

The Strategic Case for Modular Temporary Buildings in UK Education

WHITE PAPER

Supporting SEND Provision, Classrooms, and Sports Facilities Through Sustainable Design and Innovative Funding

UK schools and academy trusts face increasing pressure from rising pupil numbers, ageing estates, SEND demand growth, and constrained capital budgets. Modular temporary buildings provide a flexible, cost-effective, and rapid solution to expand capacity while maintaining compliance with Department for Education (DfE) standards.

When combined with energy-efficient technologies and lease-based funding models aligned with Secretary of State class consent, modular solutions offer a compelling pathway to:

- Enhance educational environments (including SEND-specific provision)
- Reduce operational costs and carbon footprint
- Avoid large upfront capital expenditure
- Generate additional revenue streams through community use

1. The UK Education Estate Challenge

UK schools are managing a growing set of pressures that traditional construction methods are often too slow, disruptive, and capital-intensive to respond to effectively.

Rising Pupil Numbers

Increasing pupil numbers and space shortages are placing significant strain on existing school estates across the UK.

Ageing Infrastructure

Ageing infrastructure and structural issues — including RAAC-related closures — are forcing schools to seek urgent alternatives.

Growing SEND Demand

Growing demand for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) provision requires specialist spaces that existing buildings cannot always accommodate.

Limited Capital Funding

Limited access to capital funding means schools must find solutions that do not rely on large upfront expenditure.



2. Modular Buildings: A Flexible and Scalable Solution

What Are Modular Buildings?

Modular buildings are off-site manufactured structures assembled on-site to create high-quality education facilities compliant with UK building regulations.

They can be deployed as:

- ◆ Temporary or permanent classrooms
- ◆ SEND units and specialist learning environments
- ◆ Sports halls and activity spaces
- ◆ Multi-use community facilities

Key Benefits for Schools and Academies

Speed of Delivery

Installation can occur in days or weeks, not months — minimising disruption to live school environments.

Cost Efficiency

Up to ~50% lower cost than traditional construction, with reduced lifecycle and maintenance costs.

Flexibility & Adaptability

Easily reconfigured, expanded, or relocated — suitable for evolving curriculum needs and SEND requirements.

3. Applications in Education



SEND Facilities

Modular buildings are particularly well-suited for SEND due to customisable layouts (sensory rooms, therapy spaces), controlled acoustics and lighting, and safe, accessible design. They allow schools to rapidly respond to EHCP-driven demand increases without long procurement cycles.



General Classrooms

Modular classrooms provide immediate capacity expansion, decant space during refurbishments, and can serve as permanent or semi-permanent teaching blocks.



Sports and Multi-Use Facilities

Indoor sports halls, fitness and wellbeing spaces, and covered play areas can be designed as dual-use community assets, supporting both school and external users.

4. Integration of Energy-Efficient Technologies

Modern modular buildings can incorporate low-carbon, high-efficiency systems, aligning with UK Net Zero targets. Modular buildings are often inherently energy efficient, further reducing running costs.



LED Lighting

Reduced energy consumption vs traditional lighting with lower maintenance costs.



Solar PV

On-site renewable energy generation reducing grid dependency.



Air Source Heat Pumps

Efficient low-carbon heating supporting decarbonisation of school estates.



Smart Building Controls

Optimised energy usage and improved occupant comfort.



EV Charging Infrastructure

Supports staff and community transition to electric vehicles with potential revenue generation.

- 📄 **Key Benefits:** Lower operational expenditure · Improved EPC ratings and sustainability credentials · Alignment with DfE sustainability strategy · Enhanced learning environments (thermal comfort, air quality)



6. Funding Through Lease-Based Models

Overview

Lease-based funding enables schools to acquire facilities without upfront capital expenditure. Key features include:

- Fully funded solutions
- Flexible payment structures (e.g. step or deferred rentals)
- Alignment with budgets

Financial Benefits

- Preserves capital budgets for other priorities
- Matches cost to usage over time
- Enables immediate delivery of facilities

Secretary of State Class Consent

Under UK regulations, academy trusts must obtain consent for borrowing. However, certain leased assets are pre-approved under Secretary of State class consent, including temporary classrooms and equivalent structures.

