



Governance & Implementation of AI in Schools

AI Research Project Report
- 2025/26 -



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AI Research Project Report: 2025-2026

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Computing & Digital
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LEARN SHEFFIELD

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With contributions from the AI project leads from the following settings:

Abbeyfield Primary Academy, All Saints Catholic High School, Arbourthorne Primary School,
Cascade MAT, Inova MAT, Lowfield Primary School, Nether Green Junior School, Norton Free CoE
Primary School, Prince Edward Primary School, Watercliffe Meadow Community Primary School,
Wybourn Primary School

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming part of everyday life for schools, staff and pupils. Generative AI tools such as Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and ChatGPT offer opportunities to reduce workload, improve accessibility and support teaching and learning, while also raising important questions around safeguarding, data protection, ethics, assessment and professional practice. This report presents the findings of Learn Sheffield's Governance & Implementation of AI in Schools project, undertaken during the 2025-26 academic year. The project explored how schools can implement AI safely, ethically and effectively, while investigating its impact on workload, staff confidence, inclusion, and teaching and learning. The project is just one part of an ongoing commitment to support schools to navigate the ever-changing landscape that is AI in education.

The project involved co-researchers from 12 settings, including two multi-academy trusts, one secondary school and nine primary schools. Participants undertook small-scale research projects linked to local priorities, supported by a year-long programme of professional development and collaboration.

Key Findings

By summer 2026, 62% of staff across participating organisations reported using AI tools as part of their role, with teachers twice as likely to be using AI as support staff. The project highlighted significant concerns among staff, particularly around data privacy, safeguarding, misuse of AI, accuracy of outputs, environmental impact and over-reliance on technology (both staff and pupils). The effective adoption of AI tools often relied on these concerns being addressed and where staff use was supported by clear guidance, professional development and opportunities for collaboration.

Other findings included:

- ❑ Schools that approached AI as a strategic change-management initiative were generally more successful than those focusing solely on specific technology.
- ❑ Staff confidence increased across the project following targeted professional development.
- ❑ Teachers reported that AI helped reduce workload when used for resource creation, report writing, administrative tasks and adaptation of materials – but not across all use cases.
- ❑ There was some impact on inclusive practices through differentiated resources, adapted texts and support for pupils with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) and EAL (English as an Additional Language).
- ❑ Specific use cases, for example the creation of retrieval practice quizzes, generating meaningful cover work, and supporting an inclusive teaching approach, were particularly successful.

Key Conclusions

The findings suggest that AI has considerable potential to support schools and teachers, particularly in reducing workload and improving accessibility. However, benefits are not automatic. AI implementation requires clear governance, careful consideration of risks, appropriate professional development and ongoing quality assurance. AI works most effectively as a tool that supports professional expertise rather than replacing it, and settings should identify the specific tasks where it makes the most impact. It is also important to note that improved efficiency doesn't necessarily mean that educational outcomes are improved: quicker ≠ better in all cases. Finally, addressing staff attitudes and concerns is key to successful implementation of the technology.

Recommendations

Drawing on the evidence from participating schools, the project recommends that schools and trusts:

- ☐ Start with governance rather than technology.
- ☐ Focus implementation on identified educational and organisational priorities.
- ☐ Invest in professional development and AI literacy.
- ☐ Establish approved tools and clear processes.
- ☐ Maintain professional judgement and quality assurance.
- ☐ Develop communities of practice and collaborative networks.
- ☐ Prioritise areas where evidence suggests the greatest benefit.
- ☐ Continue to evaluate and contribute to the growing evidence base around AI in education.

