Australian Government







A DIGITAL DETOX







November 2026

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Image on page 2: The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education and students from Cabramatta Public School in New South Wales. Source: Supplied.

Image on page 20: Laptops | MLC Collections (https://mlccollections.mlc.vic.edu.au/nodes/view/53)

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Minister's foreword

When I was a kid there was a computer room at school. Now they are everywhere, and they're not always used for learning.

The evidence is mounting. The more time children spend online, the more likely they are to fall behind.

There is also evidence that AI can undermine learning. Something called cognitive stunting.

Parents and teachers are worried about the impact AI is having on critical thinking, concentration and problem-solving as well.

I'm not against technology in schools. Students still need to learn digital skills, but there is an argument to wind it back a bit. A bit of a digital detox.

Overseas, places like Los Angeles and New York are setting screen-time limits for children in primary school.

We're starting to see the same thing happen in Australia. Victoria and NSW will set screen-time limits in schools from next year, while Western Australia will pilot this.

This paper sets out the next steps.

It says that when technology is used, it should be for a purpose, including supporting student learning and wellbeing, and if it causes harm, it should be restricted.

It will build on our existing reforms, including getting mobile phones and personal devices out of schools and the social media ban for children under 16.

This is all about helping children learn when they are at school, and making sure technology is a tool that supports learning, not something that gets in the way of it.



The Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Education





The problem

Technology is changing the face of teaching and learning, as schools across Australia increasingly integrate digital devices, educational technology (edtech) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools into classroom practice.

While technology presents a range of opportunities for teaching and learning, for digital devices and AI, including Generative AI (GenAI), to provide educational benefits, school systems need to ensure its purposeful and effective use.

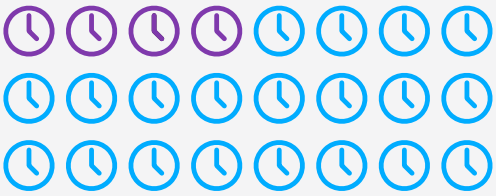
Technology must serve a clear educational purpose and be aligned with teaching and curriculum in order to strengthen rather than replace effective teaching, and support rather than distract from learning.

This increasing use of digital devices in schools has prompted public debate about the impact and effects of screen time on students, not only on immediate educational outcomes, but cumulatively on cognitive development, including self-regulation, behaviour, and developmental delay. Emerging research highlights a range of potential learning and wellbeing risks linked to the excessive use of digital technologies.

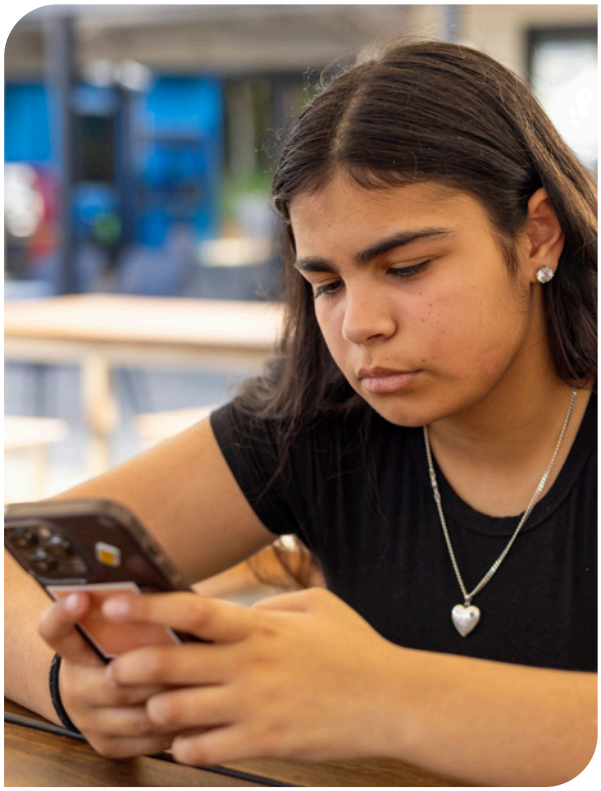


3 in 4 children

are **spending more than 2 hours a day** on screens



Teenagers aged 15–17 **average more than 4 hours of screen time each day**



Screen time and digital device use

Technology in schools can have a range of benefits for both students and teachers, including increased accessibility and providing students with the skills needed to succeed in a technology driven world. However, as outlined in this section, a growing body of research links excessive screen time with a decrease in academic results among students, as well as greater distraction in classrooms.

Australian children and young people regularly use screen-based digital devices for both leisure and learning.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported that three quarters of children aged 5 to 17 exceed the recommended maximum of 2 hours of sedentary screen time per day, with adolescents aged 15 to 17 spending more than 4 hours on screens each day.[1]

While younger generations, often known as 'digital natives', have grown up with screens, devices and online spaces, the negative impacts of high screen use on adolescents' cognitive development and socio-emotional wellbeing are well established. A 2026 study of Australian adolescents during the 2010s found that, for each additional hour of total daily screen time, adolescents showed higher levels of emotional problems, peer relationship issues, hyperactivity and conduct problems.[2]

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, '1 in 4 children meet screen time guidelines in 2023', 2026.

2 J Arnup and B Edwards, 'The impact of screen time on adolescents' academic and socioemotional development', 2026.



An umbrella review which examined data from 23 meta-analyses representing more than 2.8 million children from 64 countries found that higher screen use was associated with poorer emotional regulation, as well as higher incidences of anxiety, depression, aggression and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms.[3]

Screen time can negatively affect young people's physical wellbeing. A review of studies published between 2017 and 2025 exploring the association between screen time and health problems among children found that excessive screen use is linked with outcomes such as obesity, dry eye syndrome, hypertension and myopia.[4]

The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) has also summarised research on the impacts of increased screen time, calling out issues related to myopia, weight management, and neck and back strain. The SCHN has also noted that excessive screen use can impact children's communication skills as they can become isolated from what is happening around them, affecting their development of healthy relationships with family and friends, as well as their language and speech skills.[5]

3 E Al-Jbouri , M D Nivison, R D Neville, A Marsh, B McArthur, D Christakis, P Fearon and S Madigan, 'Screen Use and Child and Adolescent Development and Mental Health Outcomes: A Quantitative Umbrella Review', 2026.

4 M Piszka, E Kwapien, P Brasse, K Staszkiewicz, J Zerdka, K Staszkiewicz, J Bartkowski and M Kubicka, 'The Impact of Screen Time on the Health of the Pediatric Population: Short- and Long-Term Consequences for Lifestyle, Ophthalmology, and Mental Health', *Cureus* 17(11), 2025.

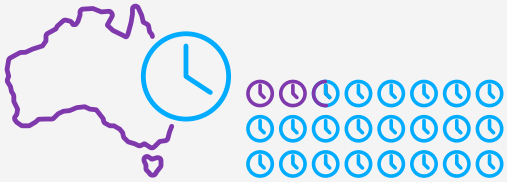
5 New South Wales Government, 'Negative health effects from excessive screen time', *The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network*, 2026.



Australian students spend

more time learning on digital devices

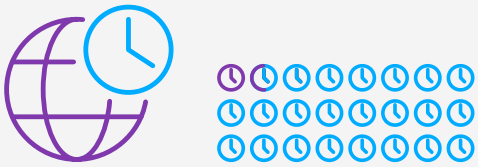
than their **OECD peers**



Australian students spend

2.6 hours per day

using **digital devices for learning activities** at school



Compared to the **OECD average** of

1.7 hours per day

Recent data shows that Australian students use digital devices frequently and extensively for learning.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 2025 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) highlights that on average, Australian students spend 2.6 hours per day using digital devices for learning activities at school, compared to the OECD average of 1.7 hours.[6] Further, 57% of Australian students report using digital devices for learning at school for more than 2 hours per day, which is substantially greater than the OECD average of 30%.[7]

OECD analysis suggests that moderate educational use of digital devices is associated with stronger academic performance than either no use or high use, but excessive use can lead to negative outcomes.[8] Analysis of 2022 PISA data showed that the positive effects of edtech on students' mathematics performance clearly reversed once the use of these resources at school surpassed 3 to 5 hours per day.[9] High levels of student leisure use of digital devices at school are also associated with poorer academic outcomes.[10] In the 2025 PISA, students who spent up to one hour per day using digital devices for leisure at school scored 72 points higher in science than students who spent between 5 and 7 hours using devices for leisure.[11]

6 OECD, 'PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Australia', *PISA*, 2026.

7 L De Bortoli and C Underwood, 'PISA 2025: A first look at student and school characteristics for Australia', *ACER*, 2026.

8 OECD, 'PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students', *PISA*, 2026, p 4, https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en.

9 L Boeskens and A Echazarra, 'Using digital resources for learning: Policy insights from PISA 2022', *OECD Education Working Papers*, 2025, No. 340.

