INDEPENDENT INSIGHTS FEB 2026

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

SCHOOL WIDE APPROACHES FOR INTEGRATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artificial intelligence is not a future issue for Australian schools. It is already shaping how students learn, how teachers plan and assess, and how schools support wellbeing, inclusion and engagement. Across the country, schools are experimenting with AI tools in classrooms, in student support systems, and in curriculum delivery.

There are already strong examples of schools using AI in thoughtful, creative and culturally responsive ways. In regional and remote communities, AI is helping bring learning to life. In schools serving students with complex needs, it is enabling more personalised and timely support. In classrooms, teachers are beginning to use AI to reduce administrative burden and focus more on relationships and teaching.

Australia is now at a critical point. Without a shared national direction, AI risks becoming a source of growing inequality rather than a driver of national educational improvement.

Right now, schools are adopting AI at different speeds, with very different levels of infrastructure, professional learning, policy guidance and safeguards. Some schools are building sophisticated, whole-school approaches. Others are navigating powerful technologies with limited support. If this approach continues, Australia risks creating a two-speed system where some students benefit from AI-enabled learning while others are left behind.

To realise the promise of AI in education, policy makers must champion a shared national direction, invest in sustained, high-quality professional learning, and embed equity as a guiding principle. No student should be left behind because of postcode, background, or learning context.

Successful AI integration is not about individual tools or isolated classroom trials. It depends on whole-school approaches, where leadership, teachers, students and communities work together to align technology with pedagogy, ethics and student wellbeing. Schools that are using AI well have strong governance, clear expectations about data and privacy, ongoing teacher learning, and assessment practices that protect critical and creative thinking.

The case studies in this report show what is possible. They demonstrate that AI can strengthen culture, support inclusion, personalise learning and help teachers intervene earlier when students need support. But they also reveal a system-wide problem: these innovations are occurring in pockets, not at scale.

At the same time, there are real risks that require coordinated national attention. These include:

- over-reliance on AI that weakens deep thinking and learning
- privacy, data security and bias risks, especially for children
- widening gaps between schools with the capacity to use AI safely and those without.

Other countries are already moving to address these challenges. For example, Finland, Singapore, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States are combining national policy frameworks, teacher capability building and ethical safeguards to guide AI adoption. Australia now has an opportunity to do the same — but in a way that reflects the diversity of our education system and puts equity at the centre.

ISA is the national peak body for Independent schooling in Australia. ISA represents the sector on national issues and engages with the Australian Government, national agencies, media, key stakeholders and the wider Australian community. Working with the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), ISA represents nearly 745,000 students, 1,230 schools and a workforce of nearly 128,700 people.

A CALL TO ACTION

Independent Schools Australia is calling on the Australian Government to establish a national, sector-blind pilot program on AI in schools.

This pilot should be designed to:

- test safe, education-ready AI tools and whole-school implementation models
- provide sustained, high-quality professional learning for teachers and school leaders
- embed strong data privacy, security and ethical safeguards
- prioritise regional, remote and under-resourced schools
- build an evidence base to inform future policy, curriculum and funding decisions.

A national pilot would allow governments to support innovation while managing risk. It would create the conditions for scaling what already works, rather than leaving schools to navigate AI in isolation.

Independent schools, with their diversity and agility, are well placed to contribute to this work. Across Australia, they serve metropolitan, regional and remote communities, students with disability, culturally diverse families and disengaged learners. Many are already developing practical, equity-focused AI approaches that can inform national learning.

ISA stands ready to partner with government, universities and schools to ensure AI in education is guided by evidence, ethics and equity - so that every Australian student benefits from the opportunities this technology offers.

INTRODUCTION

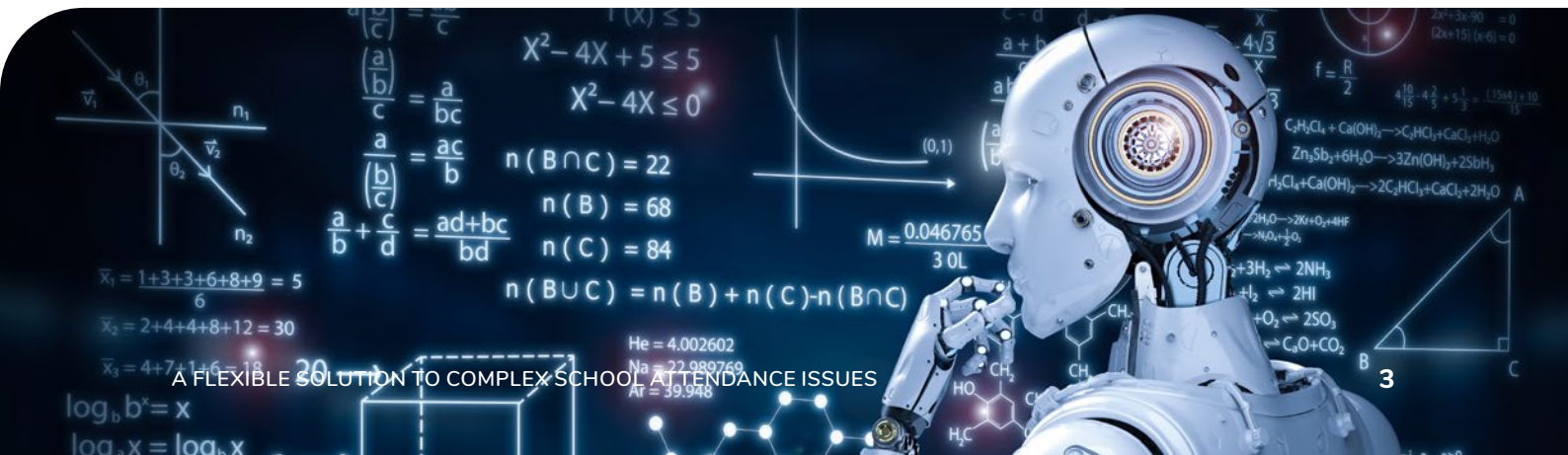
Generative AI (GenAI) has arrived in education with remarkable speed, sparking both excitement and uncertainty. While some schools are diving in and exploring its potential to transform teaching and learning, others are stepping carefully, mindful of the risks and unknowns.

One thing is certain, GenAI is not a passing trend. It is a powerful force that is reshaping education and is here to stay.

Successfully integrating AI into schools will take more than just curiosity. It calls for thoughtful planning, strong policies and ongoing professional learning support for teachers and students. Teachers will need to continuously update their skills and rethink how they teach to prepare students for a future shaped by AI.

There is no one-size-fits-all roadmap when it comes to embracing AI in education. Each school has its own context, priorities and pace. Some are still in the planning phase, others are just taking their first steps, and some are well on their way, embedding AI into teaching and learning programs.