Overall, the project found that the greatest risk is not adopting or rejecting AI entirely but failing to engage with it thoughtfully. Schools that combine strong governance, professional development and evidence-informed implementation are best placed to realise the benefits of AI while safeguarding the values and professional expertise that remain central to effective education.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most significant developments facing schools in recent years. Within a relatively short period, Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot and Gemini have moved from emerging technologies to widely used tools capable of generating text, images, lesson resources and administrative documents. For school leaders, this presents both opportunities and challenges. AI has the potential to reduce workload, improve accessibility and support teaching and learning. At the same time, it raises important questions regarding safeguarding, data protection, ethics, assessment, professional judgement and the future role of education itself.

As schools began to explore the opportunities and risks presented by Generative AI, Learn Sheffield established a series of professional learning opportunities alongside a city-wide working group to support schools in developing their understanding of AI. However, it became clear that schools required more sustained input, and leaders wanted opportunities to develop governance frameworks, evaluate emerging practice and investigate the real-world impact of AI within their own settings.

In response, Learn Sheffield launched the AI Research Programme during the 2025-26 academic year with two strands. This report presents the findings and recommendations from the first year of the Governance and Implementation of AI in Schools project. A second project report, Teaching about AI in Primary Schools is also available via the Learn Sheffield website at <https://learnsheffield.co.uk/>.

About the project

The Governance & Implementation of AI in Schools project was established to investigate the impact of staff use of Generative AI tools and to share learning with schools across the city and further afield. The group comprised senior leaders, computing leads, IT managers and class teachers, and schools were recruited through word of mouth, existing networks and emails to headteachers. In total, staff from 12 settings took part, including one primary trust, one mixed primary and secondary trust, 1 secondary school and 9 primary schools. The project was jointly funded by the participating schools and Learn Sheffield. The project was designed around four core aims:

- ☐ To support schools in developing safe, ethical and effective approaches to AI governance.
- ☐ To build staff confidence and understanding of Generative AI.
- ☐ To investigate the impact of AI on professional practice and organisational effectiveness aligned to school/trust priorities.
- ☐ To contribute to the growing evidence-base regarding AI implementation within schools.

Who led the project?

Learn Sheffield is a not-for-profit schools company, part owned by individual schools and the local authority. Our purpose is to enhance the life chances of children and young people in Sheffield, and we work with and through our member settings to achieve this by providing high-quality school improvement support for Sheffield settings, leading collaboration within and beyond our education sector and being the 'glue' in the education system of our city.

The project was led by Catherine Moore, as lead researcher, and Andrew Yeomans. Catherine leads the Computing & Digital Innovation Centre at Learn Sheffield, providing consultancy, curriculum resources and training for schools within the city and nationally to support the computing curriculum and the effective implementation of educational technologies, including artificial intelligence. Andrew is the Learn Sheffield Insights Hub Director. He has extensive senior leadership experience as an early years leader, head of academy, and executive leader. He has worked as a designated safeguarding lead, EdTech demonstrator and remote learning lead across primary and secondary phases, with experience of leading technology-based projects to support school improvement.

It is also important to note that this was a collaborative project, with the group forming a community of practice, sharing experiences and learning. This was an essential aspect of the project and helped to ensure its success.

Wider Context

Artificial intelligence in education has moved remarkably quickly from being a future consideration to an immediate reality for schools. Ofsted's review of 21 early-adopter schools and further education providers provides an important early contribution to this developing picture¹. Significantly, the settings involved were not simply introducing AI indiscriminately. Leaders were characterised as both curious and cautious. Adoption was generally connected to an identified purpose, supported by leadership and professional development, and often began with relatively small-scale applications before expanding. The evidence tells us something about how early adopters are approaching AI; it also points towards questions that the evidence cannot yet fully answer. Furthermore, the review exposes an important distinction between using AI for educators and using AI with learners. It is this distinction that perhaps raises the most important questions for education. Using AI to reduce administrative workload, generate initial resources or support planning presents one set of opportunities and risks. Allowing pupils to use Generative AI as part of learning presents another, potentially much more profound, set of questions about knowledge, cognition, independence, assessment and learning.