10 OECD, 'How's life for children in the Digital Age?', 2025.

11 A Schleicher, 'PISA 2025: Insights and Interpretations', 2026.



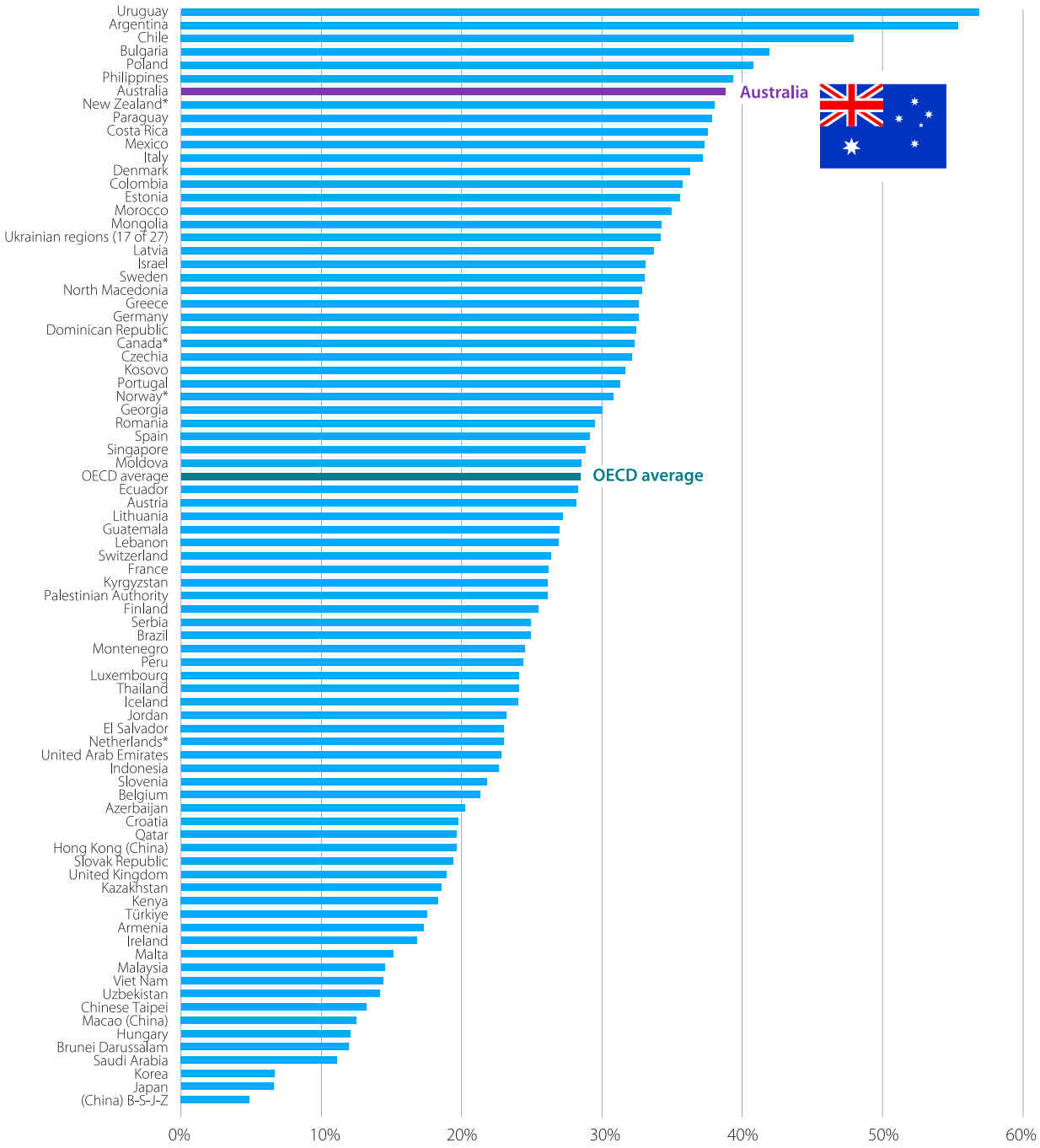
The previously mentioned study of Australian adolescents during the 2010s found that higher daily screen time was associated with lower academic achievement and greater socio-emotional difficulties. The study found negative developmental outcomes were strongest for passive screen use and social media time, while educational screen use was associated with better outcomes, particularly for writing.[12] The findings highlight the importance of considering not only total screen time, but also the type of screen activity and patterns of use.

Digital distraction is a pervasive contemporary challenge for Australian school students. The 2025 PISA found 39% of Australian students report that their peers are often distracted by the use of digital devices during most or all science lessons, which is higher than the OECD average of 28%.[13]

12 J Arnup and B Edwards, 'The impact of screen time on adolescents' academic and socioemotional development', 2026.

13 A Schleicher, 'PISA 2025: Insights and Interpretations', 2026.

Figure 1: Distraction from digital devices in science



Percentage of students who reported that students get distracted by using digital devices in most or every science lesson.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who reported that students get distracted by using digital devices in most or every science lesson.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025 Database, Table I.B1.4.43.

In 2025, the New South Wales Government supported a series of surveys which aimed to capture the perceptions of education stakeholders towards the use of screens by school students. A Macquarie University report detailing the results of the surveys found that in class, 84% of high school students and 57% of primary students reported they were distracted when using screens. Further, 83% of high school students and 50% of primary students reported being distracted while doing homework using screens.[14] The surveys also found that Year 11 and 12 students reported an estimated 85 minutes of leisure screen use at school per day, with social media, streaming and gaming among the most prominent leisure activities. The report also found that 84% of secondary students reported being distracted when using screens in class.[15]

Recent work by educational neuroscientist Dr Jared Cooney Horvath highlights the potential risks of edtech and AI on children's cognitive development and learning.

Dr Horvath argues that, despite investment in digital technology, student outcomes in areas such as literacy and numeracy have declined across many education systems, and technology can create cognitive costs that outweigh its benefits.[16]

14 M Bower, K Woo, J Lee, S Sepp, R Adlington, T Apps, L Gill, D Maher, J Smith, J Orlando, B Zunica, K Rowston, K Waters, K Beckman, A Baroutsis and W Warburton, 'Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Survey Findings', *Macquarie University*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.25949/Y9DT-3K44.

15 M Bower, K Woo, J Lee, S Sepp, R Adlington, T Apps, L Gill, D Maher, J Smith, J Orlando, B Zunica, K Rowston, K Waters, K Beckman, A Baroutsis and W Warburton, 'Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Survey Findings', *Macquarie University*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.25949/Y9DT-3K44.

16 J C Horvath, *The Digital Delusion: How Classroom Technology Harms Our Kids' Learning—And How to Help Them Thrive Again*, Cornerstone Press, 2026.



Year 11 and 12 students reported an

estimated 85 minutes of leisure screen use

at school per day

This complements previous international comparative analysis by the OECD, which found countries that had invested significantly in information and communication technology for education did not report substantial improvements in their students' reading, mathematics and science achievements.[17]

While the 2025 PISA showed that Australian students are extensively using digital devices for learning activities at school, this does not appear to be translating to improved digital literacy. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) *National Assessment Program – Information and Communication Technology Literacy (NAP-ICTL) 2025* found that ICT literacy among students had fallen further. Only 50% of Year 6 students in the assessment achieved the national ICT literacy proficiency standard, which fell from 55% in the 2022 NAP-ICTL. Among Year 10 students, only 37% achieved the proficient standard, which was the lowest proportion recorded since the NAP-ICTL assessment commenced.[18]

17 OECD, 'Students, Computers and Learning: Making the Connection', *PISA*, 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264239555-en.

18 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 'National Assessment Program ICT Literacy 2025 Public Report', 2026.

A 2021 OECD report that analysed 2018 PISA results found that although the majority of Australian students were taught to distinguish fact from opinion and assess the credibility of information, extensive use of digital technologies does not necessarily result in better digital literacy skills.[19] More recent survey results indicate that digital literacy skills remain a concern, with only 57% of school leaders agreeing that students have high levels of digital literacy.[20]

Recent research is pointing towards the cognitive benefits of using of pen and paper.

A 2024 meta-analysis considered 24 studies that analysed college students' academic achievements and whether they typed or handwrote their lecture notes. The meta-analysis found that taking and reviewing handwritten lecture notes led to higher academic achievement and was more effective for studying and committing information to memory.[21] A 2024 educational psychology study compared the brain activity of 36 university students when they were handwriting versus typing. The study found that when writing by hand, students' brain activity showed much more elaborate connectivity patterns that are critical for memory formation, encoding new information and ultimately promoting learning, further noting that children from an early age should handwrite in school to establish the connectivity patterns to support learning.[22]



19 OECD, '21st-Century Readers: Developing Literacy Skills in a Digital World', *PISA*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1787/a83d84cb-en.