This report shines a light on the different approaches schools are taking at various stages of their AI journey. It offers practical guidance and approaches for schools starting out, as well as insights into the common challenges and barriers that can arise along the way.



WHAT IS AI?

At its core, artificial intelligence refers to computer systems that can perform tasks people usually associate with human intelligence such as recognising patterns, making decisions, or solving problems. These systems work with structured data and are increasingly being used to support learning in schools.

Unlike traditional AI, which often relies on pre-programmed responses, generative AI can create entirely new content such as text, images, audio, video, or even code, based on patterns it has learned from existing data. When used thoughtfully, GenAI can enhance learning by offering personalised feedback, supporting creativity and helping students engage with content in new ways.

One of the most exciting forms of GenAI is the large language model (LLM). These models are trained on vast amounts of text and can generate human-like language. In education, LLMs are already being used to assist with marking, provide tailored student feedback, identify student learning gaps and provide one-on-one tutoring experiences.

However, with these new capabilities come some big questions. How will AI reshape the teacher's role? What does it mean for curriculum and assessment? Most importantly, how do we make sure AI strengthens, not replaces, the human connections at the heart of education?

As the AI and the Future learning Report [1] (2025) states "AI won't replace teachers. But teachers who use AI will replace those who don't."

Already in some countries including the UK and the USA, we are witnessing the rise of the "teacherless" classroom. The Sabrewing Program at David Game College in London, is described as the UK's first teacherless classroom model. Launched in September 2024 for GCSE students aged 15–17, it replaces traditional teaching with AI-driven adaptive platforms for core subjects such as Maths, English, and Sciences, alongside optional subjects such as Computer Science and History. Students attend daily on-campus sessions supported by learning coaches who provide mentoring, feedback, and wellbeing support.

The program also includes co-curricular activities focused on life skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and public speaking, while leveraging technologies for virtual reality (VR) immersive experiences.

With small cohorts of just 20 students and a strong focus on personalised AI-driven learning, the Sabrewing program represents a bold shift towards AI-led education and is viewed as a test case for future integration. However, critics caution that this approach may reduce human interaction and create an over-reliance on technology.

While the Sabrewing program reminds us that AI can be a powerful ally in teaching and learning, it also challenges us to think deeply about how we teach, what we value, and how we should prepare students for a future where AI will play an increasing role.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW?

AI in education is evolving at an extraordinary pace, transforming not just the tools we use but the very mindset underpinning teaching and learning. The rise of agentic AI systems - those that act and complete tasks independently - demands a fundamental rethink of educational goals and practices.

Schools need to focus on what is uniquely human - creativity, empathy, ethical judgment, and community building; yet they also need to ensure that all students are equipped to thrive in a world shaped by AI. This means ensuring equitable access to tools, training, and curriculum that reflect a digitally transformed society, and supporting teachers to lead confidently in this space.

To realise this vision, education policy makers must champion a shared national direction, invest in sustained, high-quality professional learning, and embed equity as a guiding principle. No student should be left behind because of postcode, background, or learning context.

1 HP Futures, Global Learning Council, & T4 Education. (2025). AI and the Future of Learning: A strategic blueprint from global education experts. HP Futures.
Available at: https://hpfutures.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/hp-futures-2025-digital-report.pdf

Harnessing AI's potential requires a whole-school approach rather than isolated classroom experiments. AI literacy should be embedded across every subject, every year level, and every staff role, from leadership teams and curriculum designers to classroom teachers and IT support. Together, schools need to shape an AI-enabled learning culture.

In this new paradigm, judgement and discernment will define expertise. Students must learn to interrogate AI-generated responses, challenge assumptions, and know when something sounds plausible but isn't quite right. Teachers, in turn, will focus on cultivating deeper cognitive skills of evaluation, critique, and refinement, so that learners can navigate complexity with confidence.

Crucially, understanding how to build, guide, and question AI systems will become a core literacy, as essential as reading, writing, and numeracy. Whether exploring ethical dilemmas in humanities, modelling data in science, or composing music with generative tools, AI will be a companion in students' creative and investigative journeys.

AUSTRALIAN FRAMEWORK FOR GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN SCHOOLS

As schools explore how AI fits into classrooms and communities, the Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools offers a clear, practical foundation to guide this journey. Developed by the National AI in Schools Taskforce, including Independent Schools Australia, it helps educators navigate the opportunities and challenges of generative AI. Centred on six principles: Teaching and Learning, Human and Social Wellbeing, Transparency, Fairness, Accountability, and Privacy, Security and Safety, the framework provides practical guidance for shaping ethical, inclusive, and future-focused policies and practices.

Adding to this momentum, educator Leon Furze (Perkins, M & Furze, L, 2024) has created a multi-level AI integration model that is gaining traction across many schools. This approach keeps pedagogy front and centre, helping teachers decide when and how AI should support learning and never replace it. With five levels of integration, from Level 0 (no AI use for critical thinking tasks) to advanced stages where students collaborate with AI, the framework encourages intentional, reflective practice.

The message is clear: AI should enhance learning, not shortcut it. By prioritising pedagogy first, the framework safeguards against cognitive offloading and encourages teachers to critically reflect on when AI should and should not be used, ensuring technology enhances learning rather than replacing essential thinking processes.

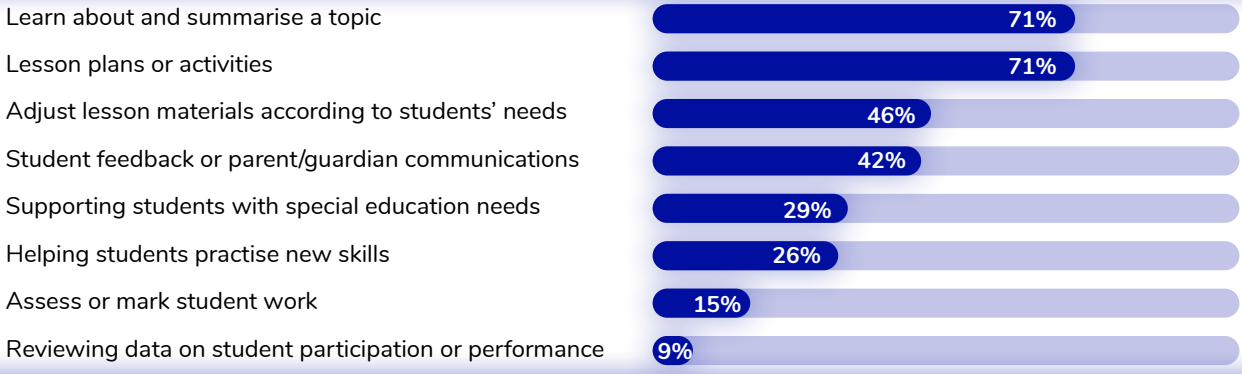
WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACHES TO AI INTEGRATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Schools across Australia are approaching AI integration in different ways, depending on where they are in their journey. Some are just beginning to explore what AI might mean for their classrooms, while others are already experimenting with tools and strategies.