Advantages:

- ◆ Reduced administrative burden
- ◆ Faster procurement
- ◆ Greater financial certainty

7. Revenue Generation Opportunities

Modular facilities can become income-generating assets, helping schools offset lease costs, create sustainable income streams, and strengthen community engagement.



Out-of-Hours Hire

Schools can rent facilities for community sports clubs, fitness classes, adult education, and events and meetings.



Holiday and Weekend Use

Holiday clubs, SEN support programmes, and local authority services can utilise facilities during school holidays and weekends.



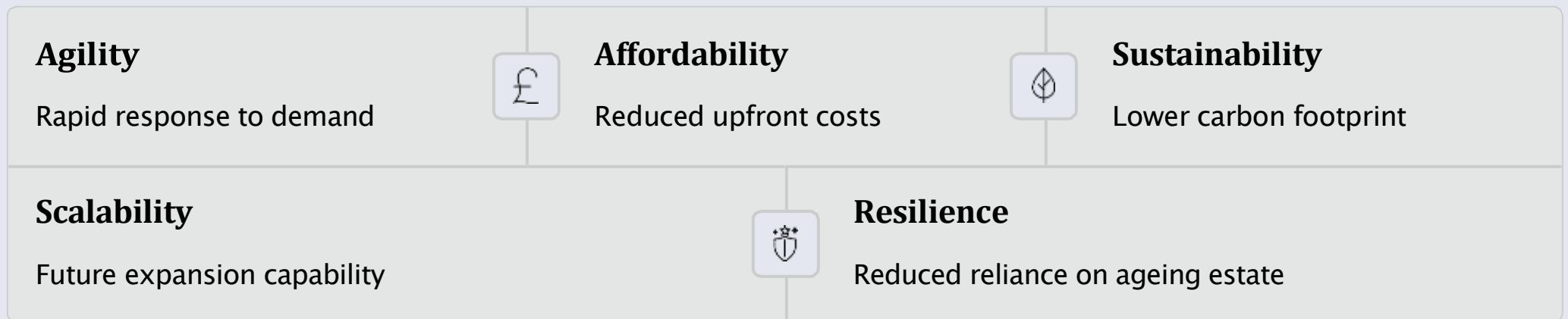
EV Charging Revenue

Public or semi-public EV charging access generates income via usage fees, creating an additional passive revenue stream.

Offsets lease costs · Creates sustainable income streams · Strengthens community engagement

8. Strategic Advantages for Trusts and Schools

Modular, energy-efficient buildings deliver a comprehensive set of strategic advantages for academy trusts and schools.



9. Risks and Considerations

As with any strategic infrastructure decision, schools and trusts should carefully consider the following factors before proceeding with modular building solutions.

Planning Permissions

Temporary vs permanent classification affects the planning permission route required and the duration of consent granted.

Long-Term Estate Strategy Alignment

Modular solutions should be considered within the context of the trust's broader long-term estate strategy to ensure coherence.

Supplier Quality and Compliance Assurance

Ensuring suppliers meet DfE compliance standards and deliver quality-assured structures is essential to protecting the school's investment.

Lease Accounting Treatment

IFRS16 / FRS102 considerations must be factored into financial planning and reporting, particularly for academy trusts subject to these standards.

10. Conclusion

Modular temporary buildings represent a strategic enabler for modern UK education delivery.

When Combined With

- ◆ Energy-efficient technologies
- ◆ Lease-based funding aligned with government consent frameworks

...they can provide a high-impact solution for addressing capacity challenges, enhancing SEND provision, and improving financial sustainability.

References

1. UK modular construction overview and compliance
2. Benefits and cost efficiency of modular classrooms
3. Rapid installation and cost advantages
4. DfE-compliant modular classroom features
5. School expansion challenges and modular adoption
6. Speed and scalability benefits
7. Lease funding benefits and flexibility
8. Secretary of State leasing consent framework
9. Modular buildings meeting long-term standards

📄 **Summary:** Modular buildings, energy-efficient technologies, and lease-based funding together form a compelling, compliant, and cost-effective pathway for UK schools and academy trusts facing today's estate challenges.