20 M Bower, K Woo, J Lee, S Sepp, R Adlington, T Apps, L Gill, D Maher, J Smith, J Orlando, B Zunica, K Rowston, K Waters, K Beckman, A Baroutsis and W Warburton, 'Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Survey Findings', *Macquarie University*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.25949/Y9DT-3K44.

21 A E Flanigan, J Wheeler, T Colliot and et al., 'Typed Versus Handwritten Lecture Notes and College Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis', *Educational Psychology Review*, vol 36, no. 78, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-024-09914-w.

22 F R R van der Weel and A L H van der Meer, 'Handwriting but Not Typewriting Leads to Widespread Brain Connectivity: A High-Density EEG Study with Implications for the Classroom', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2024.

While there is a growing body of evidence showing associations between an increase in screen time to a decrease in academic results, some research indicates that digital devices can improve academic performance when used purposefully and in moderation.[23] Limited or moderate use of digital devices for learning at school can be associated with better academic outcomes. However, as noted above, excessive use and distraction is associated with poorer performance.[24] These impacts have not been evaluated against an offline alternative, nor against the comparative benefit of systems investing in physical textbooks over edtech.

A report by Professor Leslie Loble AM with Aurora Hawcroft has focused on the ways that edtech has the potential to help close enduring equity gaps in the education system and provide support to a wider range of learners. Some edtech products claim to offer tailored, adaptive and more inclusive ways of learning to students with disabilities and special educational needs. These kinds of features have the potential to benefit students who have fallen behind. Critically, this work emphasises that technologies can only deliver benefits and close equity gaps if the tools and platforms are well-designed, well-used and well-governed.[25]

Artificial Intelligence

Across Australia, schools and school systems have been exploring the potential for AI to reduce teacher workload, support personalised learning, improve access to educational resources and strengthen student outcomes. In addition to the limited initial use of standalone AI education tools, AI capabilities have also become increasingly embedded within existing digital products and services used for learning purposes.

The United States Department of Education's 2023 report, *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning*, highlights how AI has become embedded within broader edtech systems and does not only exist in standalone, dedicated AI tools.[26] For example, AI capabilities are being incorporated into a wide range of tools, systems and platforms for student information, classroom instruction, school logistics, tutoring, learning management, assessment and adaptive learning. The report emphasises that some AI capabilities in broader edtech may not be apparent to the user, and that educators need to adequately understand and interrogate how AI may be operating inside systems and applications.[27]

This means that students are using AI not only through approved edtech products in classrooms, but also through search engines, social media, and other online platforms they use every day.

23 A Cheung and R E Slavin, 2013; S Forsström et al., 'The Impact of Digital Technologies on Students' Learning: Results from a Literature Review', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 335, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, The impact of digital technologies on students' learning; OECD, 'PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students', *PISA*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en.

24 OECD, 'PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students', *PISA*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en.

25 L Loble and A Hawcroft, 'Shaping AI and Edtech to Tackle Australia's Learning Divide', 2022.

26 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Technology, 'Artificial Intelligence and Future of Teaching and Learning: Insights and Recommendations', 2026.

27 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Technology, 'Artificial Intelligence and Future of Teaching and Learning: Insights and Recommendations', 2026.



Emerging research shows that AI can have impacts on students' deeper and long-term learning and development. The 2025 PISA showed that student use of AI is widespread across OECD countries, with 46% of 15-year-old students using AI chatbots weekly or more to help them learn.[28] As GenAI becomes embedded in teaching and learning, education research is increasingly exploring how its use may be impacting students and their development.

28 A Schleicher, 'PISA 2025: Insights and Interpretations', 2026.

In the 2025 PISA, among students who use AI for general learning purposes in their schoolwork, those who use AI moderately perform better in PISA than students who use it either rarely or significantly.[29] In reference to this finding, the report said:

> "This pattern mirrors the broader finding on the relationship between performance and time spent using digital devices for learning activities at school. It also reflects the notion that digital tools can support learning when used purposefully and in moderation, whereas excessive or unguided use can lead to distraction and shallower engagement, ultimately negatively affecting learning outcomes."[30]

The 2025 PISA also found that students who use AI for specific tasks, such as summarising texts, generally score lower in science than students who do not. However, students who use AI chatbots once or twice a week for general learning perform at a similar level to non-users. Students who frequently use AI for learning and have opportunities to learn how to assess the credibility of AI-generated information tend to perform slightly better than infrequent users.[31]

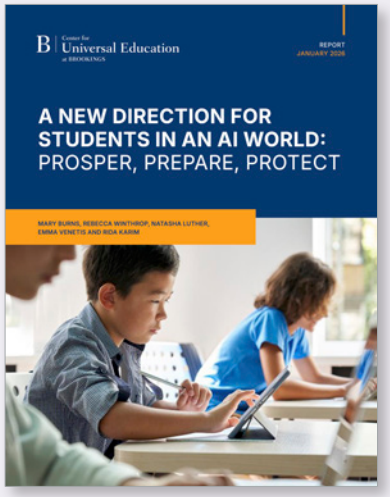
29 OECD, 'PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students', *PISA*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en.

30 OECD, 'PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students', *PISA*, 2026, p 236, https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en.

31 A Schleicher, 'PISA 2025: Insights and Interpretations', 2026.

The Great Unwiring

The Brookings Institution's 2026 report on the risks of GenAI in education concluded that at present, the risks of using GenAI in education overshadow the benefits. The report refers to a 'great unwiring' of students' cognitive capacities, with 57% of all responses (including students, parents and teachers) to Brookings' survey discussing harms relating to cognitive development. The report called out potential risks associated with students outsourcing their thinking, weakening critical learning capacities, and negatively affecting foundational learning and social and emotional wellbeing. Importantly, this work emphasised there is still potential for GenAI to bring positive effects to school education if school systems take action ranging from promoting AI literacy, preparing teachers, using AI tools that teach, not tell, and breaking the engagement addiction.[32]



A new direction for students in an AI world: Prosper, prepare, protect | Brookings

One of the key concerns related to use of GenAI is cognitive offloading and the potential effects on students' learning. An overreliance on GenAI tools can lead to cognitive offloading and a decline in knowledge and skill development. Cognitive offloading refers to the outsourcing of cognitive processes to external technologies.[33]

A 2026 report by Professor Leslie Loble AM and Professor Jason Lodge highlights this occurs when use of AI short-circuits the cognitive effort, preventing sustainable, deep learning. Cognitive offloading can be particularly detrimental for younger students who are still building their foundational knowledge and skills. In turn, AI may not enhance learning for school-age students, but instead prevent their deeper learning.[34] Professors Loble and Lodge also discuss the 'performance paradox' whereby AI use can increase a student's performance with an immediate task, however, this then diminishes the durable, long-term learning for students.[35]

> "This cognitive offloading from human to AI is especially risky for school students ('novice' learners who are building foundational knowledge and skills) when they turn to AI as a tempting substitute, not an amplifier, increase their dependency on the tool and lose access to deeper learning."[36]

32 M Burns, R Winthrop, N Luther, E Venetis, and R Karim, 'A new direction for students in an AI world: Prosper, Prepare, Protect', *The Brookings Institution*, 2026.

33 J M Lodge and L Loble, 'Artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading and implications for education', 2026.

34 J M Lodge and L Loble, 'Artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading and implications for education', 2026.

35 J M Lodge and L Loble, 'Artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading and implications for education', 2026; G Chirayath, K Premamalini and J Joseph, 'Cognitive Offloading or Cognitive Overload? How AI Alters the Mental Architecture of Coping', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2025.

36 J M Lodge and L Loble, 'Artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading and implications for education', 2026.

Dr Horvath also discusses how AI is used by students to skip thinking processes and does not enable effective learning. He notes that AI is a tool for offloading thinking, and that by offering answers, AI can prevent intellectual growth.[37]

The Australian Education Research Organisation's (AERO) 'AI in schools explainer' also highlights that developing strong content knowledge, metacognitive strategies and self-regulated learning techniques are also critical to support students to use AI effectively and safely.[38]

New research analysing results of Chinese students in Years 7 to 12 has helped to reveal the impacts of AI use on student learning. Thirty months of data on more than 26,000 students in China showed that while AI use improved homework scores by 18% and improved completion times by 30%, it lowered monthly exam scores by 20% within 6 months. The study highlighted that AI users were engaging in 'homework outsourcing', where they completed their homework quickly and received high scores, however, their longer-term retention and learning were clearly negatively affected.[39]

Students themselves also believe that AI is having an impact on their cognitive development.