¹ Ofsted. (2025). 'The biggest risk is doing nothing': insights from early adopters of artificial intelligence in schools and further education colleges.



The important variable across both uses is not simply whether AI has been used, but what happens to learning because it has been used.

The current positions of Ofsted and the Department for Education are, perhaps appropriately, relatively cautious. Ofsted does not expect schools to use AI and does not inspect AI as a discrete aspect of provision. Its position is essentially technology-neutral. Where AI is used, however, its consequences become relevant, including in relation to safeguarding. This is an important current stance, as there is currently no inspection incentive for schools to demonstrate that they are using AI. The relevant leadership question is not "Are we using AI?", but "If we are using it, why are we using it, have we considered risks, what difference is it making and how do we know?"

The Department for Education adopts a similarly balanced position. Its guidance² recognises the potential for Generative AI to reduce workload and support educational activity while emphasising that professional judgement, teacher expertise and relationships between adults and pupils remain fundamental. Existing responsibilities around safeguarding, data protection, intellectual property, equality and online safety continue to apply irrespective of the technology being used.

These positions provide schools with something valuable. The green light to explore without an expectation to adopt. In this paper, you will read how Generative AI can support activities including planning, resource creation, administration, assessment, feedback and adaptation of materials. Its contribution to reducing teacher workload is promising. This builds on other studies, for example, an Education Endowment Foundation trial³ found that teachers using ChatGPT alongside structured guidance reduced lesson planning time in science by approximately 31%. However, the educational argument for AI cannot simply be that it enables us to do existing things more quickly. The more important question is whether it enables teachers and pupils to do things more effectively.

This distinction matters because the evidence base remains immature. This is exemplified in Ofsted's research where early-adopter schools and further education providers identified considerable enthusiasm and examples of promising practice, but Ofsted still acknowledges the limited evidence currently available about the impact of Generative AI on educational outcomes. Furthermore, we must consider how the technology is constantly developing and being adopted considerably faster than the evidence base can inform significant changes in practice.

Full-scale implementation without consideration is therefore not desirable. Waiting for definitive evidence before engaging with AI, however, is not practical or recommended. Pupils occupy a world with a growing infiltration of AI. They already encounter these technologies beyond formal organisational uses. Surveys conducted in November 2025 by

² Department for Education. (2025). Generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education.

³ Education Endowment Foundation. (2024). ChatGPT in lesson preparation - Teacher Choices trial.

the UK Safer Internet Centre⁴ found nearly all young people aged 8 to 17 (97%) are now using artificial intelligence (AI) tools (although this does include smart speakers and the Google AI Summary). Teachers are also using it widely, often without oversight: a National Education Union survey⁵ conducted in 2026 found that 76% of teachers were using AI tools in their day-to-day work, most commonly for resource creation, lesson planning and administrative tasks. At the same time, almost half of schools (49%) have no formal AI policy in place. Simply prohibiting or ignoring AI therefore risks leaving schools responding to a changing world without developing the knowledge required to navigate it. Pupils and staff members need to be prepared: they need to be safe, to coexist in an informed and empowered position, so that they can harness potential opportunities and mitigate any risks.

“Safety should not be compromised. Schools and colleges should also consider that there may be uses of generative AI by staff or pupils that have not been explicitly approved or adopted in their setting.” (DfE, 2025)

So, where does that leave us in education? It leaves us in a fortunate position. One we are always in, but do not always cultivate and capitalise on. We have the opportunity to investigate effective practice ourselves. To do it robustly, ethically and precisely, to ensure responsibility, safety, sustainable improvement and learning are at the heart of any barometer of investigation or impact measure, areas where we firmly remain the experts.

This project represents just one small part of a potentially huge research community, and a contribution to the collective evidence base from within the environments in which these technologies will ultimately succeed or fail.

