

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PROCURING A SCHOOL WEBSITE

Get the best value for money, and a website that works for you and your school's needs, with this comprehensive guide to school website procurement.



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INTRODUCTION

With increased pressure on budgets and more scrutiny on how schools are spending money, procurement has never been more important. Over the course of this guide we'll provide advice and guidance to help your school get the most out of your website investment and in doing so, help you purchase a school website with longevity and practicality in mind.

WHAT IS PROCUREMENT?

Procurement is the term used to describe the process of purchasing goods or services. This includes the whole process, from identifying a need and finding out what solutions are available, to sourcing potential suppliers and selecting, buying and using the goods or services, right through to contract renewal.



PLANNING

IDENTIFYING A NEED

Good procurement normally starts with planning, and in the first instance, identifying a need. This typically involves understanding why you need a new school website in the first place and putting forward a convincing case for investing in a new one. This may fall into the following categories but the reasons to update your website will be unique to your school and circumstances.

PRODUCT-BASED REASONS

- Your school website looks outdated, or doesn't properly reflect your brand, identity, ethos and values.
- Your school website is difficult and cumbersome to update, making it a burden on your time and resources.
- Your school website is no longer secure or has been compromised.
- Your school website lacks key functionality you require in order to market your school and communicate with your stakeholders effectively.

SERVICE-BASED REASONS

- The support you are receiving from your existing supplier is unsatisfactory, you have no support at all, or in the case of in-house solutions perhaps the individual responsible for looking after your website has left, or is leaving.
- The relationship with your existing provider has gone sour.
- Your staff have received inadequate help or training to update your website.

VALUE-BASED REASONS

- Your school website no longer represents good value for money.
- Making small changes to your website costs too much money.
- You're being charged for functionality that other suppliers provide as standard.

MARKET-BASED REASONS

- You need to boost enrolment at your school and your current website isn't geared at attracting prospective students.
- Your school has become an academy or joined an academy trust and the information or design of your website is no longer relevant.
- You need to attract more teachers or support staff and the careers/vacancies part of your website is not fit for purpose.
- Your school website no longer adheres to accessibility best practices, the latest website standards, or the website requirements set out by the Department for Education.
- Your school website does not work effectively on mobile devices like smartphones or tablets.

Before you can source a reputable school website provider your school should first identify why you need a new school website in the first place.

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PLANNING

COLLABORATION

The next step in the planning process is to see whether or not there are opportunities to work with other schools to make the process simpler, and drive down administration time and costs.

Talking to other schools about your procurement could help you identify whether they'll be able to help. It might be worth talking to a school that has recently updated their school website, to see what process and factors they considered and to gain an insight into their experience. It could be that they help give an indication of the cost of a new website for you to benchmark against. Or in the case of a trust, it could be that buying in bulk for each of the academies in your organisation could offer greater efficiencies and greater savings too.

EXAMPLE

A primary school in a multi academy trust of 7 primary schools wishes to update their website. They collaborate with the trust and establish that another two primary schools in the trust would like to update their website too.

EACH school could pay £2,000 for a BESPOKE WEBSITE, totalling £6,000.

Or, through collaboration, the trust may instead decide to work with the lead school to create a BESPOKE WEBSITE for them, which then becomes a TEMPLATE on which to build the additional primary school websites. EACH one costing just £1,000 per school. This option would cost just £4,000, saving the trust and it's schools £2,000, enough to build another two school websites with the savings!

Best of all, this approach ensures that the trust maintains design consistency across the different websites, all the while giving each school the option to add in an element of their own individuality. It also reduces the burden of learning how to update multiple systems or liaising with several suppliers.

PLANNING

CREATING A SPECIFICATION

The next step in the process is to create a specification that outlines what you need your website to do, any key features you require and any 'must-haves' or 'nice-to-haves'. The best way to approach this is to first look at what you already have in place and look at examples of websites that you aspire to. Talk to the people that update your website and get a feel for what works and what doesn't. Look to see what information suppliers put online to give you some ideas and then brainstorm a list of some of the key features and functionality that you require, or desire.

To save time on this part of the process we've detailed some of the things that e4education provide as standard.

Download our free checklist that details what key things e4education provide as standard, to compare and benchmark against other providers.

[REQUEST A COPY](#)





At this point it's also worth assessing any timescales your might have and thinking about when you'd like to launch your new website. Some express websites, typically based on templates or pre-existing websites, can go live in a matter of days. Bespoke website solutions however can typically take between 8 to 12 weeks to design, build, test, populate and put live.

