Free guide: 8 steps to meet Government advice on school broadband services

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Executive summary

The internet is an integral part of school life now - so it's important that you have a broadband service that's fast, reliable and above all safe.

The government has recently issued guidelines for broadband in schools. You can make sure yours meets the standards and is an adequate solution for your surfing needs with these nine steps.

1 ·

Connectivity

The first thing to consider when picking a broadband package is the amount of bandwidth available to you - usually measured in megabits per second (Mbps). As a rule of thumb, 100Mbps would meet the needs of an average secondary school, and for an average primary, 10Mbps would usually suffice.

Look for an "uncontended" connection. This means you don't share the connection with other customers. Also look out for "symmetrical" - this means the download and upload speeds are the same - as opposed to home connections where the upload speed is often much slower than the download speed.

It's also best to avoid signing up to a connection with data limits or a "data cap" - this can result in unforeseen costs if you need extra capacity beyond your download limit. Unlimited services are widely available.

2

Capacity

You'll likely find that your connection needs will increase over the period of the contract, - Internet services are continually becoming more "data-heavy" as new technologies develop.

With this in mind, remember to ask about how "future-proof" the proposed package will be for your school, without of course paying over the odds for extra capacity which will never be used.

3

Contract

Ensure your provider offers clear terms of service, and provides agreements on how quickly any issues or faults will be resolved.

Look out for providers whose terms of service comply with standards such as FITS or ITIL - these are industry recognised frameworks.

4

Reliability

Reliability is usually described in terms of "uptime" - i.e. what percentage of the time the

connection can be guaranteed to be working.

As a minimum, look for an uptime guarantee of 99.9% - this equates to no more than about 8 hours of "downtime" in a year.

You also need to consider how swiftly the provider can restore your connection in the event it fails - obviously the quicker the better. Look for a Service Level Agreement which promises no more than 4 hours to restore your access in the event of disruption.

5

Safety & Security

A secure broadband service for your school is essential - it not only ensures the safety of pupils, but also security of school data and services. Make sure the system you choose has adequate monitoring, filtering, firewalls, anti-virus, authentication and other network security systems.

Ensure you can manage the access to online content too - including email and social networking sites.

The filtering system you choose should adhere to recognised national standards (such as Internet Watch Foundation watch list and PAS74). You will need to find a balance, though, between safeguarding your children from harmful content and being able to access the websites and materials you need to give them the best possible learning experience.

You'll also need to ensure that your system is secure enough to allow transfer of confidential data. Check with your supplier that back-up systems and also remote access systems are also secure.

6

Value for Money and Sustainability

Compare broadband services on a like-for-like basis: check the total cost of the entire contract period. Collaborative purchasing agreements with other schools or the Regional Broadband Consortia could bring down the cost to you, too.

Make sure you're clear on additional services from suppliers, including the specifications/standard of service provided - and how much each additional service costs. Remember - go for best value for money, but bear in mind this may not always mean the lowest purchase cost.

7

Supplier Reputation

There are many broadband suppliers out there - but you're likely to get a more suitable service from a provider with a proven track record in education services. Make sure they can demonstrate sufficient understanding of educational broadband for schools. This way, the broadband supplier can respond to e-learning developments, pupil requirements and e-safety.

8

And Finally...

Make sure you read the small print before signing a contract with a new broadband supplier, and make sure you fully understand the contract when you do sign it. Ask about any additional

charges that could be levied, and any cancellation clauses included in the contract that could affect you.

If the contract involves more than one supplier, make sure you know who is responsible for what. This may have to be included in the contract, too. If you change supplier, check with both the new and existing supplier that there is no disruption to your broadband supply.

To find out more about adequate broadband services for schools, you can contact your RBC (Regional Broadband Consortium), local authority or Partnership for Schools (if a Free School), or contact us for a quote.

About Webanywhere

Since 2003, we've provided website services and e-learning solutions to help schools communicate, collaborate and promote themselves online.

Our Broadband Service

We provide broadband services to schools via our website at
http://www.schoolbroadband.co.uk

– if you'd like to speak to us about our solutions, please get in touch through the site or using the details below:

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