

Thousands of rural primary schools to get huge broadband upgrade

- £82 million investment will help an estimated half a million primary school children
- Scheme will also encourage roll out of better broadband to surrounding rural homes and businesses

Hundreds of thousands of pupils living in the countryside will enjoy lessons powered by better digital connections as the government invests to level up internet access in rural primary schools.

A joint £82 million investment from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Department for Education (DfE) announced today will mean pupils in classrooms from Cornwall to Cumbria will reap the benefits of full fibre broadband capable of delivering up to 1,000 megabits per second.

This means an estimated 500,000 primary school pupils will be able to use the internet with no interruptions, even if multiple classes are using it at the same time. They will benefit from being able to link up with others anywhere in the world to learn from one another, with access to an ever-growing library of online tools designed to make lessons more fun and engaging.

Over the next three years, up to 3,000 eligible schools will be able to embrace efficiencies through modern ways of working – generating cost savings and reducing workload for frontline professionals. The programme will cover the costs of connecting rural schools not likely to be connected by commercial rollout currently stuck on outdated copper cables.

Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

Children's opportunities in school should not be pre-determined by where they grow up.

Today we're announcing millions of pounds to get lightning fast broadband connections to rural schools and level up children's access to the best possible teaching.

Teaching has been revolutionised by digital technology and we need to make sure all pupils can benefit from the opportunity it brings.

Schools Minister Robin Walker said::

High speed, reliable internet is crucial to helping schools provide the best possible experience for pupils. This investment will open a whole world of possibilities for schools and teachers in hard-to-

reach areas, whether that is through more access to online resources for children, or fast, top quality video streaming.

It is more important now than ever for schools to be connected and this welcome investment comes on top of the programme of upgrades to connectivity and Wi-Fi that we are delivering through our Priority Education Investment Areas.

Russell David, Head of The Acorns and Whitley Village Federated School in Ellesmere Port, which has already been connected to gigabit broadband through Project Gigabit, said:

Our pupils now feel more connected to each other, their teachers and our community than ever before.

Fast, reliable connectivity is vital in today's classrooms and gigabit broadband, along with the fantastic new WiFi provided through the Connect the Classroom programme, has allowed us to transform how we teach using the latest educational tech, giving pupils and staff access to a huge library of new tools and resources to thrive and engage with the curriculum.

Our remote location is no longer a constraint to our participation with the rest of the Rowan Learning Trust in our exciting journey.

Funding for up to 2,000 schools will be from the DCMS [GigaHubs programme](#), which is part of Project Gigabit, the government's £5 billion programme to deliver lightning-fast, reliable broadband in hard-to-reach areas of the UK. The scheme is set to connect up to 7,000 rural public sector buildings including schools, GP surgeries, libraries and other public buildings.

The new infrastructure will bring gigabit-capable connections (1,000 megabits per second) to the heart of communities, incentivising more investment in hard-to-reach areas and providing 'hubs' from which the commercial sector can connect surrounding homes and businesses.

An additional 1,000 schools will be funded by DfE as part of their mission to enable every school in England to access high-speed internet by 2025.

To ensure teachers and schools can make the most of these connections in the classroom, DfE is also investing £30 million in the pilot project 'Connect the Classroom', which aims to upgrade technology in thousands more schools in priority areas, meaning pupils will benefit from fast Wi-Fi and cloud services and will be able to link up with peers, experts and specialists in countries from around the world via live video calling.

The government is investing in 'Connect the Classroom' in its Priority Education Investment Areas, 24 areas of the country where education outcomes are weakest and support is being targeted.

The delivery of new gigabit connectivity also underpins the government's net zero ambitions – helping schools to move away from inefficient locally-hosted servers and embrace more efficient and secure cloud data storage, services and devices.

ENDS

A regional breakdown of the number of schools to benefit will be determined at the time of procurement, with costs also determined by local factors established at the project's next stage. An engagement exercise will take place over the coming months with all eligible schools, and procurement will begin in the autumn term.

This announcement of £82m has been calculated using the average site cost from the Rural Gigabit Connectivity programme, a precursor to GigaHubs. The programme connected around 1000 sites of which 530 were rural English schools.

The potential number of sites included in the project (up to 3,000) has been calculated by comparing a DfE list of rural schools supplied to DCMS GigaHubs eligibility criteria – this provides DCMS-funded project numbers of around 2,000 schools, while DfE will be funding around 1,000 further sites.

Project Gigabit

Project Gigabit is the government's flagship £5 billion programme to connect hard-to-reach communities unlikely to be connected through commercial rollout, meaning families no longer having to battle over bandwidth and people in rural areas can have the freedom to live and work more flexibly, helping businesses to grow and vital public services to thrive.

The faster connections delivered by the scheme have been levelling up rural communities across the UK: enabling businesses to grow by using digital technology to boost their productivity and giving people living in more remote areas better access to good jobs.

GigaHubs

Over the next 3 years, up to £110m of government funding will be invested into providing gigabit connectivity to up to 7,000 rural public sector buildings including schools, GP surgeries, libraries and other public buildings. This will deliver a range of benefits, such as enabling clinicians to provide remote video consultations and allowing whole classes of schoolchildren to be online, at once, with no interruptions.

The GigaHubs model works by providing funding towards infrastructure build for eligible public sector buildings which meet qualifying criteria set by BDUK and where investment cases are clear.

Priority Education Investment Areas – 'Connect the Classroom'

The government's Priority Education Investment Areas are: Blackpool,

Bradford, Derby, Doncaster, Fenlands and East Cambridgeshire, Halton, Hartlepool, Hastings, Ipswich, Knowsley, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire Coast, Norwich, Nottingham, Oldham, Portsmouth, Rochdale, Salford, Sandwell, Stoke-on-Trent, Tameside, Walsall, West Somerset.