Findings from RAND's American Youth Panel show 67% of students endorsed the statement: 'the more students use AI for their school work, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills'. This has increased more than 10 percentage points from 10 months earlier.[40]

AI is also having a significant impact on Australian children's lives outside the classroom. Research from the eSafety Commissioner shows AI assistants are now mainstream among Australian children, with 78% of 10- to 17-year-old children reporting they have used an AI assistant. The report also found that 1 in 5 children who had used an AI assistant or companion had experienced potentially inappropriate or harmful interactions with these tools. Further, 1 in 3 children who had used an AI assistant or companion had shared personal data or potentially sensitive information.[41]

While emerging research is beginning to reveal the potential effects of AI use on student learning, the current evidence base has a number of limitations. Much of the research currently available is short-term, conducted outside of Australian contexts and focuses on student engagement and perceptions, rather than measures of learning. Further, there is very limited research exploring the impacts of student learning within primary school settings.[42]

37 J C Horvath, *The Digital Delusion: How Classroom Technology Harms Our Kids' Learning—And How to Help Them Thrive Again*, Cornerstone Press, 2026.

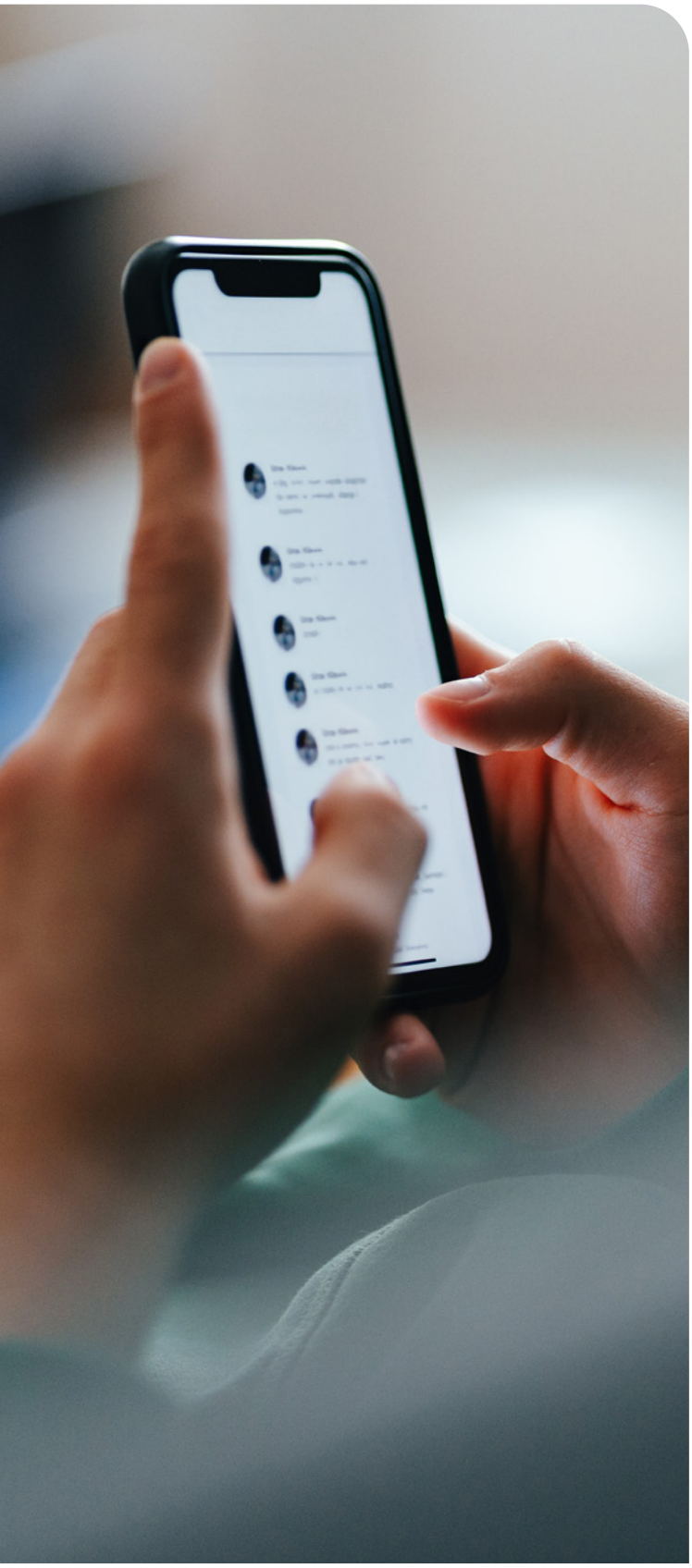
38 Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), 'AI in schools: Considerations for policymakers', 2026.

39 D Stromberg, V Lei and Y Wu, 'The Generative AI Learning Penalty: Evidence from Chinese Secondary Education', 2026.

40 H Schwartz and M Diliberti, 'More Students Use AI for Homework, and More Believe It Harms Critical Thinking: Selected Findings from the American Youth Panel', RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 2026.

41 eSafety Commissioner, 'Talking to machines: Children's experiences with AI assistants and companions', Australian Government, 2026.

42 Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), 'AI in schools: Considerations for policymakers', 2026.



Social media

Digital technology, particularly social media, has also radically altered Australian students' experience of childhood and adolescence, including the socially and individually formative experience of going to school. This has been to the detriment of too many Australian young people.

A 2025 report from the eSafety Commissioner found that 96% of children aged 10 to 15 had used at least one social media platform. Of this cohort, 7 in 10 children reported encountering content associated with harm online, such as misogynistic or hateful material, dangerous online challenges, violent fight videos, and content promoting unhealthy eating and self-harm.

More than half of children in this age group reported experiencing cyberbullying, 24% had experienced sexual harassment and 8% had experienced image-based abuse.[43]

43 eSafety Commissioner, 'Digital use and risk: Online platform engagement among children aged 10 to 15', Australian Government, 2025.

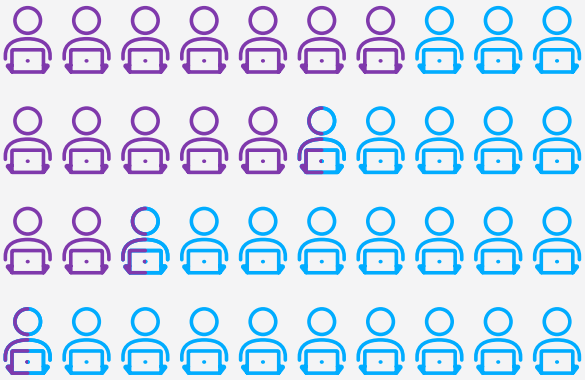
Online safety experiences

of children aged 10–15

Social media use:

96% of children aged 10–15 had used **at least one** social media platform

Reported experiences among children in this age group:



7 in 10 social media users encountered **content associated with harm**

More than half experienced **cyberbullying**

24% experienced **sexual harassment**

8% experienced **image-based abuse**

Source: eSafety Commissioner, 2025. Methodology report updated April 2026.

A decade-long study led by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute shows that young people in Australia who spend at least 2 hours a day on social media had a higher risk of experiencing depressive symptoms and poorer wellbeing, with the strongest effects in early adolescence (aged 12–13).[44]

In addition to poorer mental health outcomes resulting from social media engagement, younger generations are exposed to a range of other emerging risks in online spaces. This includes being increasingly susceptible to radicalisation online and the development of concerning attitudes towards violent extremism[45] and women, with these attitudes being reflected in classroom behaviour.[46]

44 V Nandita, S Dashti, L Canterford, S Ellul, A Parissi, A Goddings, R Viner, P Moran, R Borschmann, L Mundy, E Robson and S Sawyer, 'The Effects of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health: Findings From a Population-Based Cohort Study in Australia', The Medical Journal of Australia, 2026, 224(6), https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.70220.

45 Australian Government, 'A safer Australia. Australia's Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy 2025', 2025.

46 S Meger, 'Misogyny, Online Radicalisation, and Youth Extremism in Australia', *The University of Melbourne*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.26188/33250176.

Teacher and school leader perspectives on digital technologies

Teachers' perspectives

A number of recent reports offer Australian teachers' insights on the impacts of young people's use of digital technologies and social media.

In a 2026 survey of Australian teachers conducted by Monash University, 78% of respondents reported observing or experiencing gendered violence in their schools and 95% of teachers believed that at least some of their students access manosphere content.