It's worth thinking about what time and resource you have available internally and what period of the year would be most opportunistic to launch a new website, to give you the biggest impact. We've put together a free guide on when best to launch a school website which you can download below.

Download our free guide of possible dates, times and circumstances to consider launching your new school website and why.

[GET RESOURCE](#)

PLANNING

SETTING A BUDGET

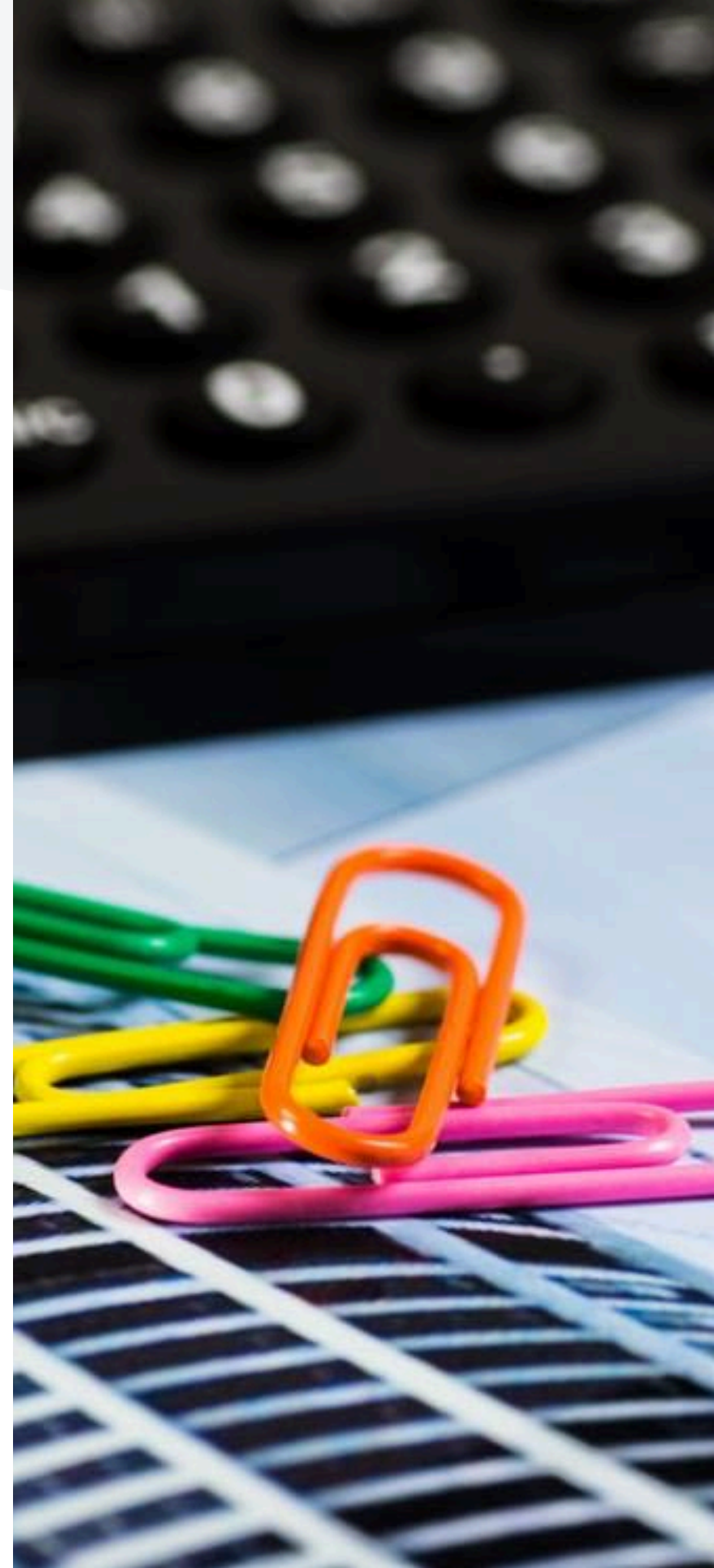
The next stage of the planning process is to consider what budget you have available and look in detail at the potential costs that might arise. To do this, consider the initial up-front costs, any ongoing maintenance or running costs, any additional services you may require as part of your project (like professional photography, videography or branding) and consider the cost of VAT.