Key Questions Explored by this Project

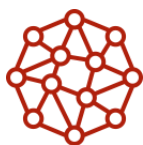
Across all participating schools, the project sought to explore variations of the following questions:

- ☐ How can schools develop effective AI governance?
- ☐ What systems and structures best support implementation?
- ☐ What impact does AI have on staff workload and wellbeing?
- ☐ Can AI contribute to more inclusive educational provision?
- ☐ What impact might AI have on teaching, learning and assessment?
- ☐ How confident are staff in using AI and how do they feel about the technology?

These questions provide the framework for the findings presented later in this report.

⁴ UK Safer Internet Centre & Nominet. (2026). Smart tech, safe choices: Exploring the safe and responsible use of AI.

⁵ National Education Union. (2026). State of education: AI.



What do we mean when we talk about AI?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems capable of performing tasks that would previously have required human intelligence, such as recognising patterns, generating language, solving problems and making predictions. AI is already embedded within many technologies used daily by schools, staff and pupils, including search engines, translation tools, recommendation systems and productivity software, much of this based on Machine Learning models that have existed for some years.

This project, however, focusses on the impact of Generative AI. Generative AI tools create new content such as text, images, video, audio and code based on prompts provided by users. Generative AI models are trained on large amounts of data and generate responses by identifying patterns in that data, producing outputs that are statistically probable and, therefore, not necessarily accurate. Tools such as Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude are examples of generative AI chatbots powered by Large Language Models (LLMs), to analyse and generate text, and produce images using image generators. Other, more specific tools, exist for the generation of music, videos, audio content, lesson slides and multimedia content.

Generative AI offers significant opportunities for schools, including:

- ☐ Administrative support
- ☐ Resource creation
- ☐ Lesson planning
- ☐ Ideation and creativity
- ☐ Adapting materials for different learners
- ☐ Supporting assessment and feedback
- ☐ Creating accessible content
- ☐ Professional learning and support for research.

However, these opportunities must be balanced against important risks and ethical questions, including:

- ☐ Data protection and privacy
- ☐ Safeguarding concerns
- ☐ Bias and inaccuracies
- ☐ Copyright and intellectual property issues
- ☐ Assessment malpractice
- ☐ Environmental impact
- ☐ Over-reliance and cognitive offloading.

For this reason, the central question for schools is not whether AI should be used, but how it can be used safely, ethically and effectively in ways that improve educational outcomes and organisational effectiveness.



Methodology

Ten schools and two multi-academy trusts were recruited to participate in the project during autumn 2025. Participants included senior leaders, computing subject leaders and IT managers. Each participating organisation nominated one or more co-researchers who undertook a small-scale enquiry project linked to local priorities.

The project adopted a collaborative action research approach. Participants attended a structured programme of professional development sessions throughout the academic year with time to share experiences and tools. These ran alongside implementation activity within their own settings. Schools were encouraged to develop a clear research question and gather evidence before, during and after implementation. The project took place between September 2025 and July 2026, and one school chose to defer completion until 2026-27.

Data collection methods included:

- ☐ Online staff surveys
- ☐ Interviews with project participants
- ☐ Reflections from working groups
- ☐ Case study reports

Qualitative responses were analysed using thematic analysis. The programme was informed by the Education Endowment Foundation's implementation guidance⁶, with participating schools encouraged to explore, prepare, deliver and sustain change through structured implementation planning.