Teachers in the survey consistently and explicitly linked shifts in their students' gendered behaviours to exposure to online misogyny and manosphere content, with the survey report noting that these digital influences are entering school environments. The survey found that gendered violence has led 1 in 3 teachers to occasionally consider leaving teaching, reported by women significantly more than men.[47]

As established in the preceding section, use of social media is linked with poorer mental health among young people. These outcomes are being observed in Australian schools and are placing additional pressures on educators. Teachers have cited mental health issues as the leading issue impacting children and young people. Beyond Blue's 2026 Mental Health in Education Survey found 53% of educators do not agree or are unsure if children and young people in their care are mentally healthy. The survey also found that 9 in 10 educators agreed that supporting the mental health and wellbeing of learners is part of their job.[48] A 2024 report released by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) found that more than 70% of educators surveyed were concerned about their students' experience of a death, suicide or self-harming. As outlined in the report, one of the major workload pressures facing Australian teachers is the ongoing challenge of addressing student mental health needs, with complex student needs and a lack of teacher support contributing to high rates of teacher attrition.[49]

Regarding the impact of digital technologies on student learning, in the series of New South Wales surveys, 82% of teachers agreed that digital devices are important for fostering students' digital literacy skills.

47 S Wescott, S Roberts, W Bingley, J Greig, M Failla, N McMillan, N Pfitzner and S Hamlett, 'Duty of Care: Teachers' experiences of sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment in Australian schools', 2026, https://doi.org/10.26180/32942816.

48 Be You and Beyond Blue, 'State of Mental Health in Education 2026', 2026.

49 A Dabrowski, M Hsien, T V D Zant, S K Ahmed, A Berry, M Conway and Y Nietschke, 'Improving Educator Readiness to Support Student Mental Health', *Australian Council for Education Research (ACER)* 2024.

However, only 53% agreed that digital devices support students to learn more effectively and 52% agreed that the benefits of technology use in classrooms outweigh the disadvantages.[50]

Principals' perspectives

In 2025, the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) published a position paper on digital devices in primary schools, which calls for 'the meaningful and sustainable integration of technology in primary schools and a thoughtful, balanced approach to device use'. APPA's paper acknowledges the important role of digital technology in education and emphasises that its effectiveness depends on teachers and students being supported to navigate the digital landscape, clear policies and a commitment to digital literacy.

APPA considers aspects such as teacher professional development and training, device quality, learning design, targeted support to improve student digital literacy, and parent education as critical to the success of technology in schools.[51]



Regarding screen time, APPA supports clear messaging to promote a balanced approach and believes schools should ensure that device use promotes meaningful learning and is not driven by trends. Students should also have opportunities for physical activity, social engagement and the pursuit of personal interests.[52]

50 M Bower, K Woo, J Lee, S Sepp, R Adlington, T Apps, L Gill, D Maher, J Smith, J Orlando, B Zunica, K Rowston, K Waters, K Beckman, A Baroutsis and W Warburton, 'Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Survey Findings', *Macquarie University*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.25949/Y9DT-3K44.

51 Australian Primary Principals Association, Devices in Primary Schools, 2025.

52 Australian Primary Principals Association, Devices in Primary Schools, 2025.



The backstory: digital technology use in Australian schools (1970s–2026)

Australian schools have used digital technologies to support teaching and learning for several decades, with adoption of these technologies increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic and following the introduction of GenAI.

The introduction of computers in Australian classrooms

In the early 1970s, a small number of computers were used in Australian schools, primarily used by mathematics departments for teaching algorithm design and programming.[53]

The late 1970s saw significant growth in the use of computers in Australian schools with the arrival of the Apple II personal computer, which was more affordable.[54] South Australia and Tasmania were early leaders in educational computing, establishing shared computing services and state-wide networks for schools.[55]

53 A Tatnall and B Davey, 'History of the Use of Computers and Information Technology in Education in Universities and Schools in Victoria', *ICT and Society*, Springer, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-44208-1_18.

54 A Tatnall and B Davey, 'History of the Use of Computers and Information Technology in Education in Universities and Schools in Victoria', *ICT and Society*, Springer, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-44208-1_18.

55 A Tatnall, 'The Australian Educational Computer that Never Was', *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, 2013, Vol 35, no.1, pp 35–47.

By the end of the 1970s, several streams of computer education had emerged in Victorian schools, including Computer Science, programming in mathematics, word processing and the use of computers across different areas of the curriculum.[56]

Computer use remained limited in the early 1980s. Microcomputers had only recently begun to appear in Australian schools, and the limited availability of suitable educational software restricted their classroom uses, with early machines used largely for activities such as programming.[57]

In 1983, the Australian Government established the National Advisory Committee on Computers in Schools and provided $18.7 million to support the committee's recommendations on curriculum development, professional development and support services.[58]

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, computers became increasingly common in Australian schools and were gradually introduced into a wider range of curriculum areas.[59] Personal access, however, remained uncommon. The introduction of 1:1 laptop classes at Methodist Ladies' College in Melbourne in 1989 was regarded as a world first, and this model was not adopted on a larger scale in Australian schools until much later.[60]



In the 1990s, computing curriculum continued to grow with the introduction of 3 new computing subjects in schools. By the mid-1990s, Australian educators were exploring the use of the internet in schools, including access to online information and resources and opportunities for collaborative and exploratory-based learning.[61]

56 A Tatnall and B Davey, 'History of the Use of Computers and Information Technology in Education in Universities and Schools in Victoria', *ICT and Society*, Springer, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-44208-1_18.

57 A Tatnall and R Leonard, 'Purpose-Built Educational Computers in the 1980s: The Australian Experience', *History of Computing: Learning from the Past,* Springer, 2010, pp 101–111.

58 A Tatnall and B Davey, 'History of the Use of Computers and Information Technology in Education in Universities and Schools in Victoria', *ICT and Society*, Springer, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-44208-1_18.

59 A Tatnall and B Davey, 'History of the Use of Computers and Information Technology in Education in Universities and Schools in Victoria', *ICT and Society*, Springer, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-44208-1_18.

60 A Fluck, 'Laptop Classes in Some Australian Government Primary Schools', *Australian Educational Computing*, 2011, vol 26, no 1, pp 10–15.

61 J Mason and A Fisher, 'Origins and Development of Computer Literacy for the 90s: An Inservice for Teachers', paper presented at ASCILITE 1995, University of Melbourne, 1, 3.

Accelerated integration and investment in digital technologies

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, computers became increasingly integrated into everyday classroom learning. This was accelerated in Australia by the $2.4 billion Digital Education Revolution (DER) Program launched in 2008. This program included a $1.4 billion National Secondary Schools Computer Fund that installed more than 900,000 computers for students in Years 9 to 12.[62] The DER Program also delivered digital learning resources, online diagnostic tools and professional development for teachers to support the Australian Curriculum.[63]

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the use of digital technologies in schools, prompting a rapid shift to remote and online learning across Australian schools to ensure continuity of learning during lockdowns and periods of social distancing. Before the pandemic, remote and online learning was used in limited circumstances, such as secondary school provision in rural and remote areas.[64] However, fully remote and online education was generally used for particular purposes and student groups, rather than as the standard mode of schooling.[65]

Data collected before the pandemic suggested that many education systems were still developing teachers' preparedness to use digital technologies effectively for instruction and identified ongoing needs for ICT training and infrastructure.[66]

By contrast, during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools had to use digital technology as the primary mechanism for delivery of education with 91% of schools adopting digital tools and resources to enable continued teaching and learning.[67]

AERO undertook a review of remote and online learning in Australia during the COVID-19 period and found that school systems did not have sufficient time to transition to and scale up their existing distance education materials for more extensive use. Further, schools' ability to transition to remote learning varied greatly across systems and jurisdictions, highlighting digital access gaps and teachers' varying levels of digital capability. AERO's review also identified that during the pandemic, more than 140 different technological tools were used across Australian and New Zealand schools; however, there is limited evidence demonstrating which tools actually enhanced learning outcomes.[68]

While the edtech sector was already in a growth phase before COVID-19, the pandemic further accelerated that growth and reliance,[69] and many digital technologies have remained embedded in classroom practice even after a return to normal schooling.

62 Australian Government, 'Beyond the Classroom: A New Digital Education for Young Australians in the 21st Century', Digital Education Advisory Group Final Report, 2013.

63 S Alexander, D Barnett, S Mann, A Mackay, M Selinger and G Whitby, 'Beyond the classroom: a new digital education for young Australians in the 21st century', Digital Education Advisory Group, 2013.

64 A Wade, A Walstab, E Doecke and M Tham, 'Review of remote and online learning experiences during COVID-19 – Final report', 2022.

65 M Taylor, A Fudge, N Mirriahi and M de Laat, 'Use of Digital Technology in Education: literature review', South Australian Department for Education, 2021.

66 OECD, 'Teachers Getting the Best out of Their Students: From Primary to Upper Secondary Education', TALIS, *OECD Publishing,* 2021.

67 Data#3 and Aruba, 'The impact of COVID-19 on ICT within Australian Schools', 2020.

68 Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), 'Review of remote and online learning experiences during COVID-19', 2022.