The schools making meaningful progress are not necessarily the ones with all the answers. They are those asking the right questions, engaging in thoughtful conversations, setting clear expectations and aligning AI use with their broader educational goals. They approach AI as a whole-school initiative, engaging school leaders, teachers, students and families to create a vision grounded in shared values.

To support schools in articulating the vision, coherent frameworks for governance, accountability and alignment between values, leadership strategy and policy need to be in place. Sustainable AI integration relies on shared ownership between staff, students, parents, boards and external partners.

AI use by Australian lower secondary teachers (common uses):



66% of Australian teachers used AI in the previous 12 months (OECD average: 36%), but teachers are worried about student use.

Source: Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2024 Teacher Questionnaire

GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO WHOLE SCHOOL AI IMPLEMENTATION

PART 1: Laying the Foundations

1. Strategic Vision

Strong leadership is essential in implementing a whole school approach to embedding AI in Teaching and Learning. Schools that embed AI into their strategic planning and policy development create both clarity and direction. When AI is aligned with a school's vision and values, staff and students feel it has purpose and are more willing to use it. Leaders play a vital role in balancing AI with other school priorities and being able to resource its implementation in ways that genuinely enhance learning.

2. Policy Development

Clear, sustainable policies are essential for guiding AI use in schools. Policies should outline how staff and students can use AI while meeting data privacy, security, and intellectual property (IP) requirements. Some schools have developed dedicated AI policies, while others embed guidance within existing acceptable use policies seeing AI integration as another digital technology.

Whatever the approach, policies should be regularly updated and shaped by input from staff, students and families. This collaboration builds trust and ensures that the policy stays relevant and practical.

3. Communication Plan

Transparent communication is essential for building a shared understanding within the school community. Schools that clearly explain their AI strategy and involve students, staff, and families in co-designing policies and guidance, foster stronger engagement through their school implementation. A well-informed community is more likely to embrace change, so communication should be ongoing, accessible, and inclusive, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

PART 2: Building Staff Readiness

1. Professional Learning

Ongoing, professional learning is vital for building confidence and capacity. Early adoption of AI has shown that teachers need time and support to explore tools, understand their potential, and adapt their practice. This means rethinking how lessons are designed and placing greater emphasis on higher order thinking skills, areas where AI cannot easily replicate human insight.

Regular workshops, peer coaching, and collaborative professional learning opportunities help staff consolidate their learning. Some schools are embracing distributed leadership models, where digital leaders and champions guide colleagues, share expertise, and foster a culture of collaborative support and an attitude that “we are all in this together”.

2. Access and Support

Teachers need access to reliable, education-focused AI tools and the technical support to use them effectively. When teachers feel confident, supported and can see how AI can be used in their respective learning areas, they are more likely to experiment, innovate and integrate AI meaningfully into their teaching practice.

3. Redefining Teaching Roles

AI is changing what it means to be a teacher. Increasingly, teachers are working alongside AI as co-teachers, co-learners, and co-creators. As co-teachers, they use AI to design and refine assessment tasks while still providing the personal feedback only a teacher can give. As co-learners, they explore new content and strategies with AI as a partner in their professional growth. As co-creators, they collaborate with AI to develop new resources, lessons and learning experiences through a creative, iterative process.

4. AI Literacy for Staff and students

AI literacy is not just about knowing which tools to use, it is about understanding how AI works, where its limits are, and the ethical questions it brings up. Embedding AI literacy into professional learning helps teachers use AI responsibly and empowers them to guide students in doing the same.

Schools that integrate AI literacy into the curriculum alongside digital citizenship and ethical thinking, equip students with the tools they need to thrive and navigate in an AI-rich world.

PART 3: Engaging Students in Learning

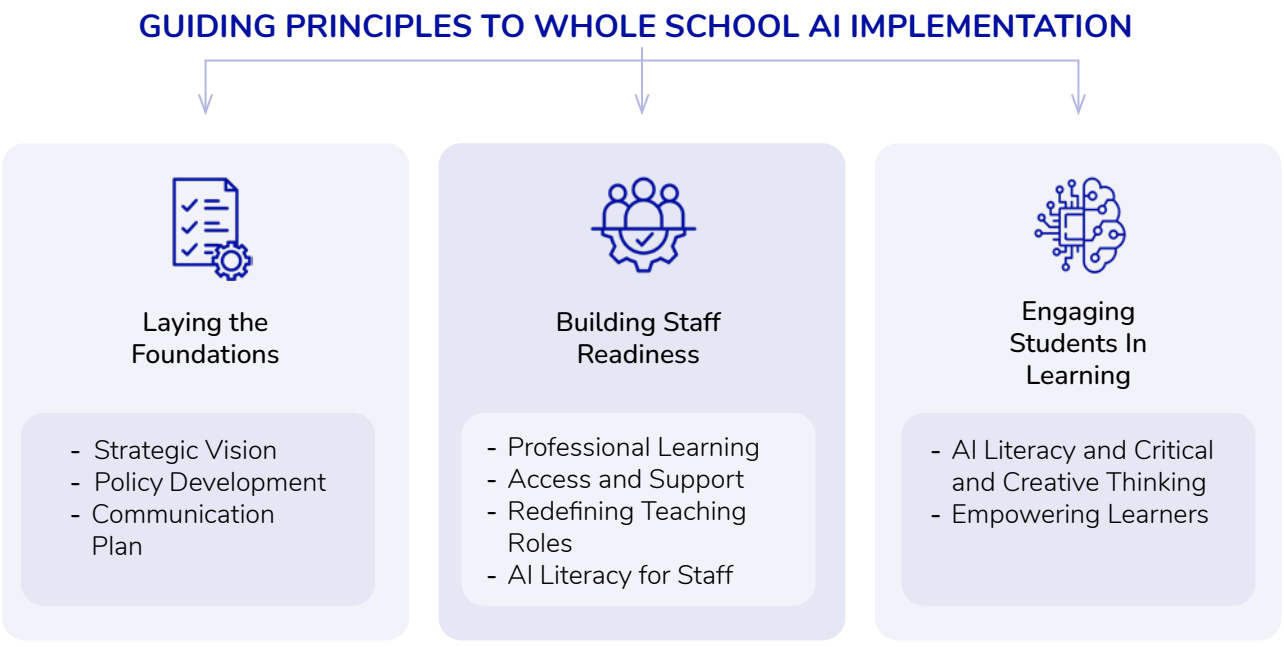
1. AI Literacy and Critical and Creative Thinking

To use AI well and with integrity, students need support. It is not just about knowing how to use the tools, but about building skills in critical and creative thinking, working together, and students taking ownership of their learning. AI should be there to enhance student thinking, not replace it. When teachers show students how to use AI thoughtfully, they help them become responsible, curious and confident users.

