

Why Schools Aren't Buying From You

And what you can do about it

Lessons for navigating your business through the most cautious education market in years.

Sprint Education 



Contents Page

About us	2
Introduction	3
5 reasons why	4
Roundup	10
Strategy 1	11
Strategy 2	12
Strategy 3	14
Turning strategies into action	16
Conclusion	20
The Sprint way	21

Contents

ABOUT US

Sprint Education...

Is an award-winning agency that has pioneered marketing to education since 2007.

We create over 48 million teacher connections for our clients every year through delightful digital marketing plans and our education marketing and sales software (Campus) that attracts teachers, school staff, and educational establishments to our clients' brands.

This report was written by Guy.

"I co-founded Sprint Education back in 2007, and since then I've learnt so much about our industry and the inner-workings of communicating with the education sector. Many of you will know that I was once a teacher myself, and so know all about the pitfalls education businesses must avoid when it comes to choosing an education agency to manage their marketing. This is going to become even more important in light of this difficult time.

I've written this report to help explain why the industry is where it is and importantly what you can do to come out on top this year."



Guy Lewis
Co-Founder – Sprint Education



EDUCATION BUYING HASN'T STOPPED . . .

It's evolved!

If you sell to UK schools, you may have noticed some uncomfortable marketing and sales patterns lately:

- Responses are slower
- Buying cycles are longer
- Budget sign-offs are rarer
- Once-dependable leads have gone cold

You're not imagining it

Schools are hesitating and many have simply stopped buying non-essential services altogether. But here's the truth:

Schools are still spending, but now they're being incredibly selective about what gets the green light.



At Sprint Education, we work with hundreds of education companies every year and we've seen **the same pattern repeated across the sector**: cautious, cost-conscious schools are tightening purse strings but they are still purchasing when the right value is presented in the right way. This whitepaper is your roadmap to understanding what's driving the slowdown and how to respond.

We'll look at

- Why schools' purchasing patterns have changed.
- The five factors that have reshaped education spending.
- How to adapt your strategies to not just survive, but thrive.

While the easy wins might be harder to come by, a smarter, more strategic approach can put you **ahead of the competition** and help you build the kind of partnerships with schools that last well beyond this year's budget cycle.



It's a simple
lack of **money**."



5 REASONS . . .

Why schools are spending less

"It's a simple lack of money."

Wrong!

It's actually a multi-layered, multi-faceted situation involving funding gaps, cost spikes, staffing crises, demographic shifts, and changing social expectations of schools.

As I see it there are five main reasons...



Reason 1 | The funding freeze

At first glance, government announcements in late 2024 seemed positive: multi-billion pound increases for school budgets over two years. But looking more closely it becomes clear that it's not that straight forward.

Between 2019-20 and 2024-25, total school spending per pupil in England rose by approximately 11% in real terms, returning to levels comparable to 2010. However, when focusing solely on mainstream schools (excluding high-needs funding), the real-term increase was almost 5%.

Okay, so we're back where we were in 2010, right?

Sure, but... in the meantime, costs like salaries, energy, and food have soared far above 2010 benchmarks. And when you consider that so much of a school's funding is absorbed by these fixed costs (especially salaries and utilities), discretionary spending is being hammered.

A real-term
funding increase
of close to 5%.



Heads and Business Managers report:

- Having less budget flexibility than ever before.
- Needing to prioritise basic operational needs over innovation.
- Scaling back enrichment, training, IT investment, and adoption of new resources.

If your product isn't tied to core curriculum delivery, safeguarding, or statutory compliance then it could very well be at risk of being cut, deferred, or deprioritised unless you make a compelling case for it.



WHY SCHOOLS ARE SPENDING LESS

Reason 2 | The cost crisis hits schools

Salary pressures

- ✓ Teachers received a 6.5% pay rise in 2023 and support staff averaged even higher at 7.6%. The largest pay rise in education for decades.
- ✓ Teachers received a 5.5% pay rise in 2024.
- ✓ For 2025-26 it's recommended that there's a further pay rise of approximately 4% for teachers but crucially the government has indicated that any pay increases beyond the budgeted 2.8% will need to be funded by schools.