Limitations

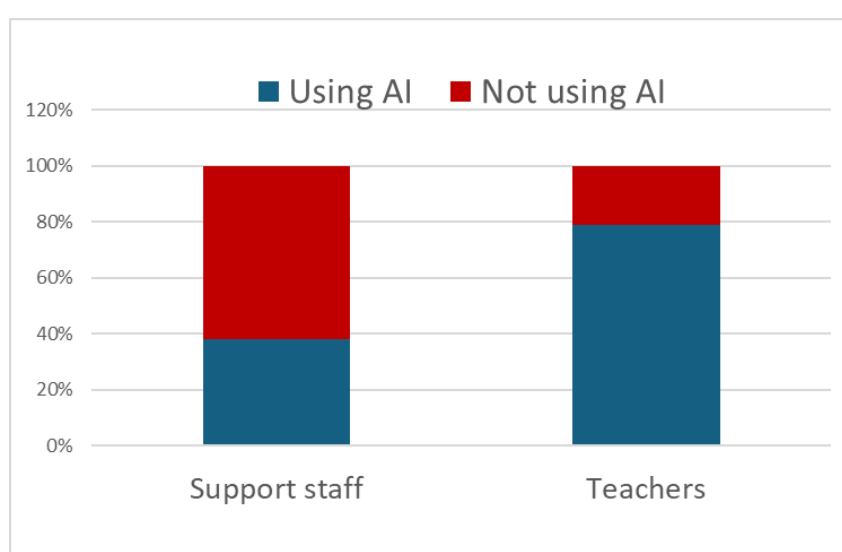
This report represents findings from a relatively small group of schools within one geographical area. As a result, findings may not be directly generalisable to all settings. Data collection methods varied between participating organisations and survey instruments didn't always include consistent phrasing of questions – this is reflected in how findings are reported. Much of the evidence is based on self-reported perceptions from staff which may be subject to social desirability or recall bias. In some cases, the post-intervention surveys were completed by significantly fewer respondents making direct comparisons difficult. Furthermore, because the project lasted one academic year, evidence relating to pupil outcomes remains limited.

⁶ Education Endowment Foundation. (2026). A school's guide to implementation.

Key findings

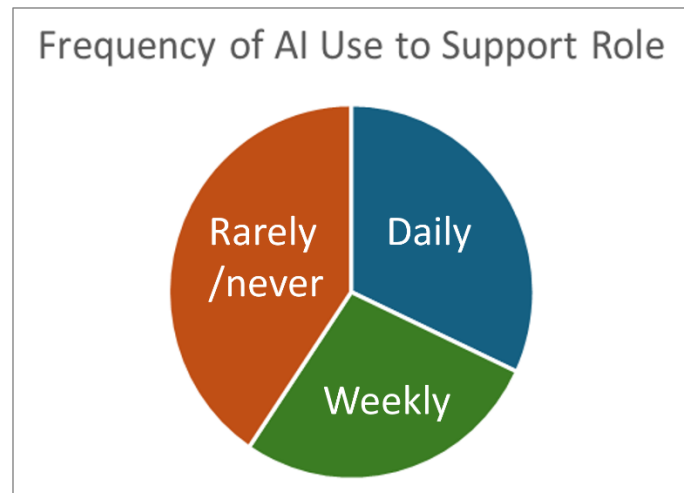
Measure	Number
Multi academy trusts (MATs) involved	2
Total number of secondary schools involved	4
Total number of primary schools involved	20
Total number of staff members who completed survey responses	486
MAT 1 – total number of respondents	222
Total number of respondents in the 4 schools where surveys were completed before and after implementation	132

At the end of the project in summer 2026, 62% of staff in participating schools were using AI to support their role, with numbers roughly equal across primary and secondary schools. This was an increase of over a third compared to pre-intervention (46% reported using AI in surveys conducted across autumn 25 and spring 26). This summer figure is lower than the number reported in the recent NEU survey⁷, which found 76% of teachers using the technology, but our data does include support staff who are less likely to be using AI than teachers. Across one trust, made up of 3 secondary and 7 primary schools, only 38% of teaching assistants and non-teaching staff were using AI, whereas 79% of teachers and senior leaders were using the technology.



⁷ National Education Union. (2026). State of education: AI.

In terms of frequency of use, across the same trust 32% were using AI daily, 27% were using it weekly, and 41% were using it rarely or never (from a total of 222 respondents). This finding was consistent with data collected from other settings, with staff split into regular, occasional and rare users.