Having a budget in mind will help suppliers craft a solution that's perfect for your school. Since the cost of website products and services can vary, be prepared to revise your budget up or down according to value and the quality of the service you might receive.

DEFINING A SCORING CRITERIA

The final part of the planning process is to think about the criteria you might use to pick your perfect website partner. Will you give more weighting to the quality, cost, functionality, service, reputation, the communication and level of detail provided at the point of sale, the future development plans of the business, the breadth of their offering, a mixture of these, or something else entirely?

Identifying a list of priorities and explaining to a potential supplier what is most important to you will help them to deliver tailored advice to ensure you meet your procurement goals.





SOURCING SUPPLIERS

Armed with a plan, you should now be in a position to look at different solutions for delivering a new school website. There are a range of options available, from open-source template solutions, to fully managed bespoke websites from agencies that work specifically with schools.

IN-HOUSE/OPEN SOURCE

Based on more than 16 years' experience working with schools, we'd always recommend avoiding the allure of doing your website in-house, or opting for an open source solution. The costs of doing so, can be much more than you might have anticipated and the result is nearly always compromised. For more information about why, check out our blog post (below) or carry on reading for a mini-guide on why Wordpress might not be the best option for your school or trust.

Read our blog on why going in-house could end up costing you more than you first thought.

[READ OUR BLOG](#)

5 REASONS WORDPRESS MIGHT NOT BE THE BEST IDEA...

SECURITY: Millions of people use Wordpress, making it one of the most heavily targeted platforms for hackers. Finding vulnerabilities is commonplace and exploiting them is easy. If the vulnerability is with a plugin, unless it is patched quickly the only way of securing your website would be to remove or replace the plugin, potentially affecting the functionality of your website. A recent study of 40,000 Wordpress installations found 70% were vulnerable.

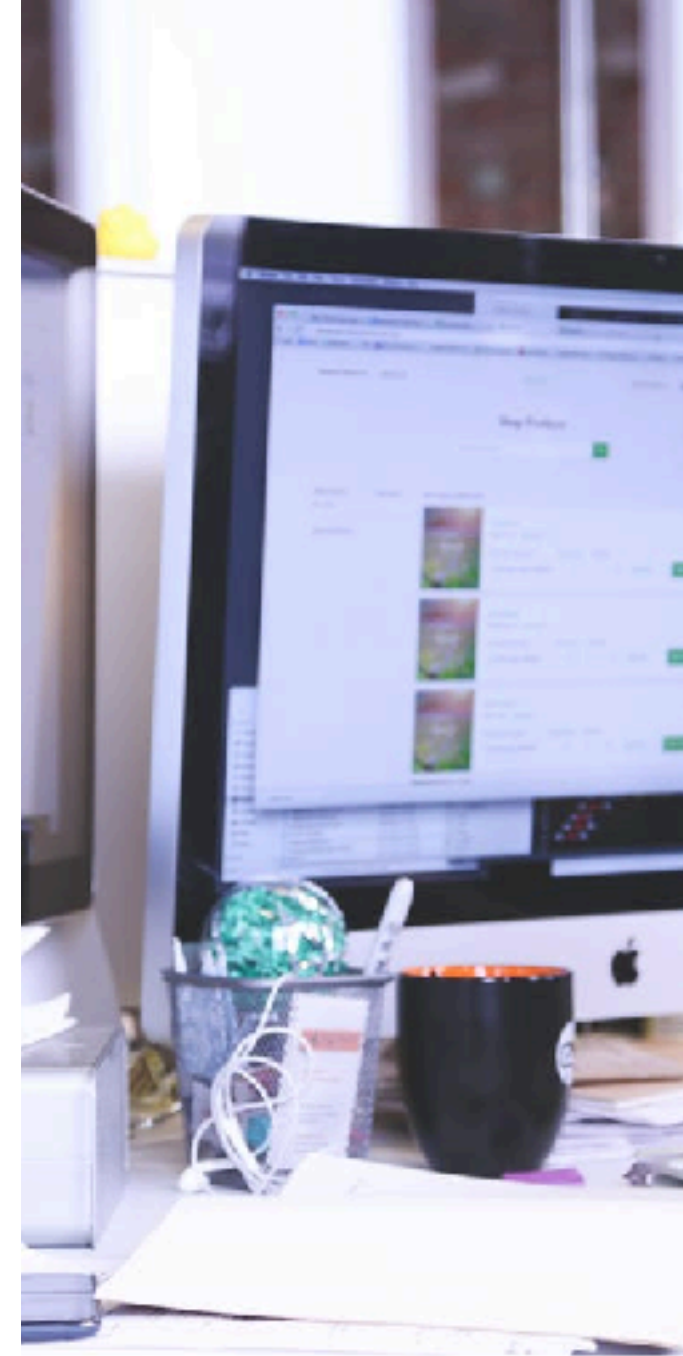


SEO: Plugins are often poorly coded or slow down a website, which will affect the loading time of your website - a key criteria in your search engine placement.