These measures have been necessary for retention (teachers are fleeing the profession in their droves), but in many cases have not been fully funded by government grants. It's a case of the government standing on a manifesto of getting more teachers and improving retention but then passing the financial burden, in part, back to the schools. Schools will simply have to find this shortfall from existing budgets - and you know that means... **cuts elsewhere!**

Employers' national insurance contributions

Under the Labour Government on April 6th 2025 the main rate of employers NI rose by 1.2% from 13.8% to 15% and compounding this is the fact that the earnings threshold at which employers begin paying NICs was lowered from £9,000 to £5,000.

I did a quick rough calculation (assuming that the average salary of school staff is the median annual earnings for full-time employees across the UK from 2024 - which is £37,430) and it comes in at an additional cost of £955.96 per employee, each year.

Now multiply that out by about 950,000 school staff and I reckon schools are in the hole by getting on for £1 billion. That's going to hit hard!



Inflation hasn't just dented household incomes; it's devouring school budgets!



Our electricity bill went from £18,000 in 2019 to **£41,000** last year. No grant covers that.”



REASON 2 CONTINUED . . .

Energy and materials inflation

Although energy prices have stabilised from the 2022 peak, they remain dramatically higher than pre-crisis levels. Material costs (books, furniture, cleaning supplies) have also surged.

This means schools face £30,000-£70,000 extra costs annually compared to just a couple of years ago.



Reason 3 | Policies that create pressure

Recent government decisions have, unintentionally, tightened school budgets even further.

Underfunded mandates

As well as the underfunded pay rise recommendation I mentioned earlier, other underfunded mandates include policies like universal infant free meals which sounded great politically.

In reality the increase was tiny for the 2025-26 academic year with the Department for Education announcing a miniscule 3 pence extra per meal. This falls below the rate of food price inflation and wage increases and yes, you guessed it - schools will have to subsidise the real costs from their own already stretched budgets.

Other examples include where SEND provisions have been expanded but with chronic funding gaps, as well as additional safeguarding and welfare duties placed on schools post-COVID without matching grants.

Robbing Peter to pay Paul

The problem schools are facing is that for every well-intentioned policy that isn't fully-funded they themselves need to rob Peter to pay Paul and cut their discretionary budgets to meet their statutory requirements.



Reason 4 | Falling pupil numbers

Since 2008 the UK's birth rate has been slowly declining meaning primary schools are seeing lower intakes. Fewer children = less funding.

For schools in affected areas

Annual budgets have shrunk significantly.

Fixed costs (staff, building upkeep) have likely remained broadly the same.

The result? **Extreme pressure on flexible spending.**

Secondary schools will soon begin feeling this pressure too as smaller cohorts move up from primary schools.

Reason 5 | Social change post-COVID

COVID didn't just disrupt learning; it reshaped the role schools play in communities.

Today, schools are expected to:

- Fill welfare gaps, like feeding children.
- Provide mental health services.
- Act as community hubs in deprived areas.

And of course, all of this means that more staff time is diverted to pastoral care, there's greater demand on school leadership, and new costs that aren't matched by new funding are appearing. Then, when budgets are triaged, the "extras" like workshops, enrichment programmes, new platforms, and training days face an uphill battle unless they directly support wellbeing or academic recovery.

WHY SCHOOLS ARE SPENDING LESS

Roundup

Schools' spending decisions aren't just about tight budgets.

They're about survival priorities and senior leaders are now zoning in on:

- ✓ Keeping the lights on
- ✓ Paying staff
- ✓ Meeting statutory obligations
- ✓ Supporting vulnerable pupils

Anything outside that needs to fight for its place and prove it is worthy of investment.

So what should you do?

It's easy to feel disheartened by this backdrop but the truth is: smart suppliers are still growing. They're doing it by pivoting their marketing and sales strategies to meet schools where they are today.

In the next section, I'll walk you through three sales and marketing strategies you can deploy immediately which will resonate with cash-strapped, risk-averse schools.

