

What 2019's Top EdTech Startups Can Still Teach Us

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Back in 2019, the UK's Nesta foundation launched a bold experiment: a £4.6 million fund to support education technology companies building tools that could actually make a difference in schools.

The goal wasn't just shiny software or gimmicks. It was about helping teachers, students, and parents with the real work of education—planning lessons, assessing progress, managing homework, and engaging families.

Now, six years later, many of those companies have grown, evolved, or inspired others to follow in their footsteps. And as classrooms continue to balance digital tools with hands-on teaching, their work still feels ahead of its time.

For school staff looking to invest in tools that save time and support learning, these ten EdTech pioneers are a reminder of what works—and what's worth investing in.

Seneca Learning

Smart Revision and Homework at Scale

Seneca covers over 95% of UK school exams and offers free, adaptive revision content for students. Since 2019, it's grown into one of the most trusted homework and learning tools for both teachers and learners—streamlining workload while boosting results.

Firefly Learning Connecting Parents, Teachers, and Students

Firefly gives schools a way to keep parents in the loop with homework, grades, and school updates. What started as a tool for private schools has expanded into more state schools—thanks to streamlined, intuitive design that supports real parent engagement.

MangaHigh

Gamified Maths with Accessibility in Mind

By combining curriculum-based maths with game design, MangaHigh has stayed relevant—and fun. With improvements in accessibility and SEND support, it's a great option for schools aiming to raise maths confidence across ability levels.

Pobble

Getting Kids to Write—and Love It

Pobble encourages real handwriting and peer feedback in primary writing lessons. Teachers can showcase student work and access lesson resources, while students get to share their writing with pride—online and in the classroom.

Educake

Auto-Marked Assessments Without the Busywork

Educake provides auto-marked quizzes for secondary subjects like science, geography, and English. It's quick to set up, simple to use, and a huge time-saver for busy teachers preparing for exams.

Texthelp (WriQ)

Automated Writing Feedback That Works

WriQ gives teachers a faster way to assess writing—checking grammar, structure, and fluency. Unlike generic spellcheckers, it's tailored to educational contexts, helping teachers focus on coaching, not correcting.

First Pass (Bolton College)

AI Feedback for Open-Ended Questions

First Pass uses AI to give students instant feedback on open-ended answers—a bold shift away from multiple-choice-only tools. It encourages deeper thinking

while giving teachers a head start on assessment.

Skills Builder Hub

Teaching Skills That Actually Transfer

Skills Builder helps schools integrate communication, problem-solving, and teamwork into everyday lessons. With structured progression and ready-made resources, it's a solid tool for preparing students for life beyond exams.

Studybugs

Reaching Hard-to-Reach Parents

Studybugs improves communication between schools and parents, especially in communities where engagement can be tough. Attendance alerts, illness tracking, and real-time messages help schools keep parents connected and informed.

Practical Tech for Real Classrooms

What made these companies stand out in 2019 still holds true today: they focus on solving problems that teachers actually face.

They didn't try to replace teachers—they aimed to support them. They didn't chase trends—they built tools that work quietly in the background, helping lessons run smoother, feedback get sharper, and students stay engaged.

For today's schools, the lesson is clear: the best education technology is the kind that understands education. Whether you're stocking up on supplies, planning next term, or refreshing your tech toolkit, it pays to look for products that do one thing well—and prove their value in the classroom.

Good EdTech doesn't just save time. It gives it back to the people who need it most.