

DEVICE LIFECYCLE

After Windows 10: plan the estate, not just the upgrade

A school-focused method for deciding what to upgrade, replace, repurpose or retire - based on learning need, security, condition and total cost.

COOs and SBMs

IT leads

Finance

Curriculum leaders

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEFING

Use this guide to turn a device list into a defensible, staged investment plan rather than a rushed bulk purchase.

If you only read one page

Start with the decision, then use the rest of the briefing to test evidence and plan implementation.

THE CORE DECISION

Windows 10 support ended on 14 October 2025. The right response is an evidence-led lifecycle plan that protects learning and operations while prioritising the devices that create the greatest risk or disruption.

Why this matters now

Security support ended

Standard Windows 10 devices no longer receive the normal security fixes and technical support provided before end of support.

Compatibility is only one factor

A compatible device can still be unreliable or unsuitable; an incompatible device may have a short, controlled transition option.

Budgets need staging

Schools need a repeatable annual replacement model that accounts for user need, warranty, condition, management and support cost.

What good looks like

- One inventory combining hardware, user, purpose, condition and support status
- Clear categories: upgrade, replace, repurpose, temporary exception or retire
- Priority based on security and educational impact, not age alone
- Application, printing, AV, accessibility and peripheral testing
- A standard build, automated management and documented handover
- A rolling three-to-five-year budget rather than emergency purchasing

A sensible first action

- Reconcile management-platform data with a physical or owner check.
- Identify every Windows 10 device and its role.
- Separate technical compatibility from condition and user suitability.
- Prioritise unsupported devices with sensitive or critical functions.

SCHOOL REALITY

Where sensible plans often become difficult

These are common implementation problems in schools. They are not signs of failure; they are reasons to make dependencies, evidence and ownership visible.

Inventory quality

Devices may be duplicated, missing, stored, unmanaged or assigned to the wrong user, making headline counts unreliable.

Curriculum dependencies

Specialist software, exam tools, peripherals, drivers and classroom AV can delay otherwise simple upgrades.

Shared-device experience

Profile creation, printing, filtering, sign-in time and data removal matter in classrooms and libraries.

Deployment capacity

Build, data transfer, testing, logistics, staff guidance and support demand must fit short change windows.

Warning signs to investigate

- Replacement decisions use only model age or Windows compatibility
- No owner is assigned to shared or specialist devices
- Critical apps and peripherals are discovered during rollout
- Temporary exceptions have no end date or compensating control
- New devices arrive without a standard build and management profile
- The budget covers purchase price but not deployment, warranty or disposal

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE

Ask for enough technical detail to support a decision, but keep the outcome expressed in school terms: learning, safeguarding, continuity, workload, cost and accountability.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

Questions that turn reassurance into evidence

Use the third column to agree what the school should be able to see, retain and review. Evidence should be current, understandable and linked to an owner.

DECISION AREA	LEADERSHIP QUESTION	EVIDENCE TO REQUEST
Role	Who uses the device, where and for what learning or operational task?	Named owner, location, workload and criticality
Support	Is the operating system, application set and hardware still supported?	OS status, warranty, vendor support and exception date
Compatibility	Can it run the required supported platform and management tools?	Hardware assessment, firmware and management check
Condition	Is performance, battery, storage, casing and reliability acceptable?	Condition grade and recent incident history
Dependencies	Will apps, peripherals, printing, AV, accessibility and filtering still work?	Pilot test record and issue list
Security	Does the device receive policy, encryption, protection, patches and monitoring?	Management compliance and security coverage
Cost	What is the full three-year cost of keeping versus replacing it?	Purchase, deployment, repair, support, warranty and energy
Disposition	How will data, accounts, licences and hardware be securely removed or reused?	Wipe certificate, asset update and disposal record

How to use the table

Do not expect every item to be perfect before acting. Record the current position, the risk or service impact, the agreed action, the owner and a realistic target date. Review high-impact gaps first.

IMPLEMENTATION ROUTE

Move in controlled, visible stages

The sequence matters: establish the current position, prove the important controls or user journeys, then embed review into normal school governance.

DISCOVER Build a reliable estate picture	- Reconcile device, user, location, purpose and condition - Assess support status and Windows 11 compatibility - Identify specialist, shared and critical-device dependencies
PILOT AND PRIORITISE Prove the deployment pattern	- Test representative staff, pupil, admin and specialist devices - Validate apps, printing, AV, filtering, accessibility and sign-in - Rank replacement waves by risk and educational impact
DEPLOY AND SUSTAIN Create a rolling lifecycle	- Schedule waves around exams, terms and support capacity - Measure deployment quality and early incident demand - Refresh the forecast and budget annually

Measures leaders can follow

01 Unsupported-device count	02 Pilot pass rate	03 Deployment success and rollback	04 Annual replacement demand
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KEEP THE PLAN REALISTIC

Align major changes to exams, census, payroll, admissions, safeguarding reviews and the limited windows available for disruptive work. Build support and rollback into the plan, not after it.

LEADERSHIP CHECKLIST

What to confirm before closing the review

A completed checklist is useful only when exceptions, evidence and actions are recorded. Use it as a review prompt rather than a compliance certificate.

☐ Every device has an owner, location and purpose	☐ A representative pilot is completed
☐ Windows 10 devices are identified and risk-rated	☐ Temporary exceptions have owners and end dates
☐ Compatibility and physical condition are assessed separately	☐ Deployment includes data, training and support
☐ Specialist applications and peripherals are listed	☐ Licences and warranties are included in cost
☐ Shared-device sign-in and data handling are tested	☐ Secure reuse and disposal are documented
☐ Security and filtering controls work on the target build	☐ The lifecycle budget is reviewed annually

Minimum evidence pack

01 Reconciled inventory	02 Risk-ranked device plan	03 Pilot results
04 Application matrix	05 Deployment schedule	06 Three-year budget

Decision record

Record what was reviewed, who contributed, the evidence considered, any limitations, the decision made, actions and owners, and the next review date. This gives future leaders and suppliers a clear starting point.

ABOUT OPSWISE

School-focused support, security and planning

OpsWise helps schools make technology decisions in context - joining technical delivery with safeguarding, data protection, budget, supplier and operational needs.

How OpsWise can help

- Estate discovery and compatibility assessment
- Risk-based replacement and reuse plan
- Standard build, pilot and phased deployment
- Lifecycle, procurement and budget roadmap

What an initial discussion covers

- What is happening now
- Which outcome matters most
- What evidence is already available
- A proportionate next step, even if that is not a managed service

A PRACTICAL NEXT STEP

Turn the questions into a clear school IT plan.

OpsWise can turn device data into a staged plan that protects teaching and security while helping leaders explain why each replacement wave is needed.

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Authoritative sources

Microsoft: Windows 10 support ended 14 October 2025

DfE: Laptops, desktops and tablets

DfE: Cyber security core standard

Guidance checked 19 August 2026. Always consult the latest authoritative version. This briefing provides general information and a decision framework; it is not legal advice, certification or a guarantee of compliance or outcomes.