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School Wi-Fi Buyer's Guide

What to look for, what the DfE expects and the ten questions to ask before you upgrade.

Thirty pupils opening laptops at the start of a lesson is the hardest test a wireless network faces. This guide helps you work out whether your Wi-Fi is up to it, what the Department for Education expects, and what to ask before you spend a penny.

1 Signs your Wi-Fi needs attention

Tick any that sound familiar. Two or more usually means it's time for a survey.

- [ ] **Slow log-ins at the start of lessons.** Devices take minutes to connect when a whole class logs on at once.
- [ ] **Dead spots.** Some classrooms, halls, corridors or outdoor areas have weak or no signal.
- [ ] **Drop-outs when moving around.** Laptops and tablets disconnect when staff or pupils move between rooms.
- [ ] **Staff using their phones as hotspots** to get lessons or video calls working.
- [ ] **Online assessments or video struggle** when several classes are working at once.
- [ ] **Access points out of warranty or support,** or no longer receiving security updates.
- [ ] **No central view.** You can't easily see what is connected, or get an alert when an access point fails.

2 What the DfE wireless standards expect

The DfE's digital and technology standards include four wireless network standards. Schools should meet them when upgrading an underperforming or unsupported network.

Use the latest standards

When upgrading, use at least **Wi-Fi 7 (802.11be)**. The network should separate different users and devices, prioritise important traffic and let everyone log on at once.

Full signal where it's needed

Plan with wireless **heat mapping**, allow up to one access point per classroom, and use higher-specification units in busy areas such as halls. Cover outdoor areas where required.

Central management

One tool to configure access points, monitor performance and **alert you to failures**, with automatic security updates, load balancing, manufacturer support and administrator training.

Stop unauthorised access

Every user and device authenticated, **separate guest access**, and traffic protected from interception. Consider WPA3, VLANs and certificate-based authentication, and secure every admin account.

3 Plan before you buy

Start with a survey, not a catalogue

Wall construction, ceiling heights, room layouts and how many devices connect at the same moment decide where access points go and how many you need. A good supplier will survey before they quote, combining a predictive design with checks on site.

Check what sits behind the Wi-Fi

- **Cabling.** Modern access points often need faster cabling (Cat6A) to reach their full speed.
- **Switches.** They must power the access points (PoE) and have fast enough ports.
- **Internet connection.** New Wi-Fi won't fix a broadband line that is already full.
- **Filtering and monitoring.** The new network must work with your provider, so you continue to meet your safeguarding duties.

Separate who connects

Staff, pupils, guests and building devices such as cameras, screens and door access should each be on their own network, filtered appropriately and kept apart from your admin systems.

4 Ten questions to ask any supplier

1. **Will you survey our site before you quote?**
   A quote without a survey is a guess.

2. **Which Wi-Fi standard are you proposing, and why?**
   Check it meets the DfE's Wi-Fi 7 expectation for upgrades.

3 **How many access points, and where?**
Ask to see the heat map showing expected coverage and capacity.

4 **Is new cabling or switching needed?**
Find out now, not after installation starts.

5 **How is the network managed, and who gets the alerts?**
Ask for a demonstration of the management dashboard.

6 **What licences and support are included, and for how long?**
Know exactly what happens, and what it costs, when they end.

7 **How are staff, pupils and guests kept separate?**
Ask how users and devices are authenticated.

8 **Will it work with our filtering and monitoring?**
Your safeguarding duties don't stop during an upgrade.

9 **When will the work happen, and are the engineers DBS checked?**
Intrusive work should be planned for the holidays.

10 **Is the quote itemised?**
Hardware, installation, configuration and maintenance should each be priced separately, so governors can see where the money goes.

5 Budget and timing

> **Book early for the summer.** Surveys, ordering and installation take time, and summer installation slots fill quickly. Aim to have a survey done by the spring term.

- **Know the whole cost.** Include licences, support and maintenance over the life of the network, not just the hardware.
- **Spread the cost.** Leasing and finance can help you upgrade without a large upfront payment.
- **Think trust-wide.** Standardising across schools simplifies management, support and budgeting.
- **Phase it if you need to.** Upgrade cabling and switching first, then Wi-Fi, over two budget years if necessary.

Sources and notes. This guide is general information, correct as of November 2026. It is not legal advice.

Department for Education, Wireless network standards for schools and colleges (gov.uk), accessed November 2026.

Want a second opinion on your school Wi-Fi?

KBR has designed, installed and supported school networks across the North East since 1984. We survey first, quote clearly and install during the holidays using Enhanced DBS-certified engineers.

- Free site survey and coverage review
- Enterprise-grade Wi-Fi from Cambium Networks
- Cabling backed by a 25-year Excel Networking Solutions warranty
- Maintenance and support over one, three or four years

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