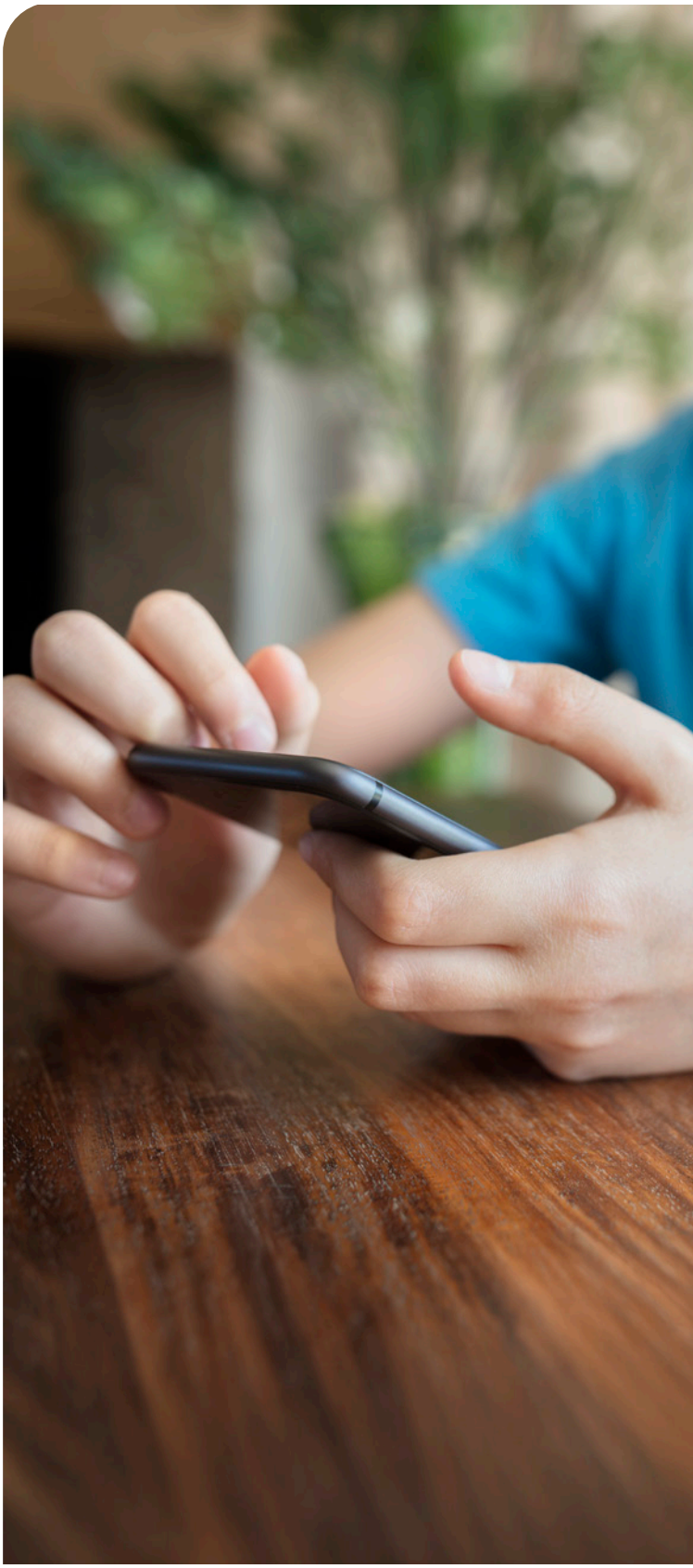
69 A Bunn, 'Educational Technology (edtech) in Australian Schools', UNSW Law Journal, 2025, 48(3).

The recent emergence of GenAI

The emergence of GenAI tools marks a new development in the digital transformation in schools, with GenAI tools being trialled, in order to reduce teacher workload and support more personalised learning.

Australian schools have been engaging in a range of initiatives to support the adoption of GenAI in schools, including South Australia's EdChat[70], NSWEduChat, Queensland's Corella[71], Western Australia's ClassmAIte[72], and Catholic Schools' Cechat.[73]

The fast-moving pace of technological change means that efforts to capture the potential benefits and address the risks of AI in Australian schools must continually evolve and adapt. In implementing AI tools in schools, there is a need for governments to consider new and emerging issues, including assessments in the age of AI, building AI literacy, and how to best prepare students for an AI-driven world. These changes are also occurring across the broader education system, including in higher education.



70 Department for Education South Australia, EdChat – the department's generative AI chatbot, Department for Education South Australia website, 2026.

71 Queensland Government, Generative artificial intelligence (AI) in Queensland state schools, Queensland Government Education website, 2026.

72 R Cook, The Premier, Minister for Defence Industries; Tourism, Trade and Investment and S Winton, Minister for Education; Early Childhood; Wheatbelt , $4.6 million for AI platform designed to reduce teacher's workloads, [media release], Western Australian Government, 9 May 2026.

73 Catholic Education Network, cechat – CEnet, n.d.



Digital detox: first steps

Australian Government actions to protect young people from the risks of digital technologies

As digital technologies have increasingly become embedded in the way we live, work and learn, the Australian Government has been taking world leading action to reduce the harms of technology and social media to young people.

Australian Government actions to protect young people from online harms

From 10 December 2025, age-restricted social media platforms were legally required to take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under the age of 16 from creating or keeping an account. This follows amendments to the *Online Safety Act 2021* in November 2024.[74]

On 15 October 2026, the Australian Government introduced its Digital Duty of Care reforms to Parliament.

74 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, Social media minimum age, n.d.

The reforms would impose a positive obligation on digital services to provide a safe online environment where Australians are protected from seriously harmful content and children are protected from content and features that are harmful to them. Online services such as games, apps and AI chatbots will be required to consider whether the design features that underpin their products and services (such as their recommender systems or AI chatbots) could expose children to harm. In addition, the draft laws would introduce a compressed 24-hour compliance window for cyberbullying and cyber-abuse removal notices.[75]

The Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing has published guidance for healthy growth and development for children and young people aged 5 to 17 years old and recommends limiting sedentary recreational screen time to 2 hours per day (excluding screen-based activities for educational uses).[76]

Australian Government actions to manage the risks of AI

In December 2025, the Australian Government released a National AI Plan, outlining the government's direction on AI and three goals to: capture the opportunity, spread the benefits, and keep Australian safe. The National AI Plan highlights the role of the education sector in equipping learners with the skills they need to participate in an AI-driven workforce and ensuring a strong pipeline of AI-ready school leavers.[77]

The eSafety Commissioner has consistently released advice and guidance on AI-related risks, including more recently the potential harms of deepfakes in schools, the effects of anthropomorphic chatbots or AI companions on children, and a deep dive into why children are turning to AI.

On 15 July 2026, the Office of AI was established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The office is coordinating across Australian Government agencies to design and legislate the new Australia AI standard and unlock AI training in Australia.[78]

On 20 August 2026, the Joint Select Committee on AI was appointed by resolution of the House of Representatives and resolution of the Senate. The committee will inquire into opportunities, risks and implications presented by AI across the Australian economy and society broadly, including the workforce and skills implications of AI and the adequacy of Australia's education system. The committee is expected to report on the inquiry by 30 November 2026.[79]

75 Explanatory Memorandum, Online Safety Amendment (Digital Duty of Care) Bill 2026 (Cth).

76 Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Recommendations for children and young people (5 to 17 years), 2026.

77 Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources, National AI Plan, 2025.

78 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of AI, n.d.

79 Parliament of Australia, Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence, 2026.



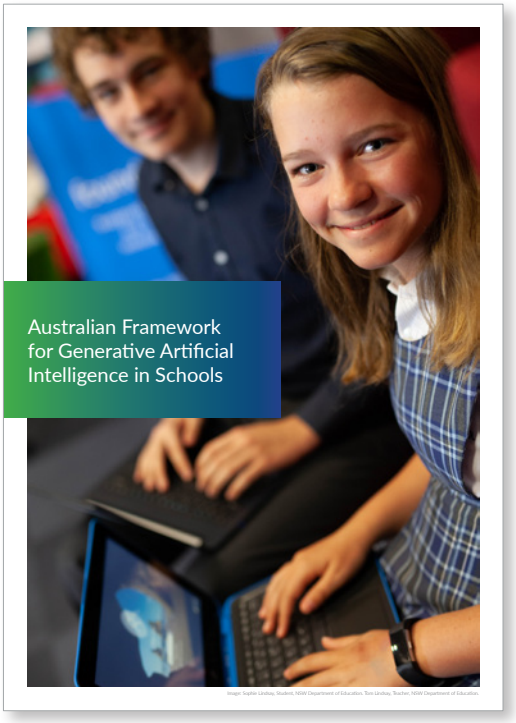
National education efforts to manage digital technologies in classrooms

Education Ministers have been working together to manage the safe and effective integration of digital technologies into the Australian school system.