PLUGINS: For some features you may require plugins, which are usually built by third parties and un-supported. Using multiple plugins can cause conflicts, and any updates to the platform could cause them to fail.

SPEED: The Wordpress platform is flexible to accommodate the needs of the masses. This makes the code and structure bloated and inefficient, causing loading times to suffer.

UPDATES: With a new iteration of Wordpress being rolled out every few months, keeping your website up-to-date and secure will require new versions to be installed instantly. Each new version could potentially break a plugin, and take up precious time to keep on top of everything.



SOURCING SUPPLIERS

AGENCY

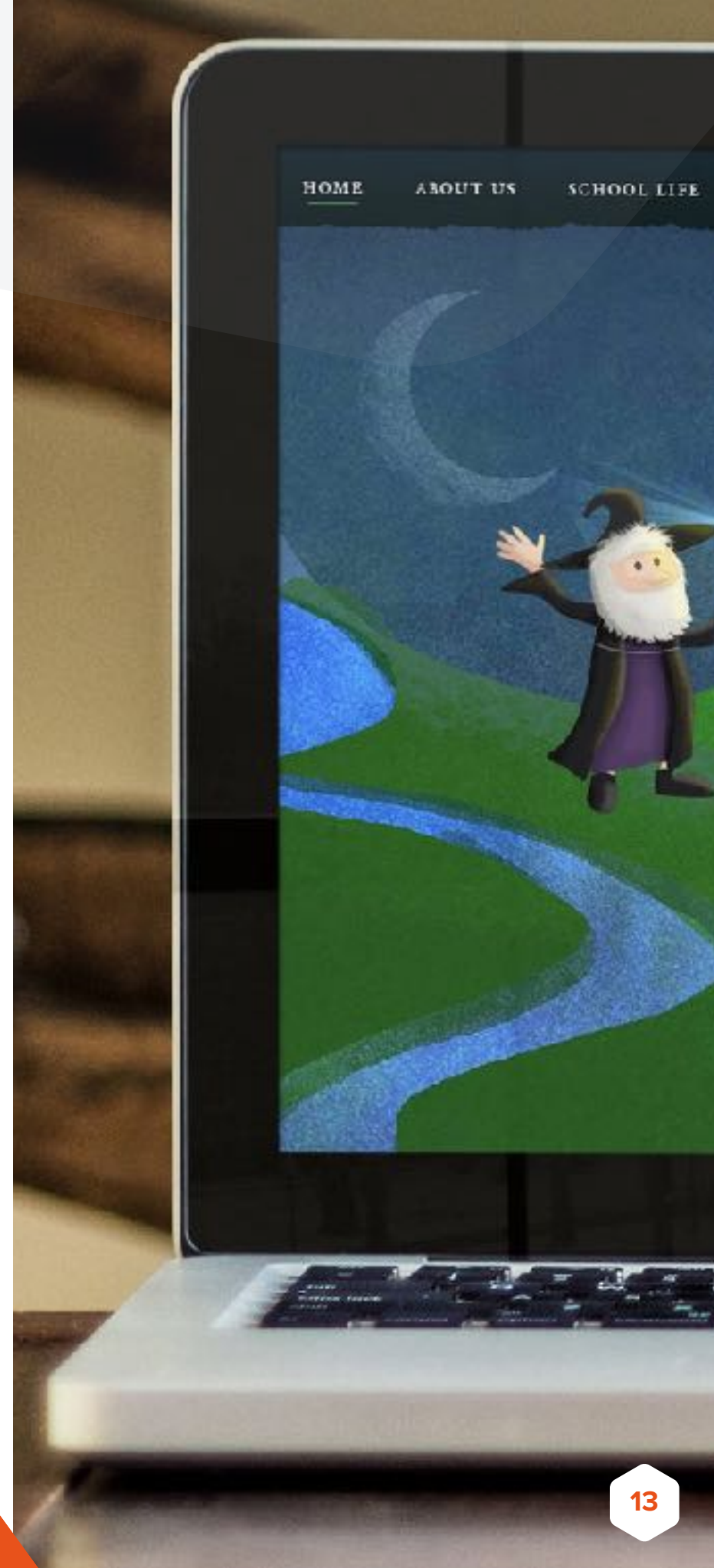
More than one-in-three schools use an agency to fulfil and maintain their school website and in our experience, this is by far the best option. A dedicated agency that works with schools will have a wealth of practical and relevant experience that they can bring to your project.