Ready? Let's dive in.



The truth is, smart education suppliers are still growing."

Ben Lewis — Sprint Education CEO



sprint-education.com

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Strategy #1

POSITION YOURSELF AS A . . .

Critical investment

If you skipped to this section, here is a quick reminder of the reality check:

Schools aren't buying "nice-to-haves", they're buying:

- Core curriculum resources.
- Solutions that save money or staff time.
- Services that improve wellbeing and attendance.
- Compliance and safeguarding essentials.

If you want to win sales, you must frame your product or service as critical to survival, performance, or compliance.

This needs to be done by reframing your value proposition.

- Focus on outcomes, not features.
- Tie your offer to Ofsted criteria, DfE guidelines, etc.
- Show how you improve pupil attainment, staff retention, or statutory compliance.

Here's an example of what I would call a weak value proposition: "A brilliant new resource for creative writing!"

This would be better: *"Proven to raise KS2 literacy attainment by 9% whilst supporting your Ofsted outcomes."*

You'd be surprised at how many education companies don't even consider a value proposition, let alone implement one that resonates with the economic pressures schools face.

Position yourself #1: Quantify the impact

Schools need ammunition to justify spending internally.

- "Saves 20 admin hours per term."
- "Improves pupil attendance by 3%."
- "Cuts consumables spend by 15%."

Give them numbers, not adjectives, because schools need a business case. Help them build it.

Position yourself #2: Value-first content

Launch guides, checklists, or webinars.

- "How to cut £20k from your school's operational spend."
- "5 ways to boost GCSE results without new staff."
- "Stretching this year's school budget: essential tips."

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Strategy #2

LOWER...

The barrier to saying "YES"

In tough financial times, even if a school wants what you're offering, the payment process itself can block the sale.

The reality is:

- Schools often don't have lump sums available now.
- Budgets are tied to the April and September funding windows.
- Committees are cautious about committing to multi-year costs.

So, if you want to secure sales right now, you need to lower the upfront risk and make your offer feel flexible, forgiving, and low-pressure.

Lower the barrier #1: Flexible pricing options

- Instalment Plans – offer termly, quarterly, or monthly payments.
- Deferred Billing - "Sign up now, first payment - September."
- Subscriptions - Instead of £10,000 upfront, offer £850/month.

Schools will be more open to committing to what you offer when the cashflow pain is spread out.

Lower the barrier #2: Free trials and pilots

Let's face it, risk-free sells better than risky. Some things you could implement are:

- Offering a 30-90 day free trial.
- Setting up "pilot programmes" for an MAT's school cluster.
- Building in opt-out clauses (cancel within 60 days).

Applying any or all of the above will undoubtedly make Heads, Business Managers, and budget holders feel safer. It'll also give schools the chance to experience the value before they have to budget for it. Oh, and of course - usage builds advocacy among staff. Don't underestimate the power non-budget holders can have in terms of pushing for your offering to be more widely adopted.

One of our clients built personalised "Pilot Success Packs" - resources to guide each school that piloted their SaaS through the successful usage of their product, increasing their conversion odds later.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Strategy #2

CONTINUED . . .

Lower the barrier #3: Group deals

Schools love bulk savings - especially trusts.

Why not consider:

- Offering special pricing for multi-school adoption.
- Bundling multiple services together for one simple cost.
- Promoting cross-sell packages: e.g. "Buy our literacy software, get free teacher training access."

Late last year one of our clients started bundling staff training into their core edtech package and lifted their average contract size.

Lower the barrier #4: Help find funding

Funding is out there but schools are overwhelmed with day-to-day pressures. This is where you come in!

- Research relevant grants and bursaries for your sector.
- Create "Funding Help" guides to send with your sales collateral.
- Offer to draft template applications or supply bid language.

Schools will be more open to committing to what you offer when the cashflow pain is spread out.

If you sell STEM kits you could link to Royal Society or IET STEM grants. Or, if you offer sports resources you could highlight Sport England small grants.

One of our clients, a supplier of wellbeing programmes for primaries launched a "Start Now, Pay Later" recently. Schools started their wellbeing interventions immediately but didn't pay until the new budget release.

