Estates &
Facilities
Toolkit

Why modernising estates management is long overdue for schools and trusts

From the expansion of academisation to the introduction and growth of multi-academy trusts, the education sector has truly evolved in the last ten to fifteen years. It's given cause for the pace of the education technology revolution to really ramp up, with growing organisations needing digital systems to consolidate and rationalise processes.

Whether that's for forward-facing teaching and learning to behind-the-scenes central functions, like HR, a few clicks of a mouse and taps on a keyboard have breathed new efficiencies into a largely traditional sector. Yet there's one core area of our schools that still seems more reliant on manual (and often outdated) systems rather than their digital counterparts: estates and facilities management. And we're intrigued to understand why.

More schools, more sites

On the surface, more schools mean more students and more staff. But it also means more sites for facilities and **estates teams** to manage. Though acquiring one, two, three new schools doesn't tend to happen overnight, it does tend to put a spanner in the works when it comes to day-to-day site management. Whether that's for top-level decisions, like where **budgets** need prioritising, or minor inconveniences such as locating an **asset** that's gone missing across your ten plus sites, there's a lot to be said for getting these collaborations right.

Central teams sat in their metaphorical control towers are the ones with a bank of digital systems to support delegation and prioritisation – understandably so. But facilities and estates teams on the ground are in just as much need – if not more – of digital systems that can support them to more efficient (and budget optimal) ways of working, too.

Digital school facilities management in action

Take the missing asset we previously mentioned – software built for schools now enables asset managers to track assets moving not only within a single site, but between multiple sites in a trust. When you've got greater visibility over where your assets are, be it a fleet of mini-buses or tablets for the classroom, you get greater control. From accurate stock counts and the cost of past, current, and upcoming repairs to reminders about upcoming renewals, data is hugely powerful in supporting estates and asset managers to making asset management as effective as possible.

Now, a quick thought about the headache-inducing task that is allocating the budget. Each department, teacher, caretaker (the list goes on) will fight for their right to a slice of the pie, whether that's to repair the radiators in the classroom that just doesn't seem to want to get warm, or to finally replace the staff room's longest serving settee. With the right digital system, facilities and estates staff can work with the central team to make the most informed decisions about what really takes the number one spot on the priority list, and what can wait. Software features like customisable activity checklists, RAG-ratings, and risk triggers support teams to get a detailed understanding of the tasks that need funds for attention and repair, helping to keep learning environments safe and welcoming for students and staff alike.

Benefits of digital facilities management for schools

Education is a sector that's digitising an increasing amount of the workday, like switching from paper to digital to-do lists or running parents' evenings via remote means. Why should site **maintenance** be any different? Like with any handywork, it needs to be far more than just half a job – e.g. a spreadsheet per site that lists the RAG-ratings of all your risks. Useful, but not really that useful in showing you which risk is the most major cause for an **incident** concern.

With the right digital tools to do the job, we can empower site teams. They say a poor works-person blames their tools – yet, don't jump to conclusions. If we're not giving staff the most appropriate digital tools to enhance their jobs, or the training they need to use the systems to their best ability, then

they've every right to pass on the blame.

Supporting trusts of the future

Though there's certainly a barrier to getting digital school facilities management off the ground (in terms of user adoption, training, and proving the benefit), when it's done right, it really works. Schools can operate in a leaner fashion, using digital to open a realm of cost-saving, time and energy-efficient opportunities. Managers can manage better, with eyes on real-time data that tells them what's going on across their entire site portfolio. Automated alerts can be sent to the most appropriate person/people about the green-now-amber-rated risk item, and they can put proactive interventions in place before the risk turns into an incident.

The **schools bills** might have been quashed, for now at least. But with the signs continuing to point us to a trust-led education system, empowering school sites and facilities teams with the most appropriate digital systems now will pay dividends to this collaborative future.

Get in touch