

All schools to have high speed internet by 2025

Every school across the country will be able to access high speed internet by 2025, the Education Secretary has announced today (Wednesday 23rd March).

Speaking at the Bett Show in London, the Education Secretary set out the latest step in cross-government plans to roll out lightning-fast gigabit broadband across the UK.

To achieve this ambition, the Government has also announced a £150 million fund to support schools most in need to upgrade their WiFi connections. Over the course of the next three years, the Department for Education (DfE) will reach out to schools in priority areas to facilitate the introduction of faster and more reliable connectivity.

The department is also publishing its first set of technology standards, aimed at supporting schools and colleges in understanding which technologies they should have in place to best support effective teaching.

The standards refer specifically to broadband and in-school connectivity. Schools and colleges will be able to access advice on the most recommended technology infrastructure, which itself will support best practice in helping pupils learn.

Both steps to further improve technology in schools and colleges will contribute to the Government's aim to level up education for all – improving pupil access and outcomes, reducing teacher workload and making running a school more efficient.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Digital technology, and the data and infrastructure that underpins it, is changing the way we live, work, and learn. We need to use our experience from the pandemic as a springboard to embed new and better ways of using technology in schools, and across education.

This new investment moves us a giant step forward to helping ensure that every school across the country has the best technology.

Upgrading schools to high speed broadband, setting out clear standards so that schools know what technology they should have in place, as well as providing funding to support them in achieving this, is the latest way we are levelling up education across the country.

The pledge to deliver high speed broadband will make learning more interactive, helping schools and colleges ensure that every pupil has access

to the best education possible.

Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said:

We very much welcome this focus on supporting improved digital technology in schools through the measures outlined by the Secretary of State.

It is really important to seize the opportunities offered by technology to enhance the learning experience of young people and having the right infrastructure in place and evidence base of what works is vital in achieving that goal.

Schools are very keen to make the best possible use of technology for their students, and many already do fantastic work in this direction. Anything which helps will be warmly received.

The £150 million provided to help schools upgrade their technology will include those in the department's previously identified Education Investment Areas. These 55 areas were first set out in the Levelling Up White Paper in February this year and refer to areas of the country where school outcomes are the weakest. They will receive targeted investment, support and action to help children from all backgrounds and areas succeed at the very highest levels.

These updates build on the department's ambition to get children and young people connected in the best way possible, putting 1.9 million laptops and tablets in the hands of disadvantaged children and young people; supporting 1,000 schools in hard-to-reach areas of the UK get online with super-fast broadband; and funding the pioneering Oak National Academy, an online platform supporting pupils' education across the country.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez said:

Getting faster broadband into schools is crucial to levelling up. It means teachers can spend more time teaching instead of staring at loading screens and will put the benefits of interactive and internet-powered technology at more students' fingertips.

That's why I'm giving my full support to the Education Secretary to help hundreds of schools across England seize the benefits of lightning-fast connections, and that's on top of the millions of rural homes and businesses in line for an upgrade through our £5 billion Project Gigabit.

Caroline Wright, Director General, BESA said:

Our research of 1,000s of schools annually shows that teachers top three concerns are connectivity and infrastructure, ICT training, and a lack of funding. I'm glad that the DfE has listened to the evidence on this occasion and is announcing plans to improve connectivity and provide digital standards guidance to better help schools understand the baseline infrastructure that is needed to start addressing the digital divide that exists in our schools.

Schools will be able to access the standards online via gov.uk, and eligible schools will be contacted in due course by the department to enable them to access the funding available to upgrade their technology infrastructure.