In 2020, the Safer Technologies 4 Schools (ST4S) assurance framework was established to enhance the security, privacy, interoperability and online safety of digital products used in schools. ST4S is administered by Education Services Australia (ESA) on behalf of state and territory governments and the Catholic and independent school sectors, and the New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Banning mobile phones in schools

In July 2023, Education Ministers made a national commitment to ban, restrict or manage the use of mobile phones and other personal electronic devices by students for personal use in government schools. As at Term 1 2024, all jurisdictions have implemented policies restricting or banning the use of mobile phones and other personal devices in government schools (with exemptions for approved reasons).



Australian Framework for Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Schools - Department of Education, Australian Government

In February 2023, Education Ministers agreed that responding to the risks and harnessing the opportunities arising from GenAI technologies is a national education priority and established the National AI in Schools Taskforce (the Taskforce) to develop the *Australian Framework for Generative Artificial Intelligence in Schools* (the Framework).

The Framework was released in late 2023 for implementation by jurisdictions and was subsequently reviewed in 2024 by the Taskforce. In June 2025, Education Ministers endorsed the Taskforce's review.

In late 2023, Education Ministers agreed for ESA to begin developing product standards for GenAI technologies in schools based on 3 work streams: privacy and information security, human rights and wellbeing, and educational impact.

As part of this work, ESA has established a Responsible AI (RAI) Standard which will investigate AI-enabled digital products and services used by Australian schools, to make sure they comply with ethical principles. AERO has also been working with ESA to develop standards for educational impact and design to ensure digital tools, including AI-enabled applications, are aligned with evidence-based teaching practices, educationally effective and safe for use in schools. The RAI Standard and educational impact and design standards are being piloted throughout 2026.



The *Anti-Bullying Rapid Review*, which was released on 18 October 2025, examined what is working to prevent and respond to bullying in Australian schools and what needs strengthening, including action on technologies that facilitate online harms. In response to the review, Education Ministers committed to implement a number of activities related to technology and online harms including targeted public awareness campaign (LetsStopBullying.gov.au), which aims to build community understanding of bullying and other harmful behaviours and their impacts, including cyberbullying and image-based abuse. Additionally, the *National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools* now expects schools to make reasonable efforts to initiate a response to any observed or reported bullying within 2 school days of becoming aware of an incident.

At the July 2026 Education Ministers Meeting (EMM), Ministers requested Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) provide advice on the efficacy of conducting the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) writing test with pen and paper given the emerging evidence on the impact of screens and devices on cognitive development.

State and territory actions on digital technologies in classrooms

In schools across Australia, a number of actions have been taken that are delivering real change. States, territories and schooling authorities have been taking steps to protect students from the potential impacts of digital technologies and support their learning and development.

State and territory actions to manage the use of mobile phones

Following Education Ministers' national commitment regarding the use of mobile phones in 2023, all jurisdictions implemented policies restricting or banning the use of mobile phones and other personal devices in government schools by Term 1, 2024 (with exemptions for approved reasons including health monitoring, medical, learning, disability or wellbeing reasons).

Data indicates the mobile phone ban has removed distraction, improved students' focus, behaviour and learning, reduced social isolation, and reduced critical incidents involving social media including cyberbullying.

In a New South Wales survey, principals' responses indicate that 87% of students are less distracted in the classroom and 81% of students have seen improved learning.[80] In South Australia, there has been a 63% decline in critical incidents involving social media and 54% fewer behavioural issues.[81]

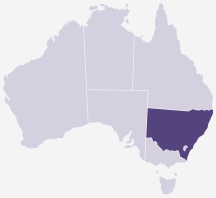
The South Australian Government is also investing $6.5 million to roll out the Wait Mate program in every public and private school in the state, which will support parents and school communities to delay the introduction of smartphones for their kids.[82] As part of the rollout, presentations will be delivered for parents at every primary school in 2026 and 2027 and every high school in 2027 and 2028, which will focus on the effects of early smartphone use.

80 New South Wales Government, Mobile ban improves learning, concentration and socialisation, [media release], 21 October 2024.

81 South Australia Government, School phone ban hailed a success, [media release], 5 August 2024.

82 Wait Mate Foundation, Wait Mate, 2026.

Student behaviour is changing after banning mobile phones in schools



New South Wales

Survey responses

87%
of students are **less distracted** in the classroom

81%
of students have seen **improved learning**



South Australia

Reported reductions

63%
decline in critical incidents involving social media

54%
fewer behavioural issues



State and territory actions to manage the use of digital devices

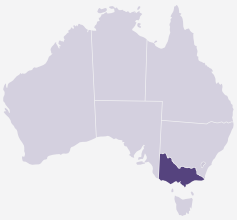
From the start of 2027, Victoria will be the first Australian jurisdiction to limit digital devices to 90 minutes per day for Years 3 to 6 and minimal use in Prep to Year 2. The Victorian Government has announced that from 2027, all state secondary schools will be required to include device-free learning time in their teaching and learning programs, while primary schools are expected to limit student use of digital devices and tools.[83]

83 Victorian Department of Education, Digital Learning: Policy, 2026.

New South Wales has also recently released new guidelines on screen use in public schools and public preschools, based on the overarching principle that screens should only be used when they are better for learning than the alternative. This includes time limits on individual devices such as laptops, desktop computers and tablets. This includes no individual student device use in public pre-schools, up to 15 minutes a day for Kindergarten to Year 2, increasing to 45 minutes per day for students in Years 5 and 6 and up to 50% of lesson time per subject for Years 11 and 12. These guidelines are recommended for adoption from 2027 and will be mandatory from 2028.[84]

In addition to daily screen-use limits in New South Wales, schools will also recommend limiting screen time for homework to help reduce overall screen use at home, with the use of digital devices for homework not recommended before Year 5. New guidelines will also recommend a minimum of one hour a day of learning using pen and paper.[85]

On 12 October 2026, the Western Australian Government announced a pilot to ban unnecessary screen use for Western Australia's youngest students. Ten public schools will take part in the 6-month screen use pilot for Kindergarten to Year 2 students, trialling a back-to-basics approach to students' use of digital devices in the classroom.[86]



Screen use limits: Victoria

From the start of 2027



Prep – Year 2

Minimal digital device use



Years 3–6

90-minute digial-device limit



State secondary schools

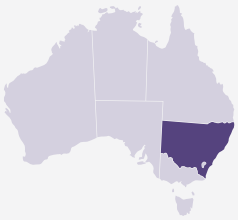
Required device-free learning time

Primary schools are expected to limit digital devices and tools

84 Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, *Screentime limits in all public schools to lift our game in the classroom*, [media release], New South Wales Government, 13 September 2026.

85 Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, *Screentime limits in all public schools to lift our game in the classroom*, [media release], New South Wales Government, 13 September 2026.

86 R Cook, The Premier, Minister for Defence Industries; Tourism, Trade and Investment and S Winton, Minister for Education; Early Childhood; Wheatbelt, *New pilot to ban screen use in early years classrooms*, [media release], WA Government, 12 October 2026.



Screen use limits: New South Wales

Recommended from 2027
Mandatory from 2028

Individual student devices

Public preschools
No individual student device use

Kindergarten – Year 2
Up to 15 minutes per day

Years 3–4
Up to 30 minutes per day

Years 5–6
Up to 45 minutes per day

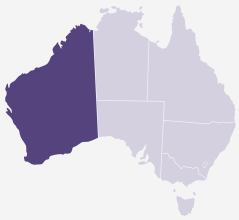
Years 11–12
Up to 50% of lesson time per subject

Additional recommendations

Digital-device homework not recommended before Year 5

At least 1 hour per day learning with **pen and paper**

Use screens only when better for learning than the alternative



Trial screen use limits: Western Australia

6-month pilot
From the start of 2027

10 public schools
Kindergarten to Year 2

Ban on unneccessary screen use

Applies to **individual** and **shared** student screens

Permitted device use

Specific **digital technologies curriculum skills**

Year 2 **NAPLAN preparation**

Excluded from restrictions

Classroom **smartboards** and **interactive whiteboards**

Technology supporting **access to learning**, including **assistive technology** and **distance education**

Pilot findings will inform a statewide approach across all year levels

State and territory actions to manage the risks of AI

On 1 September 2026, the New South Wales Government also announced new rules for schools on AI in take-home HSC assessments, limiting schools to one take-home assessment task worth no more than 15% of the school-based assessment component. This measure is part of New South Wales Government reforms to protect student learning amid the rapid rise in the use of AI in schools.[87] New South Wales is also updating advice for schools on GenAI to ensure that teachers are supported to design assessments that remain valid in an AI context, provide reliable information on student progress and are fair, inclusive and accessible by all students.

The South Australian Government has also launched a Royal Commission into AI, which will examine the impacts of AI across a range of industries and sectors, including education.[88] As findings and reports from the South Australian Royal Commission into AI are finalised, relevant advice will be provided to EMM for consideration.