2. Empowering Learners

AI tools give students the freedom to learn in ways that suit them such as exploring content, expressing ideas creatively and tracking their own progress. With personalised feedback and suggestions, students can develop their learning at their own pace. Learning extends beyond the classroom. It is important that teachers value the diverse experiences, skills and knowledge students bring from outside the classroom.

By adopting a whole-school approach, schools can ensure that AI becomes an integral part of their teaching and learning culture, not merely an add-on. This involves building a shared vision, equipping staff and students to use AI appropriately and fostering a learning environment where its use is creative, thoughtful, ethical and impactful.



WHAT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS ARE DOING NOW

Using AI For Content Creation On Country: Nyangatjatjara College

Nyangatjatjara College is an Independent Anangu school located in Central Australia, serving remote communities in the south-west of the Northern Territory. The College offers secondary education across three communities: Docker River, Mutitjulu, and Imanpa and provides primary education at its Docker River campus.

With an enrolment of approximately 96 students, all of whom are Anangu, Nyangatjatjara College stands out for its unique cultural and linguistic context. Almost all students speak Pitjantjatjara as their first language, reinforcing the deep connection to community and culture that shapes the school's approach to learning. This strong cultural foundation underpins the College's clear mission: "Every child attends and learns every day, with deep community collaboration at its heart."

AI is a thoughtfully considered tool at the College and is carefully integrated into teaching and learning. The school has developed clear policies to guide the ethical and effective use of AI, with a strong focus on supporting Anangu students whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are unique. Community engagement is essential when introducing digital technologies, to ensure that it meets the needs of students and their families.

Teachers and students use AI for content creation at Nyangatjatjara College, bringing lessons to life through avatars, virtual reality, and 360-degree imagery to engage students about country and culture. Students capture 360-degree photos and videos of significant sites and cultural activities, then use these assets to build VR environments showcasing digital field trips.

For instance, students might explore virtual landscapes that reflect their own environment or use avatars inspired by traditional elders to share stories in Pitjantjatjara, deepening their connection to both language and country. Unlike conventional text-based AI, this immersive approach enables students to engage with country and culture in meaningful ways, making learning relevant and engaging. It also serves as a powerful tool for passing cultural knowledge and stories across generations.

By making students active creators of digital content, AI boosts student engagement and strengthens cultural identity. Instead of passively consuming content, students become content creators and designers of their own learning experiences.

The College has invested in professional learning for teachers, building their confidence and capability with AI tools. Upskilling staff ensures that technology is used thoughtfully and that teachers can plan and deliver lessons that are relevant, culturally responsive and engaging with their students. The school actively recruited and trained new staff to build capacity.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Dr Paul Unsworth, Principal of Nyangatjatjara College, noted that AI often lacks cultural relevance. For example, when a teacher requests a lesson on 'water', most tools default to a Western perspective, ignoring the rich local context vital for Anangu students. Language translation is another major gap, as current AI systems cannot accurately translate Pitjantjatjara. Dr Unsworth also stressed the importance of respecting Indigenous sovereignty: any data collected is the cultural property of the Anangu community and this ownership must be upheld.

Nyangatjatjara College's journey with AI has been shaped by listening to students, families, and community leaders. The vision has been to use technology including AI in ways that respect culture, language and the aspirations of Anangu young people. By embedding AI thoughtfully, the College is creating new opportunities for learning while staying true to its mission: every child, every day, learning in a way that matters.

In Adelaide, two very different Independent schools are setting a benchmark for whole-school AI integration, embedding digital technologies into every aspect of teaching and learning.

Hills Christian Community School and Scotch College have both embraced a distributed leadership model in which teachers and students are supporting professional learning and peer coaching. This collaborative approach builds buy-in and ensures long-term sustainability.

Hills Christian Community School - Connecting technology and AI with the Natural Environment

Hills Christian Community School, located in the Adelaide Hills, opened in 1983 and now educates over 700 students from Early Learning through to Year 12. The school embraces the HILLS Way of Respect, Integrity, Courage, Empathy, and Excellence and provides a safe, engaging learning environment that fosters curiosity, discovery, independence, and joy.

The College is taking a unique approach by connecting technology and AI with the natural environment. Under the leadership of Colleen O'Rourke, Leader of Digital Innovation, the school has developed the Nature, Nurture, Network curriculum, a program that blends digital technologies with outdoor, nature-based learning.

At the heart of this initiative is the Digital Innovation Centre, positioned within the school's nature play space. This hub enables immersive, interdisciplinary learning, where students engage with AI, virtual and augmented reality and sustainability through hands-on projects.

Hills Christian Community School is proactively trialling AI-driven tools and adaptive technologies to strengthen support for diverse learners, including neurodiverse students and those with complex needs. Through a research partnership with the University of South Australia, the school tracks measurable improvements in engagement, creativity, and executive functioning.

A key strategy at the school is to embed AI into teachers' passions and subject expertise. As Colleen explains, "When teachers lead with what they love, resistance fades and experimentation flourishes." By making teachers the AI experts in their own domains, the school is building confidence and momentum.

Professional learning is peer-led through 'tech talks,' coaching, and teacher spotlight showcases, which have proven more impactful than traditional training. This approach acknowledges that teachers are at different stages of readiness and comfort with AI. Embedding digital literacy and AI skills into ongoing professional learning, equips staff to adapt confidently to technological change and better support student learning.

Scotch College – Embracing AI as a Partner in Learning

Scotch College Adelaide is an Independent, co-educational day and boarding school established in 1919. Located in the inner-southern suburbs of Adelaide, the College offers a holistic education from Early Learning through Year 12 and serves over 1,000 students, including more than 100 boarders in Years 7 to 12. Guided by its vision of "empowering young people to transform their world and its future," Scotch provides extraordinary opportunities across academic, co-curricular, and wellbeing programs.

At Scotch College, Dr Nick Jackson, Leader of Digital Technologies, champions a vision where AI is seen as a partner in learning, not a replacement for teachers. His approach ensures technology enhances human connection, creativity and curiosity rather than diminishing them.

