

A Decade of Renewal: What the Education Estates Strategy Means for Facilities Management

4 months ago



The government has set out a sweeping 10-year [Education Estates Strategy](#), marking what it describes as “a decade of national renewal” for schools and colleges across England. Backed by £38 billion in capital investment between 2025–26 and 2029–30, and longer-term commitments through to 2034–35, the strategy represents a decisive shift in how the education estate is managed, maintained and rebuilt.

For facilities management leaders, this is not simply a funding announcement. It is a structural reset: from reactive repair to proactive asset management; from fragmented oversight to digital transparency; and from buildings that merely function to estates that are inclusive, climate-resilient and community-centred.

Ending the ‘patch and mend’ cycle

The strategy is candid about the scale of the problem. Decades of underinvestment have left many schools reliant on temporary fixes. As Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson put it: “For too long, schools and colleges have been forced to patch and mend buildings that have already deteriorated – spending their time worrying about leaking roofs instead of focusing on what matters most: giving every child the best possible education.”

The data underlines the urgency. Around 22,000 schools and colleges operate across almost 70,000 buildings, with a significant proportion dating from 1941 to 1980 and now reaching the end of their design life. Overheating, flooding risk and ageing systems are no longer marginal issues; they are systemic.

The government’s response is a pivot to lifecycle thinking. Rather than waiting for failure and funding full

rebuilt, the strategy prioritises earlier intervention, structured maintenance planning and renewal programmes designed to extend building life by 15 to 40 years.

For FM providers, that should signal a sustained demand for planned preventative maintenance, condition monitoring, and whole-site asset strategies, rather than short-term remedial works.

Three pillars, one direction of travel

The strategy is built on three pillars: manage the estate, improve and renew the estate, and build and rebuild where necessary .

The first pillar, 'manage the estate', is arguably the most transformative for facilities professionals. Responsible Bodies, from multi-academy trusts to local authorities and college corporations, will be expected to meet clearer estate management standards. From autumn 2026, annual returns will confirm compliance with the School Estate Management Standards, supported by a new digital platform, Manage Your Education Estate .

This is a clear move towards accountability through data. Common standards for condition data, digital asset systems and lifecycle planning will be introduced, with two-way data sharing between Responsible Bodies and the Department for Education by 2028.

For FM companies, this elevates the importance of robust CAFM systems, accurate asset registers and transparent reporting. Those able to align with government data standards and support clients in evidencing compliance will be well placed.

The second pillar, 'improve and renew', includes almost £3 billion per year in maintenance funding by 2034-35 and a new £710 million Renewal and Retrofit Programme . This programme targets projects that fall between routine maintenance and full rebuilds, taking a holistic approach to condition, climate resilience and decarbonisation.

This is where technical FM expertise will be critical: roof replacements integrated with solar installations; heating upgrades aligned with net zero readiness; flood mitigation embedded in site-wide strategies. The expectation is not piecemeal repair, but coordinated renewal.

The third pillar, 'build and rebuild', commits almost £20 billion to the School Rebuilding Programme through to 2034-35, rebuilding over 750 schools and sixth-form colleges . All projects will follow updated design specifications focused on net zero in operation, climate resilience and inclusive design.

Inclusion as a design principle

A defining feature of the strategy is its emphasis on mainstream inclusion. The ambition is that, in time, every secondary school will have an inclusion base: a dedicated space providing specialist support within a mainstream setting.

As Phillipson said: "This is about more than buildings – it's about breaking down barriers to opportunity. Every child deserves to learn in a safe, accessible environment, with the right facilities to meet their needs and help them thrive."

Backed by at least £3.7 billion in high needs capital funding to create 60,000 specialist places, inclusion

bases will often involve refurbishment or repurposing of existing space .

Georgina Ellis, Executive Director for SEND at Unity Schools Partnership, welcomed the direction of travel: “We welcome any commitment and investment to improve inclusivity and accessibility for local SEND children and their families.

Our Trust is successfully running inclusion bases in a number of our schools and we have seen great outcomes in terms of attendance, attainment and a sense of belonging that has been fostered between the bases and their mainstream setting.”

For facilities managers, inclusive design is no longer optional or specialist; it is mainstream. Breakout rooms, acoustic treatments, sensory-sensitive lighting, improved ventilation and direct access to outdoor space are becoming core estate considerations.

Councillor Louise Gittins, Chair of the Local Government Association, reinforced the system-wide implications: “Greater inclusion in mainstream schools needs to be central to reforming the SEND system, and ensuring schools have inclusion bases will help to support this important aspiration.”

FM teams will increasingly be asked to adapt existing estates to meet these expectations, balancing operational continuity with sensitive design interventions.

Climate resilience and digital infrastructure

The strategy also places climate resilience and digital capability at its centre. With 32 per cent of schools reporting overheating in at least one building and significant flood risk across the estate , adaptation is framed as urgent, not aspirational.

Solar rollout, energy efficiency measures and renewable procurement mechanisms are expected to scale, alongside guidance on high-impact adaptations. At the same time, £325 million will support digital connectivity and core technology standards.

Facilities managers sit at the intersection of physical and digital infrastructure. Building performance data, energy monitoring, smart controls and cyber resilience will increasingly be part of the FM brief.

What FM companies should take away

First, this is a long-term market signal. With funding confirmed through to 2034-35 in key areas, the pipeline is credible. FM companies should align their strategies with lifecycle maintenance, retrofit capability and inclusive adaptation.

Second, data competence will differentiate providers. The shift to standardised data, digital asset management and annual reporting means FM partners must support clients not only operationally, but evidentially.

Third, collaboration will matter. The strategy recognises approximately 2,800 Responsible Bodies managing the estate. FM providers that understand governance complexity and can operate across trusts, dioceses and local authorities will have an advantage.

Finally, the tone of the strategy is clear: this is about opportunity, not just infrastructure. As the Education

Secretary concluded, this decade of renewal is about showing children that “their education matters, their futures matter.”

For the facilities management sector, the message is equally direct. The quality of maintenance, renewal and operational leadership over the next ten years will shape not just buildings, but outcomes.