International policies on digital technologies in classrooms

Actions to manage the use and impact of digital technologies and AI in Australian classrooms align with a range of international policy responses. Comparable education systems are responding to the risks of digital technology use on students more broadly through a range of initiatives, including AI governance and guidance, digital infrastructure and technology standards, student online safety and personal device restrictions.

87 The Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, *New rules for schools on AI in take-home HSC assessments*, [media release], New South Wales Government, 1 September 2026.

88 South Australia Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Royal Commission into Artificial Intelligence announced*, [media release], 8 October 2026.

United Kingdom



The **United Kingdom (UK)** provides a significant amount of guidance on the use and implementation of technology in schools. This includes national guidance on AI use in education, product safety standards for AI products used in schools, digital infrastructure requirements, restrictions on personal mobile-device use and initiatives to assess the effectiveness of education technology.[89]

Recently, the UK Government has also announced parents will soon get clear, practical guidance to help them manage children's screen use.[90]

89 UK Department of Education, Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education, 2025; Generative AI: Product Safety Standards, 2026; Meeting Digital and Technology Standards in Schools and Colleges, 2022; Mobile Phones in Schools, 2026; EdTech Evidence Board, n.d.

90 UK Department for Education, New guidance on screen use for children aged 5–16, 2026.

Europe



The European Commission, working with the OECD, recently launched an AI Literacy Framework to help teachers and school leaders integrate AI into the classroom.[91]

This is in addition to previously published guidelines on the ethical use of AI in teaching and learning.[92]

Norway has recently announced plans to limit the use of AI in primary schools, reflecting emerging concerns regarding younger children's use of AI.[93] **Sweden** has also emphasised a return to pen and paper.[94]

After introducing its own AI laws, **Italy** limits access to AI for children under 14, unless they have parental consent.[95]

In 2025, **Madrid** limited the use of computers in primary schools to 2 hours per week.[96]

91 European Commission, 'New AI Literacy Framework helps schools prepare learners for the age of artificial intelligence', 2026.

92 European Commission, 'Guidelines on the ethical use of artificial intelligence and data in teaching and learning for educators', 2026.

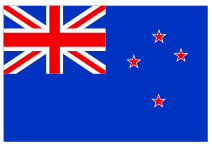
93 Reuters, 'Norway imposes near ban on AI in elementary school', Reuters, 2026.

94 Government Offices of Sweden, Government investing in more reading time and less screen time, 2024.

95 Reuters, 'Italy enacts AI law covering privacy, oversight and child access | Reuters', Reuters, 2025.

96 S Jones, Madrid plans to limit computer and tablet use in primary schools to two hours a week, The Guardian, 2025.

New Zealand



The **New Zealand** Ministry of Education recommends that students aged 6 to12 spend no more than one third of the school day on digital devices.[97]

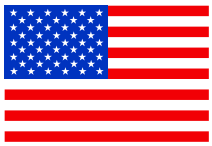
New Zealand has also introduced national AI guidance for schools and restrictions on personal mobile phones.

Its July 2026 review of AI use in schools found that AI was becoming part of everyday school life but that many schools remained at an early stage of implementation, which supports the case for a consistent, system-wide approach.[98]

97 New Zealand Government, 'Health and safety management of digital device use by staff and students', 2025.

98 New Zealand Government, 'Ready or Not: How Are Schools Responding to Artificial Intelligence?', 2026.

United States of America



The United States Department of Education released guidance for the responsible use of technology in classrooms in August 2026.

The guidance asserts that states and local communities, with input from parents and teachers, should continue to lead decisions about how technology is used in education. It encourages schools to be intentional about the digital experiences provided to students, ensuring technology use is purposeful, instructionally sound, and contributing to measurable student outcomes.[99]

As at July 2026, at least 17 states have introduced or debated legislation addressing classroom screen time.[100] This includes a range of responses, including screen time limits, research into the impacts of devices and/or moving towards more purposeful use of technology.

99 U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education Releases Guidance on Responsible Use of Education Technology in the Classroom, United States Government, 2026.

100 J Mak, 'Six states have enacted laws addressing classroom screen time as schools rethink whether every student needs a laptop', the Independent, 2026.

From the 2026–27 school year, **Los Angeles** allows no screen time for students in Kindergarten to Year 1, 20 minutes per day for Years 2 to 3, 30 minutes per day for Years 4 to 5, 60 minutes per day for Years 6 to 8, and a 90-minute limit in secondary settings, including for homework.[101] This also allows parents to opt out of their children using specific tools.

Los Angeles

Kindergarten–Year 1: no screen time
Years 2–3: 20 minutes per day
Years 4–5: 30 minutes per day
Years 6–8: 60 minutes per day
Secondary settings: 90-minute limit, including homework
Parents can opt out of their children using specific tools

From the 2026–27 school year, **New York City** also introduced screen time restrictions in public schools, including no screen time for preschool to Year 2, no more than 30 minutes daily for Years 3 to 5, and no more than 45 minutes daily for Years 6 to 8.[102]

101 Los Angeles Unified School District, 'Guidelines for Student Screen Time Policy', 2026.

102 New York City Department of Education, 'Guidance on Artificial Intelligence and Screen Time', 2026.

New York City — public schools

Preschool–Year 2: no screen time

Years 3–5: no more than 30 minutes per day

Years 6–8: no more than 45 minutes per day

Some schooling systems have also introduced limits of guidance on the use of AI in schools.

- The New York City Department of Education recently announced a ban on the use of student-facing GenAI in public schools from preschool to Year 8, with limited use in high schools from the 2026–27 school year.[103]
- The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) announced a moratorium on using AI in schools for the 2026–27 year. This will involve pausing the use of student-facing GenAI in public schools, including standalone AI tools, as well as embedded AI capabilities in other classroom software, such as Google Docs, Google Sheets and Google Slides.
- The LAUSD has also established a GenAI Ad Hoc Committee to develop recommendations for guardrails and procedures for the future student use of AI tools.[104] The committee will share its AI policy recommendations with the LAUSD school board by the end of the 2026–27 school year.[105]



103 New York City Department of Education, 'Guidance on Artificial Intelligence and Screen Time', 2026.

104 H Blume, 'LAUSD enacts student AI moratorium: What parents need to know', Los Angeles Times, 2026.

105 A Merod, 'LAUSD restricts all students from using AI tools', K-12 Dive, 2026.



The next steps: digital detox

The current evidence base and policy responses emerging domestically and internationally point to a clear conclusion: digital technologies should be only used in schools where they strengthen teaching and learning and their merits are grounded in evidence. Where the educational value or purpose of a technology is uncertain, or the risks to learning and wellbeing outweigh the benefits, a more cautious approach is warranted. Australia now has an opportunity to establish an approach to the use of technology in schools that places student learning, safety and development at the centre of decision-making.

At their meeting on 2 November 2026, Australia's Education Ministers adopted a common strategic policy on better technology use in Australian schools.

Australia's Education Ministers also agreed to establish the Australian Schools Digital Detox Taskforce which will collect evidence, consult students, teachers and parents, and provide advice on what further action Education Ministers should consider taking. It will also examine and provide advice on the digital technologies curriculum. The Taskforce will be led by an independent expert with support from the Australian Government, with representatives from state and territory governments, the independent and Catholic sectors, NATSIEC, parent and principal associations, workforce representatives and the education agencies including ACARA, ESA, AERO and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The Taskforce will provide preliminary advice by mid-2027 and conclude its work by the end of 2027, unless otherwise determined by Education Ministers.

Ministers agreed:

Technology adoption and use in Australian schools must be supported by evidence and student use of technology should be restricted when it fails to support student learning and wellbeing.



Ministers agreed the **Year 5 NAPLAN writing assessment would return to handwritten completion in 2028**, subject to further advice from ACARA on the feasibility, costs and workload implications of implementation. Ministers also agreed ACARA would provide advice on returning to handwritten NAPLAN writing assessments for Years 7 and 9.



Ministers agreed to **introduce, trial or consider limits for screen use in schools**, with the timing, scope and application of potential limits to be determined by each jurisdiction or sector.



Ministers agreed to **restrict the student use of GenAI applications in primary schools**, recognising this may involve the continued use of some AI features built into technologies currently in use, with the timing, scope and application of potential limits to be determined by each jurisdiction or sector.



Ministers agreed to **restrict student use of GenAI in secondary school assessments**, with the timing, scope and application of potential limits to be determined by each jurisdiction or sector.



Ministers agreed to establish a new **Australian Schools Digital Detox Taskforce** to provide advice on further steps to address excessive screen time and digital device use. The Taskforce will collect evidence, survey students, teachers and parents, and provide Education Ministers with advice on what further actions they should take next year.

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