Under Nick's leadership, Scotch College has embraced a collaborative model that gives students a real voice in shaping how AI is used. Students don't just learn about AI, they co-lead professional learning sessions, mentor younger peers, and demonstrate practical ways AI tools can support learning. This hands-on involvement gives students genuine agency and builds a culture of shared responsibility for AI innovation.

To make AI integration practical and accessible, Scotch College replaces lengthy policy documents with clear, classroom-ready guidance sheets. These resources outline expectations in simple, actionable terms, helping both teachers and students confidently navigate AI use.

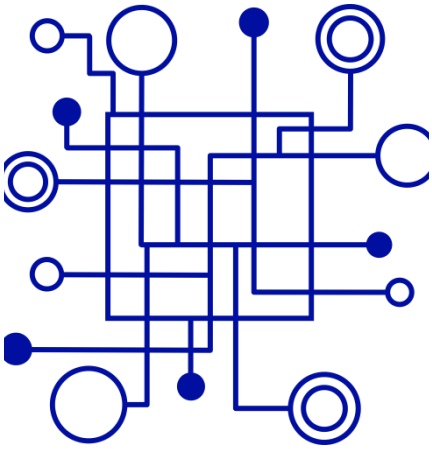
This approach reflects a broader philosophy that AI should empower people, not control them. By embedding AI into everyday teaching and learning and by involving students as active contributors, Scotch College is creating an environment where AI and human creativity work hand-in hand.

REIMAGINING ASSESSMENT

Both Scotch College and Hills Christian Community School are reimagining assessment to reflect AI's role in learning. The focus has shifted from simply checking for plagiarism to measuring cognitive engagement and authentic understanding. Instead of relying on traditional plagiarism tools, these schools use approaches that require students to defend their work, explain their thinking, and demonstrate deeper learning.

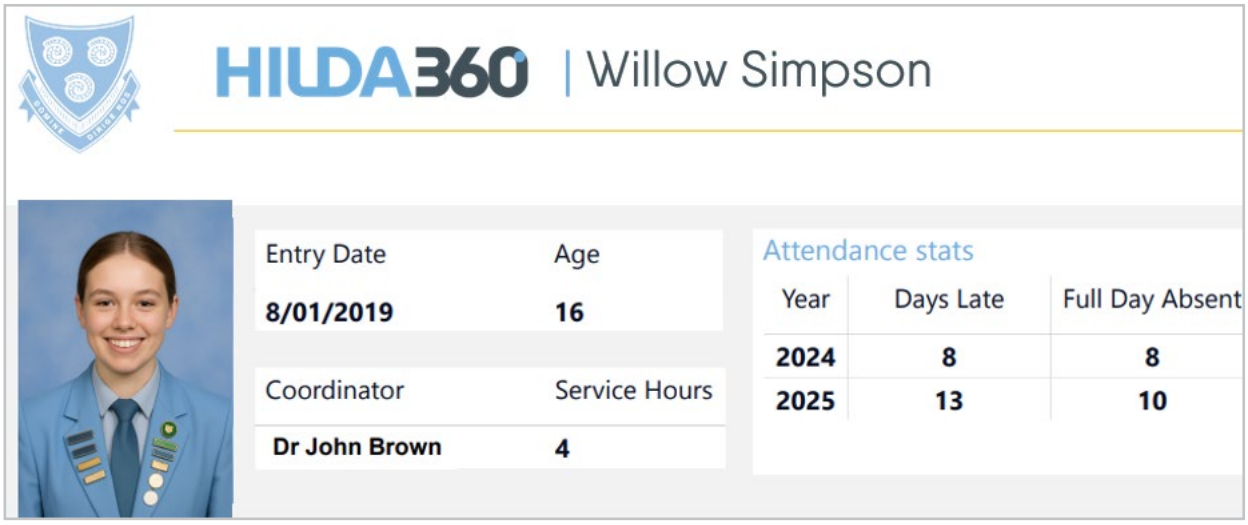
Students are encouraged to document their AI interactions, reflect on their process, and critically evaluate outputs. This builds academic integrity and helps learners develop the essential skills of analysis, judgment, and ethical decision-making. The move toward multimodal and collaborative assessments acknowledges that AI is not just a tool to be controlled, it is a learning partner that helps students think, create, and demonstrate understanding in different ways.

The biggest challenge for both schools has been shifting mindsets. Teachers have had to overcome initial resistance and continually question their own beliefs about teaching and learning in light of AI's capabilities. Early adoption of AI has required ongoing advocacy and professional learning to build confidence and capacity across the staff.



> "Change is hard, especially when it challenges deeply held beliefs about teaching, learning, and assessment. School leaders and teachers have needed to model openness, humility, and a willingness to 'unlearn' as well as learn."
>
> Dr Nick Jackson
> Leader of Digital Technologies
> Scotch College, Adelaide

Seeing the Whole Student, Supporting the Whole Student: Hilda360



Note, the student image above is AI generated for demonstration purposes

St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls is a leading Independent school in Perth, Western Australia, with a proud history spanning more than 125 years. Educating girls from Junior Kindergarten to Year 12, St Hilda's is committed to inspiring extraordinary futures.

Under the leadership of Doug Loader, Director of Information and Learning Technologies, the school has taken a significant step forward with the launch of Hilda360, an AI-enhanced student dashboard designed to bring clarity and more meaningful insights into student data.

Hilda360 is not about scores or rankings, although it does this well. It is about context.

Drawing securely from multiple school systems, Hilda360 brings together academic progress, attendance, historical report comments and the latest teacher observation information into a single, thoughtfully designed view.

Rather than teachers and leaders having to piece together information from different platforms, Hilda360 provides a clear, cohesive picture which allows educators to spend less time searching for data and more time responding to students' needs.

Importantly, the dashboard does not replace professional judgement. Instead, it supports it, surfacing patterns that might otherwise remain hidden and prompting informed, timely conversations.

Artificial Intelligence sits quietly behind Hilda360, enhancing but not directing decision making. AI is used thoughtfully to identify trends, highlight changes over time and provide intelligent summaries that help staff quickly orient themselves. For example, subtle shifts in attendance, emerging patterns in learning progress, or areas where additional support may be beneficial, can be seen earlier and more clearly, allowing time for intervention.

Teaching staff can click one of three buttons to generate AI analysis from three different perspectives: Academic, Pastoral and a Comment Bank of suggested observations. Each AI response is rich in text and visuals and differs slightly each time, allowing teachers plenty of opportunity to better understand the full picture.

Crucially, AI in Hilda360 does not make decisions about students and it does not label or automate interventions. The human relationship between teacher, student and family remains central. AI simply acts as a lens, helping educators ask better questions at the right time.