Throughout the project, implementation of AI was most successful where leaders created clear expectations, communicated openly with staff and provided opportunities for experimentation and shared learning.

Across the individual settings several key themes were repeatedly highlighted in case studies:

- ☐ AI policy and strategy
- ☐ Systems and processes for successful implementation
- ☐ Staff workload and teacher wellbeing
- ☐ Impact on teaching, learning and assessment
- ☐ Inclusive practice
- ☐ Staff attitudes towards AI



Policy & Strategy

Governance emerged as the foundation for successful implementation.

Consequently, AI strategy development became one of the most significant themes identified across participating schools.

Successful approaches in terms of policy and strategy shared several characteristics:

- ☐ Clear acceptable use expectations
- ☐ Approved lists of AI tools
- ☐ Regular review processes
- ☐ Alignment with safeguarding and GDPR requirements
- ☐ Senior leadership involvement
- ☐ Ongoing staff training and clear communication about decision-making.

According to the recent survey from the National Education Union (NEU, 2026), 49% of teachers reported that their school or setting had no AI policy in place. There is no direct imperative from the government for schools to have an AI policy, however the Department for Education guidance stipulates that “[a]ny use of generative AI by staff, students, and pupils should be carefully considered and assessed, evaluating the benefits and risks of use in its education setting.” (DfE, 2025). As part of the project, we strongly recommended that settings had some form of policy in development before starting any intervention. During the initial training sessions, we shared a number of freely available templates for policies (see [appendix](#)) and together examined possible scenarios that might occur as a result of generative AI use in schools, for example the use of smart glasses, pupil disclosures about over-reliance on social companions, and staff entering personal data into models.

At the outset of the project, none of the schools or trusts had a fully formulated AI policy, although several were in development. By summer 2026, many of these policies were still being reviewed, reflecting what one participant reported:

“Because the AI landscape evolves rapidly, the policy is treated as a living document; it has already been updated to reflect the latest government guidance alongside our own day-to-day observations of staff usage, and we have established ongoing monitoring to meet our evolving needs.”

Primary AI Project Lead

Most schools began with some kind of template, including those from London Grid for Learning, The National College and The Key, then refined them to meet the priorities of their specific settings. Some settings created whole new documents, whilst others added statements to existing online safety and GDPR policies, both of which are equally valid approaches. Creating an AI policy should not be viewed as a box-ticking exercise – its

purpose is to ensure that staff and students are clear about expectations and are able to use AI technology safely and responsibly.

“Maintaining a clear up-to-date policy which supports consistency and effective use by staff of Generative AI tools, across the range of roles colleagues hold within the organisation will continue to be a focus.”

Primary AI Project Lead

Tools

The majority of settings implemented a list of accepted tools for staff as part of an AI acceptable use policy. These primarily included Microsoft Copilot or Google Gemini, which provide a certain level of data protection and guardrails as part of education tenancies. However, most schools still advised staff not to enter personal or sensitive data into AI tools as risks do remain where applications and permissions haven't been set up appropriately. Other commonly approved tools included TeachMate AI, SLT AI, Chalkie and Google NotebookLM (now part of Gemini). There was some resistance in certain settings to having a limited list imposed, and clear training on the risks was required to inform staff why this was important. In some settings, senior leaders implemented a process for staff to request access to other tools following a data protection impact assessment (DPIA).

The results from the surveys completed in the summer term 2026 showed that ChatGPT was the most frequently used tool, despite not appearing in any approved lists. However, the question asked was “Which of these tools have you used to support your role?” and may therefore include use prior to any approved list being implemented:

Which AI tools have you used to support your role?	Proportion of respondents (n=330)
ChatGPT	54%
Microsoft Copilot	45%
Google Gemini	16%
Teachmate AI	11%
Google NotebookLM	10%
Other*	11%
None	28%

*Other tools mentioned were Canva AI, SLT AI, Chalkie and Grok.