Make buying from you the least risky, most manageable, and easiest choice on the table.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Strategy #3

BUILD ...

Relationships, not transactions

When your budgets are tightened do you gamble? Unless you're Kenny Rogers you'll probably understand that schools also don't. They stick with companies they trust.

If you're not yet that trusted supplier you need to earn that trust before you ask for the sale. This means becoming part of the education community and not just appearing when you want to invoice someone.

Relationship builder #1: Share don't just sell

We've been advocates for this approach for more than a decade and a half! I literally cannot over-emphasise enough the value of publishing blog posts, videos, and PDFs offering genuinely useful content. Like this:

- "5 Smart Ways to Save Money in Your SBM Role."
- "Clever Curriculum Hacks to Boost Outcomes this term."
- "The Ultimate MAT Budget Planner Template."

You could host webinars or short online workshops - even free 30-minute CPD tasters, or regular email digests sharing sector news, budget-saving tips, and leadership insights.

One of our clients regular "Funding" email series, sent every Friday, doubled their inbound leads within 3 months.

Don't underestimate how valuable being a thought leader is. It's everything!

Relationship builder #2: Localise, personalise

Schools are naturally "local". They trust familiar names and settings, and they talk. I was a teacher for seven years and as a young teacher I had teacher friends in seven other schools in Gloucestershire (where I taught) and Worcestershire (where I trained). In my experience teachers gravitate towards other teachers so make use of this fact too.

Ultimately, if you can localise and personalise your approach and encourage teachers to talk about you, then you can prove you know their context and not just throw generic selling points at them.

Ways we encourage our clients to do that:

- Use case studies from the local area of your prospects.
- Mention regional challenges, specific Ofsted concerns, etc.
- Reference MATs directly if selling to trust schools.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Strategy #3

CONTINUED . . .

Relationship builder #3: Social proof

This one is a relationship builder that every education supplier should be employing. It's your quickest way for schools to see you as a good option.

Every time you work with a school you should be:

- Asking them for a testimonial, especially Head Teachers and members of the Senior Management Team. If you can get a photo to go with the testimonial even better as it makes the testimonial more authentic.
- Then, always ask schools if you can use their logo on your website. It's easy for a web developer to create a carousel of logos of schools who you've worked with.

Finally, there's nothing better than an actual case study where you can dive deeper into the benefits you're providing a school. Use compelling value proposition titles to the case study e.g. "How XX School Saved £12,000 Using [Product]".

Ultimately show that you're real, relatable, and results-focused.

Relationship builder #4: Play the long game

Don't expect instant sign-offs. Schools have harder decisions to make than ever. You need to allow them the time and space to build up confidence in you and also in building up a commercial case internally for you.

When funding does free up (often unpredictably), schools will turn first to the suppliers who've been showing up all along.

Put yourself in the best possible position by:

- Nurturing leads with newsletters and content.
- Offering second demos or strategy calls without pushing hard.
- Staying visible, helpful, and supportive, even when budgets are frozen.

To win schools' trust and become their go-to supplier, focus on building long-term relationships by sharing genuinely helpful content, localising your approach, showcasing social proof, and consistently supporting them without always selling.



Turning strategies into action

So far, you've got the core strategic pillars in place:

- Prove return on investment
- Make buying from you easy and low-risk
- Build relationships and trust before selling

Now let's put these into a simple, practical action plan you can start implementing today that will help you build campaigns, content, and sales approaches that actually work in today's cautious education market.



List Built	
✓	
<input type="checkbox"/> Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Job Title
<input type="checkbox"/> Mr Nicholas Donlon	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mrs Jenny Smith	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mr S Henderson	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mrs J Bell	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mrs Emma Scott	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mr M Pannell	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Ms Rachel Clarke	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mr Damian Dwyer	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Miss L Williams	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mr Wayne Wightman	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Mrs Z Coyle	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> David Kay	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Ian Moran	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/> Katherine M	Head of Maths
<input type="checkbox"/>



Step 1 | Audit your current offer

Before you change your marketing, you need to understand how your current offer looks through today's lens.