For students, the benefits are indirect but powerful. When teachers have a clearer understanding of academic progress, effort and wellbeing, conversations become more personalised, support becomes more proactive, and academic and personal successes are more readily recognised.

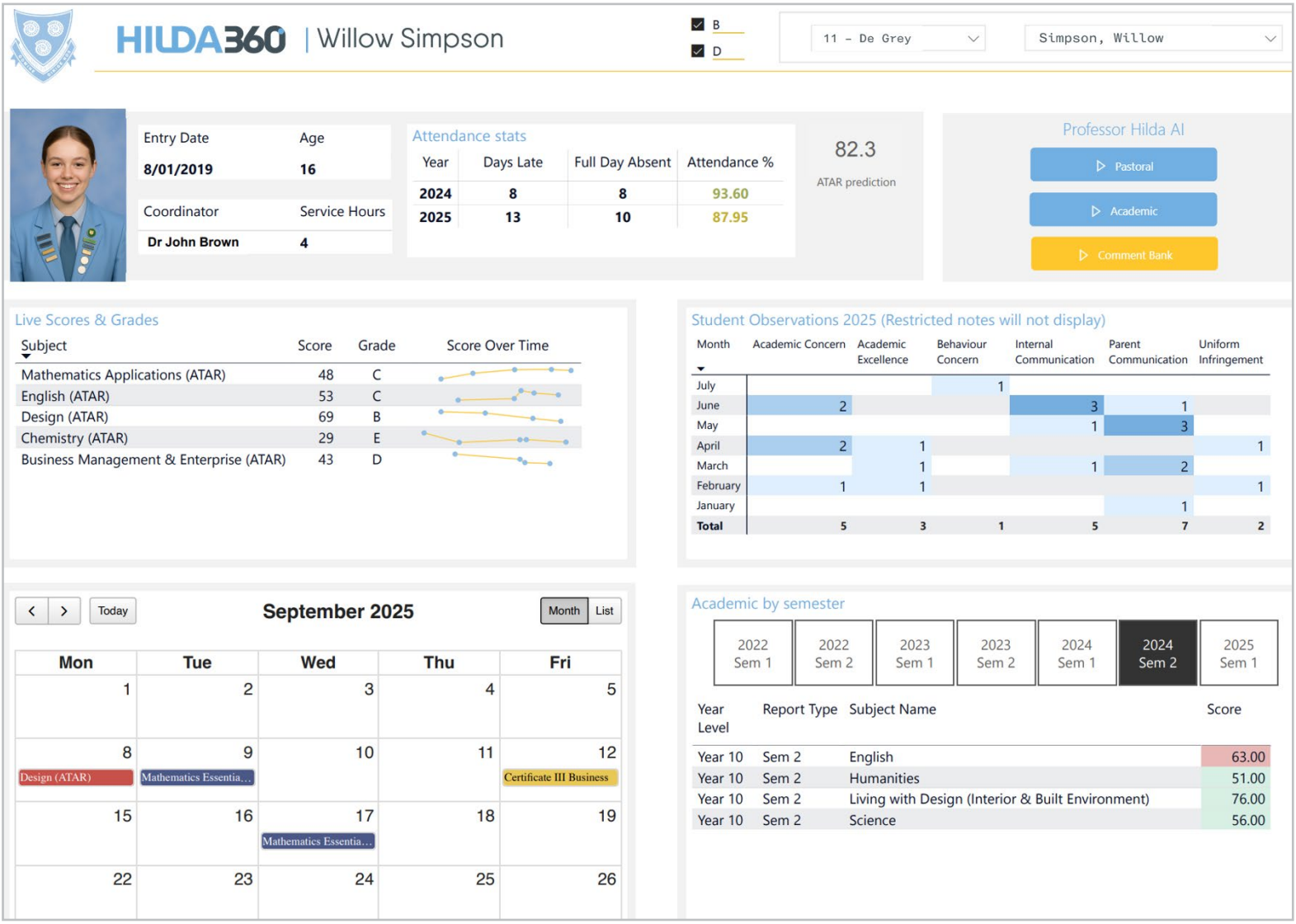
At St Hilda's, innovation is always balanced with responsibility. Hilda360 has been built within a strong data governance framework and entirely in the Microsoft ecosystem, ensuring privacy, security and ethical use of information.

The impact extends beyond efficiency. The school is experiencing a cultural shift and staff are becoming more data informed, ethically literate, and confident in navigating AI.

Future plans include extending dashboard access to students and parents, enabling real time visibility of reports and fostering stronger partnerships in student learning.

In a world where data are abundant, insight is what matters.

> "Hilda360 helps ensure that data serve our purpose to support each student to thrive and grow, because when we see the whole student, we can support the whole student."
>
> Doug Loader
> Director of Information and Learning Technologies
> St Hilda's School, WA



Making learning accessible and teaching sustainable - Horizons College of Learning and Enrichment

Horizons College of Learning and Enrichment, located in Caboolture, Queensland, is an Independent, co-educational Special Assistance School catering for students in Years 7 to 12. Established in 2014, the College provides a positive and flexible educational experience for young people who have disengaged from mainstream schooling.

With an enrolment of approximately 185 students, Horizons College is committed to delivering an exceptional student experience that motivates and inspires learners to achieve their highest potential. Guided by its vision, the College strives to create a happy and inspiring environment where every student develops intellectually, personally and socially, and is nurtured to discover their potential, passion and purpose.

The College has embraced, AI seeing it as a powerful tool to reduce barriers, personalise learning and free teachers to focus on relationships and wellbeing. Human connection remains at the heart of the process with AI simply helping to strengthen it.

The College has embraced a clear philosophy for integrating AI: it should make learning more accessible for students and teaching more sustainable for staff.

Over the past two years, the College has developed a whole-school AI strategy that reflects its 'PRIDE' values and trauma-informed practice. This strategy was shaped collaboratively by senior leadership, curriculum and wellbeing teams, with expert input from Dr Nicki Sweany of 'AI Her Way'. The AI Her Way initiative focuses on empowering organisations to adopt ethical and responsible AI strategies.

Alongside the strategy, a standalone AI policy has been created, aligned with the Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools. The policy sets clear expectations for ethical and responsible use, student safety and wellbeing, academic integrity and teacher oversight. It links closely to existing assessment and student digital citizenship policies. Both the strategy and policy will be rolled out to staff, students and families in early 2026.

Building staff confidence has been a key priority for the College, achieved through a staged approach. Initial hesitation was the biggest challenge, but once teachers experienced how AI could save time and support students effectively, enthusiasm grew quickly.

Teachers at the College are using AI tools to generate differentiated scaffolds and alternative formats for students with diverse literacy needs. Cassidy AI workflows (automated, AI-powered processes) were developed to help teachers streamline lesson planning, reduce administrative workload, and optimise classroom tasks.