They'll understand your stakeholders, goals and aspirations and probably already have an idea of how they could help make your vision a reality.

A dedicated agency that works in the education sector will also have an awareness of the increased pressure on school budgets and will be more competitively priced than independent agencies that work across different sectors. Similarly, they'll be aware of the recruitment challenges schools face, and able to provide practical, tested solutions.

Using a dedicated school website provider could give you access to experience and tools specifically for the education sector.

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SOURCING SUPPLIERS

SHORTLISTING PROVIDERS

Picking the right provider could be the difference between achieving your goals or falling short of your aspirations. Your school website will play a significant role in your marketing and communication efforts and you'll want to make sure your investment delivers. To help narrow down potential suppliers we've put together the following list of things to consider.

PORTFOLIO

Take a look on the supplier's website at their portfolio and look through some of the website they have created. Do you think they look good? Do they work well on mobile devices? Do they load quickly? Are they easy to navigate? [Click here to see our portfolio.](#)

EVIDENCE

Don't be afraid to look for, or ask for, evidence. A good website provider with an excellent reputation will be more than happy to provide detailed **case studies of their work**, testimonials from customers, and even put you in contact with existing clients so you can talk to them directly.

PROCESS

Does the company have a clearly defined process to make delivering your project a smooth and enjoyable experience? Nobody wants to be kept in the dark or feel unsure of what happens next - choosing a company with processes and systems in place to deliver projects of all shapes and sizes will avoid unnecessary complications and costly delays.

EXPERIENCE

How long has the company been trading for and how many clients do they work with? Whilst these alone shouldn't be a barometer of how great a company is, they can be indicative of a consistently strong performance at delivering websites for schools.

MAINTENANCE

What content management system (CMS) do they use? Is it their own or an open source one, like Wordpress. Does it have all of the features you require? Are there any caps on certain features that are only available if you pay more? Is the system built on a single code base so updates, enhancements and improvements can be rolled out easily? Is it intuitive and easy to use?

[**LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR CMS**](#)



RELATIONSHIP & SUPPORT

Getting your website live is only part of the process. What level of technical and consultative support will you receive after? Here at e4education the support our clients receives is second to none, with 100% satisfaction and 94% of clients rating our support as 'Excellent' and 98% rating our resolution times as 'Above Average' or 'Excellent'. We offer instant access to our support team during office hours, a dedicated help website with guides and videos, a relationship manager to offer advice, our e4education Academy where we provide top tips and best practice (just like this) and in-line help built straight into our content management system. When picking your provider be sure to ask what level of support you will receive.

UPDATES & ROADMAP

Will your content management system continue to evolve or change over time, as new technologies emerge. And will the company you choose to work with continue to innovate and bring out new products and services to help schools.

