus insights into digital maturity and creative tools like Adobe Express for core subjects.
- **Policy Updates:** Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Martyn Oliver hinted at potentially tightening inspection windows, while DfE officials shared that early impacts from the new RISE school improvement system could be visible before Christmas.

Across the board, delegates left armed with toolkits, case studies, and fresh perspectives - exactly what SAAS is renowned for.

## **The Exhibition Floor: Buzzing with Solutions and Connections**

The expanded hall was a hive of activity, with over 200 exhibitors showcasing everything from EdTech innovations to procurement frameworks and sustainability solutions.

Notable sightings:

- Busy stands like Learning by Questions (K50), ParentPay Group, implicit (finance cloud solutions), and many more reporting non-stop conversations.
- Procurement zones (CPC Village, Government Education Village) offering compliance shortcuts and cost savings.
- Wellbeing, alternative provision, and estates specialists solving real operational challenges.

Networking peaked via the ConnectEd platform and impromptu meetups - proving once again that SAAS is as much about people as policy.

## **Voices from the Floor: What Attendees Said**

Real-time feedback poured in:

- “Good conversations, good ideas, a genuine shift of pace” – despite the usual email tug!
- “Energised panel on SEND... the message was loud and clear.”
- “Great representing our trust – key takeaways on intentional, pedagogy-led growth.”
- Exhibitors: “Day 1: done with teams loving the engagement.”

The vibe? Reassuring, inspiring, and practically focused – delegates described it as “the valuable professional reset we needed.”

## Key Takeaways from Day 1 to Action Now

1. **SEND is Shared:** Push for system-wide reform in the White Paper – it's everyone's job.
2. **Grow Intentionally:** MAT expansion must enhance pedagogy and quality, not just numbers.
3. **Empower Governance:** Leverage specialists and distribute leadership to ease pressures.
4. **AI with Caution:** Ethics and training first – don't let tools outpace people.
5. **Finance Smarter:** Data-driven decisions on outsourcing, pooling, and digital maturity.
6. **Focus on Children:** It's why we shine – keep wellbeing and collaboration central.
7. **Policy Watch:** Prepare for White Paper shifts, tighter Ofsted windows, and early RISE impacts.

Day 1 has raised the bar – and Day 2 promises even more action-oriented content today.

Huge thanks to GovNet, speakers, exhibitors, and every delegate who made yesterday #FanSAAStic.

We invite **all exhibitors and attendees** to share your own insights, photos, standout sessions, and key takeaways so we can amplify your voice in tomorrow's Day 2 recap and our full event wrap-up on Monday!

We'll be back with the Day 2 recap tomorrow.

**The School Network** - Keeping you connected to the heart of UK education.

Keep the conversation going!