These workflows support the creation of lesson materials, differentiated instruction, assessments, and data analysis, enabling teachers to redirect their time toward high-impact teaching. As a result, teachers can engage more deeply with students in meaningful ways, fostering trust, curiosity, and confidence.

Assessment practices at the College are evolving to reflect an AI-present world. Tasks increasingly require students to demonstrate the thinking behind their work through processes such as checkpoints, oral explanations, and teacher observations. Students are also expected to declare any AI support they have used.

In 2026, the College will focus on both AI-resilient assessments, which require authentic demonstrations of learning and AI-collaborative assessments, which prepare students to work effectively with AI in future workplaces. This balanced approach supports both academic integrity and future readiness.

Across subjects, students are learning to use AI responsibly as part of their digital citizenship education. They are taught to distinguish AI-generated suggestions from verified facts, identify bias and errors, to use AI as a thinking partner rather than a shortcut, and to protect their privacy and data.

When students misuse AI, such as by submitting AI-generated work, the response is educational rather than punitive: they are guided to resubmit their own thinking. Currently, students have access to speech-to-text and text-to-speech supports, accessibility tools within Microsoft and Google platforms, and teacher-guided AI brainstorming. The emphasis is on improving access and supporting learning, not replacing critical thinking.

The next major milestone is the full rollout of the College's AI strategy and policy in 2026. This will include consistent expectations across all departments, AI Champions leading ongoing staff development, redesigned assessments aligned with an AI-integrated world, and a strong focus on measuring the real learning impact for students. It marks a future the College is ready to embrace, confidently and together.

NAVIGATING THE PROMISE AND PITFALLS OF AI IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Artificial Intelligence is transforming classrooms both in Australia and across the globe, offering exciting opportunities for personalised learning and real-time feedback. While we embrace these innovations, it is vital to do so with our eyes wide open to the ethical and practical challenges that come with them.

BIAS, PRIVACY, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

AI systems are not neutral. They are trained on large internet datasets, which can embed bias, stereotypes, and gaps in representation. In Australian classrooms, this means AI may reflect narrow or Western-centric perspectives, overlooking the cultural diversity of students. Countries such as Finland and South Korea are addressing this by training teachers to audit AI tools for fairness and to embed critical AI literacy into the curriculum.

Privacy is another major concern. AI tools that personalise learning collect significant amounts of student data from academic performance to demographic details. This raises questions about informed consent and whether schools and technology providers are doing enough to protect sensitive information.

Academic integrity is a significant concern when students use generative AI tools. These tools can produce text, essays, and ideas that appear polished and original, but often lack proper attribution. Because many AI platforms do not clearly cite their sources, students may mistakenly assume the content is accurate, reliable, and their own work. Students might submit AI-generated material without realising they are breaching academic integrity standards. The absence of clear source attribution makes it difficult to distinguish between original thought and borrowed ideas.

Some Australian jurisdictions are responding proactively.

New South Wales has developed NSWEduChat, a department-owned generative AI tool hosted securely in its cloud environment. With a dedicated student mode that encourages reasoning rather than answer-giving, NSWEduChat was rolled out system-wide after successful 2024 pilots. Teachers use it for lesson planning and differentiation, while students use it for writing support, problem-solving, and exam preparation. Academic integrity remains central.

South Australia's Department for Education launched EdChat, a generative AI chatbot built with Microsoft Azure AI Content Safety and tailored for K–12 use. After initial high-school pilots, it expanded statewide in 2025.

EdChat now supports 30,000 staff across 900 schools, with strong safeguards including strict content filtering and a teacher-controlled "traffic light" system to manage student access. Early results show time savings for teachers and increased confidence for students, particularly those with language or learning barriers.

Furthermore, the South Australian Certificate of Education Board permits AI as a research tool, provided students acknowledge its use and demonstrate their own understanding, with a continued focus on task design and verification.

NSWEduChat in New South Wales and EdChat in South Australia are both currently available to government schools, with funding provided by state education departments. As AI tools become more embedded in teaching and learning, there would be clear benefit in exploring how initiatives such as these could be made available across all school sectors, supporting equity and ensuring that every child, regardless of school or sector, has access to high-quality educational resources.

CRITICAL THINKING

Emerging research indicates that while generative AI can support learning in specific contexts, it may also impede the development of independent thinking. Overreliance on AI tools has been shown to diminish students' capacity for critical thinking, creativity, and practical problem-solving, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as "cognitive atrophy". For instance, when students use AI to resolve a coding issue without understanding the underlying error, they miss valuable opportunities to deepen their learning.

Research suggests that AI can enhance higher-order thinking, but only when its use is intentional and supported by strong pedagogical guidance. Without such support, students may experience "cognitive offloading", allowing AI to perform the thinking for them rather than engaging with complex tasks themselves.

To ensure that AI supports, rather than undermines, student learning, schools must establish clear guidelines for its use. It is important to provide targeted professional development for teachers, enabling them to integrate AI in ways that promote deep learning, creativity, and collaboration. Human-centred learning, including collaborative projects and hands-on tasks, should remain central to the curriculum.

Finnish schools provide a good example of ethical AI integration, utilising AI tools such as 'Eduten' to personalise learning and offer real-time feedback, but teacher readiness is a key component of their strategy. Teachers receive training to understand how AI operates, its limitations and ethical challenges. They are equipped to audit AI systems for fairness and inclusivity, and they encourage students to use AI as a tool to enhance, rather than replace, their own critical thinking.

By adopting such best practices, schools can harness the benefits of AI while ensuring that students continue to develop the independent thinking skills essential for future success.

EQUITY AND BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Not all schools are equally positioned to benefit from AI. While some are trialling advanced tools, others particularly in rural and remote areas still struggle with unreliable internet and outdated infrastructure. Without targeted support, these gaps risk widening the educational divide rather than narrowing it.

AI tools are only as effective as the educators who use them, yet many under-resourced schools lack the funding, time, and staff capacity to implement the sustained, high-quality Professional learning (PL) needed for meaningful integration. Australia's 1,230 Independent schools are highly diverse - in their size, location, communities served and more - and this is reflected in their approach to AI integration. Some have in-house digital experts and are moving quickly, while others, especially in remote communities, are proceeding cautiously due to limited resources, infrastructure constraints, and uncertainty about safe and equitable implementation.