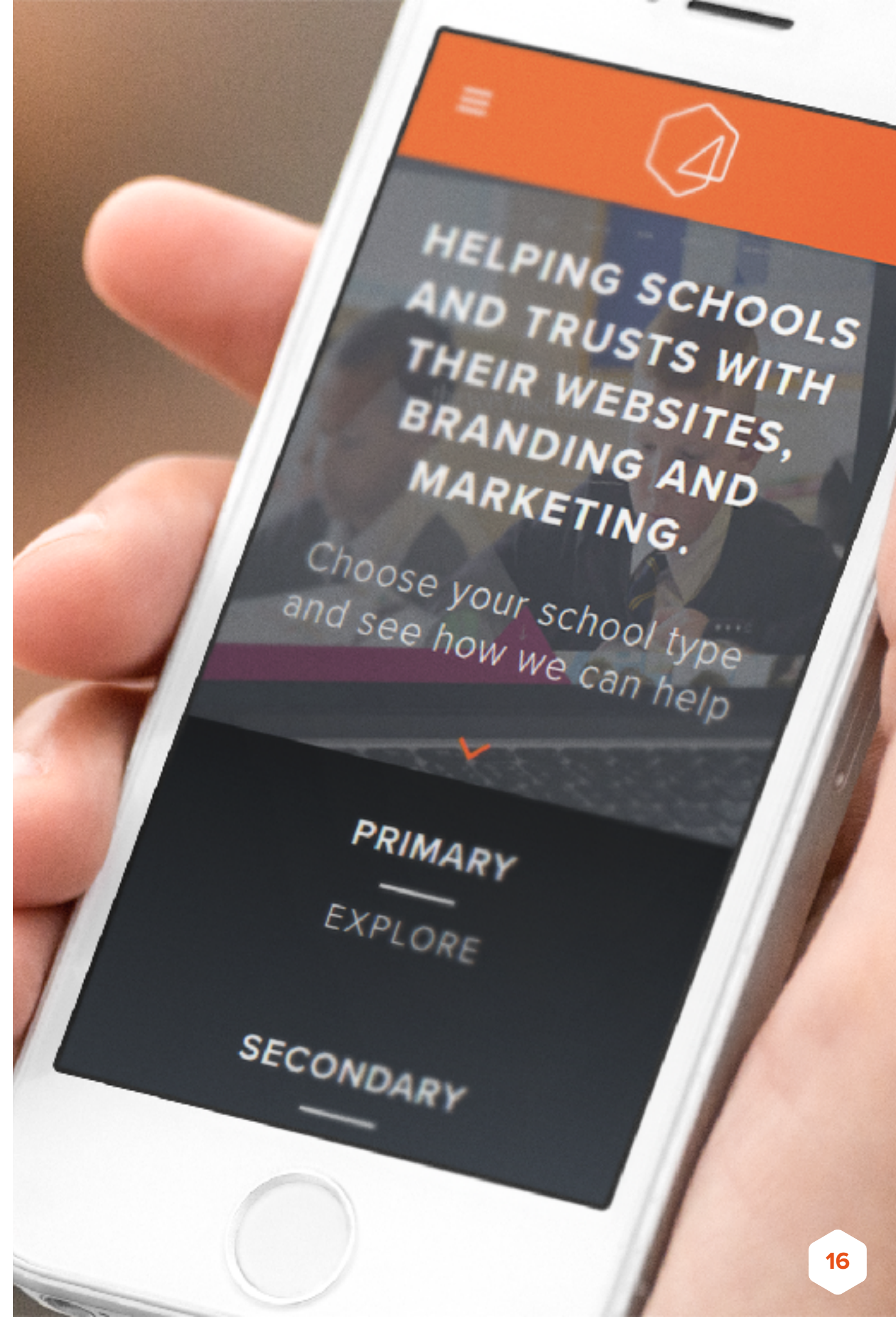
ALL-IN-ONE

Does your potential provider offer additional products and services that you might require as part of your project (like photography, virtual tours, apps, branding, videography etc)? If so, would it be more affordable and less time consuming to use one provider to procure all of these services?

SELECTING YOUR PROVIDER

Once you have narrowed down your choice of potential suppliers to just one or two, you'll likely want to arrange a demo of their product, or book either a remote or on-site meeting to discuss what they can offer and how they can help you meet your requirements. Use this time to ask any questions and advice that might help you to make an informed decision. Don't be afraid to ask follow up questions once you have received a formal quote and be sure to let your potential provider know of any considerations that may affect the outcome of your decision.

Use all of the information you gathered in the planning stages to help you decide which provider might be best.





RENEWING YOUR CONTRACT

Most providers of school websites will have up-front costs for fulfilling the project and an ongoing maintenance cost thereafter. Should a payment plan have been offered to help your school spread their up-front costs over several years, you will be locked into a contract until the payment has been fulfilled. Otherwise your contract will likely automatically renew annually and can be cancelled at any time, providing the relevant notice period has been served. In most cases this will typically be 30 days.

Some providers may offer incentives like reduced annual fees or freebies for locking into a contract for a set period of time. This is something you should discuss with your chosen provider if it's something that may be of interest.

For more procurement advice check out the guidance on the Department For Education Website.

**IF YOU REQUIRE ANY MORE HELP
OR ADVICE, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH.**



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