Ask yourself:

- Is our core message focused on outcomes or features?
- Can we quantify the savings, improvements, or benefits we deliver?
- Are we offering flexible ways to pay (plans, free trials, deferred billing)?
- Have we made it crystal clear why schools should trust us now?

If you can't answer, "Yes" to all four then it's time to update your positioning.

Step 2 | Refocus your messaging

Tighten every headline, email subject line, and landing page around what matters now:

- Cost savings
- Time savings
- Core educational outcomes (attendance, wellbeing, attainment)
- Statutory compliance
- Staff wellbeing and retention

Remove generic language like "innovative" or "exciting" - replace with quantified impacts wherever possible.

Use an urgent but empathetic tone: "We know budgets are tight. That's why [Solution] helps you achieve [Goal] without breaking the budget."

Step 3 | Launch a value-first campaign

Provide useful content immediately - even before you talk about selling.

Ideas:

- Budget-saving tipsheets for SBMs
- Free staff wellbeing CPD webinars
- Checklists for preparing for Ofsted inspections
- "Stretch your Pupil Premium" guides

Format them into:

- Blogs
- Downloadable PDFs
- Email nurture series
- Webinar series
- LinkedIn articles

Every piece of content should help a school solve a real problem they're facing today - even if they never buy from you.

Step 4 | Build risk-reducing offers

Introduce:

- Free trials
- Low-cost pilots
- Deferred billing options
- Flexible contract lengths (1 year vs. 3 year)

Promote "zero risk" offers in your marketing:

- "Try free for 90 days - no commitment"
- "Start today, first payment September"
- "Pilot project with full support included"

Make offers deadline-driven where appropriate (but avoid heavy discounting unless strategic - to protect brand value).

Step 5 | Start or Strengthen Your Community Presence

If you don't already:

- Join MAT forums, Facebook groups, LinkedIn groups
- Attend local or regional SBM network meetings (virtual or in-person)
- Submit articles to education newsletters and blogs
- Follow and interact with school leadership on LinkedIn

Share content, insights, and tips regularly - NOT just promotional material.

Build a database of local case studies and testimonials to use regionally.

Step 6 | Personalise your outreach

Break your database down by:

- School type (primary, secondary, MAT, special)
- Region
- Current challenges (Ofsted, SEND expansion, falling rolls)

Tailor campaigns:

- Referencing regional pressures
- Using local success stories
- Targeting the right stakeholders (e.g. SENCOs vs SBMs vs Heads)

Conclusion

How to win in a cautious market

Today's education market isn't "broken." It's just cautious, careful, and cooler towards anything that doesn't scream value.

Schools still have needs and ambitions and they definitely still want better outcomes for their students but the rules have changed. So must your approach to marketing and selling.

- ✓ **You must** prove ROI in pounds, in time saved, or in improved results.
- ✓ **You must** lower the friction with easy starts, flexible payments, or no-risk pilots.
- ✓ **You must** be trustworthy not just a seller, but a partner, a steady presence.



Head Teachers in Secondary Schools
Your list will reach 3,226 contacts

English Teachers in Secondary Schools
Your list will reach 15,248 contacts



Multi-Academy Trust CEOs
Your list will reach 1,812 contacts



The Sprint way

At Sprint Education, we work with organisations who don't want to shout louder - they want to speak smarter.

If you:

- ✓ Understand that schools are overwhelmed
- ✓ Are willing to adapt your messaging to match reality
- ✓ Want to grow sustainably, ethically, and intelligently

Then this year could actually be one of your best years yet.

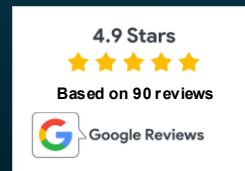
The suppliers who survive this market won't be the ones with the deepest discounts or flashiest ads. They'll be the ones who understand schools, support them, and deliver real, lasting value.

Want help planning your upcoming campaigns?

Get in touch and we'll help you create outreach that feels less like a pitch... and more like a partnership.

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