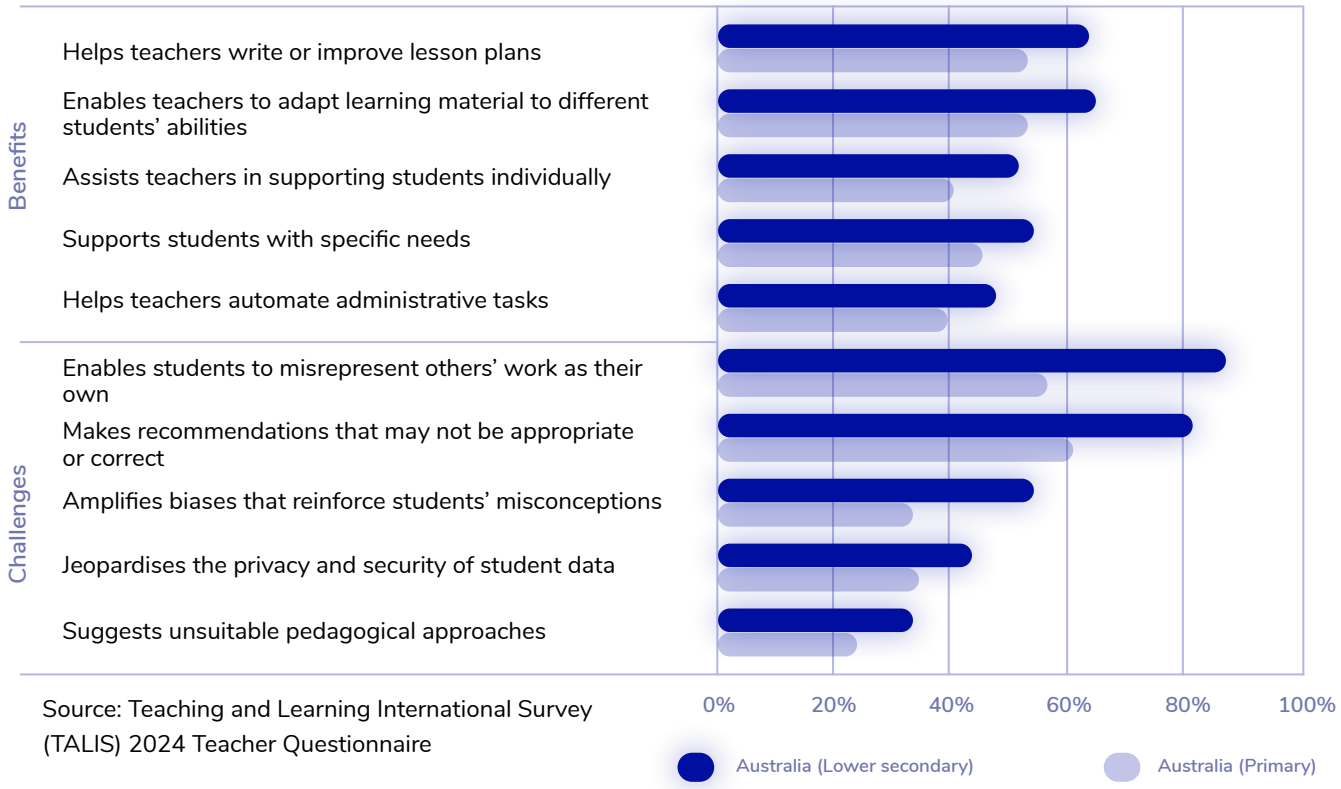
Framing AI adoption as a series of achievable, strategic steps rather than a system-wide overhaul helps secure the political and financial support needed to ensure all schools, regardless of location or sector, can participate in an AI-enabled future.

Targeted pilot programs offer a practical way forward. Small-scale trials in selected regions can test AI tools, identify infrastructure needs, and provide evidence to guide broader national strategies. Building partnerships across government, school sectors, and industry is essential.

The common characteristic of the world's most successful AI education systems is a commitment to responsible and inclusive integration. They are not just adopting technology, they are embedding ethics, critical thinking, and professional learning and teacher support at every step.

Australian teachers' views of the benefits and challenges regarding AI use in education

Percentage of teachers who "agree" or "strongly agree" that the use of AI does the following:



Source: Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2024 Teacher Questionnaire

WHAT GOVERNMENTS, THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR AND SCHOOLS CAN DO NEXT

Artificial Intelligence is transforming classrooms. These Calls to Action will ensure that whole-school AI integration in teaching and learning is ethical, equitable, and conducted with integrity.

Implementation should be tailored to each school's unique context and always grounded in clear educational objectives that enhance, rather than replace student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government: Lead, Invest, and Guide for Equity and Innovation

- Champion and fund a national pilot program, partnering with all school sectors, to test and refine practical, whole-school approaches to AI integration.
- Commit to sustainable, targeted funding for digital infrastructure and professional learning, with a strong focus on supporting regional and remote schools.
- Establish robust systems to monitor the impact of AI in schools, using evidence to guide future innovation and ensure all students benefit equitably.

The Independent School Sector: Advocate, Lead, and Share Best Practice

- Contribute as a leader to national conversations about AI in education, promoting the adoption of national frameworks and sharing evidence-based insights on effective practice.
- Advocate for targeted cross sectoral funding and pilot programs that address the digital divide, especially for remote and under-resourced schools.
- Showcase effective and innovative practices and demonstrate how they can be scaled to benefit students and teachers in all sectors.

Schools: Lead with Vision, Purpose, and Community Engagement

- Use the Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools to guide decision-making, ensuring AI strategies remain agile, transparent, and prioritise privacy and fairness.
- Regularly review and update AI policies, involving staff, students, and parents to keep pace with technological change.
- Select and implement AI tools that serve clear educational objectives and enhance student learning.
- Build networks of AI champions within the school to drive and sustain change, and prioritise peer-led, passion-driven professional learning.
- Engage parents and the broader school community through workshops and open communication about AI use and student safety.
- Uphold the highest standards of data protection by informing students about data use, offering opt-out options, and ensuring transparency at every step.

CONCLUSION

As we assess the impact GenAI is having in education, a clear story is emerging. Whole school leadership and coordinated approaches to implementation make a significant difference.

When governments and school sectors set clear national frameworks and back them with carefully designed pilots, schools feel more confident to innovate safely and equitably.

For any adoption to truly succeed, teachers must remain at the centre. With meaningful professional learning and a real voice in shaping AI tools, teachers are ensuring that technology enhances their expertise rather than sidelining it.

When AI tools reflect the language, curriculum, and context of Australian classrooms, students engage more deeply and their learning outcomes improve.

Strong public–private partnerships, combined with ongoing evaluation, give schools and sectors the platform they need to scale what works and adapt quickly as new challenges emerge.

The most inspiring examples put students in the driver's seat. When learners are empowered to use GenAI to create, collaborate and steer their own learning, with teachers offering steady guidance, the benefits are both tangible and lasting.

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