It does, however, reinforce that not all use of AI tools in education settings is necessarily visible to senior leadership, and comprehensive staff training is vital to ensure any risks are minimised. Below you can read about two schools where the implementation of AI was driven by the senior leadership team, with a focus on safe and responsible use.

Case Study Spotlight - CASCADE Multi-Academy Trust

A six-school Primary Trust established a Strategic AI Group consisting of leaders from each school. The group met every half term to review current developments in AI and any issues within school. This group developed a trust-wide policy, acceptable use agreement and a comprehensive programme of staff training in each school to introduce the policy and list of approved tools. This led to significantly improved understanding of the risks of using AI across the organisation.

Post-training, 96% of staff agreed that they understood the acceptable use of AI in their professional setting (3.2% somewhat understood, and 1 person who was absent from the training disagreed.) Prior to the training, nearly half (45%) reported that they had not considered the risks of using AI in school.

Case Study Spotlight - Arbourthorne Primary School

Senior leaders at this large primary school made AI a focus for the academic year 2025-26, and its Online Safety and Acceptable Use policies were updated in September 2025 to include a policy on the use of generative AI. It was agreed that the school's governing body would also have generative AI as one of its focus areas, due to the speed of development and the implications of the technology across many aspects of the school including safeguarding.

Baseline training for staff was delivered in September, and a small volunteer group was established to trial and evaluate a shortlist of tools, including Google Gemini, Brisk and Chalkie. This resulted in a user-friendly checklist of benefits and considerations to support other teachers to be able to identify effective tools for creating lesson resources.



Systems & Processes

Implementation was most effective where schools developed systems to support safe and sustainable use. Each participant began the project by focussing on their local priorities and issues they wished to explore using AI. Every setting in the project chose to establish a small working party, variously to develop a policy, trial new tools, share good practice or issues with AI in school, and explore the impact of AI on their own practice. In most cases this was made up of volunteers who were interested in the technology to act as AI champions. In one primary school, one teacher from each year group was selected for the group by the AI lead, but over time, other staff got involved voluntarily as they heard about the work. The two trusts established working groups made up of senior leaders to drive policy development.

The working groups met regularly through the year, and a number of settings reported that the main barrier to development was lack of time for these meetings – one school organised meetings during assembly time, another shared findings via email. Where it was most successful, the process was led by senior leaders and attendance at meetings prioritised. The benefits of such a working group were described by one participant:

“Bringing together a cross-section of staff allows you to share responsibility, draw on a range of expertise, and ensure that implementation is both practical and safe. This group can act as early adopters and advocates, helping to test tools, develop guidance, and support colleagues across schools. By distributing the workload and building a network of informed practitioners, you create a more sustainable and scalable approach to introducing AI.”

Trust AI Project Lead

In terms of staff development, project participants delivered training sessions as part of regular staff meetings, covering the fundamentals of what AI is, the risks and ethical questions, and the possible benefits for staff use in school (with access to a centrally-created slide deck). The most effective training was delivered over a number of sessions, developing staff confidence and allowing for exploration between meetings and sharing of successes (and failures!) In one primary school, the project leads invited other staff to present who had already embraced AI, in order to illustrate that no one person was the expert and everyone had something to contribute. This proved to be very successful, and meant teachers could see lots of relevant examples of how AI had been used. This school also ensured that they focussed on one tool (Google Gemini) in initial training sessions to avoid overwhelming staff. You can read more about their project below in the second case study.

Case Study Spotlight – Inova Multi Academy Trust

This Trust, comprising 3 secondary schools and 7 primary schools, prioritised safety and responsible use, ensuring that comprehensive policies and guidance for staff were in place before any AI use was permitted. The initial AI working group introduced a DPIA-led (Data Protection Impact Assessment) approval process for AI tools alongside ongoing policy review and a staff AI checklist for using tools to generate resources. Mandatory training on AI for all staff is planned for September 2026, including an assessment to confirm understanding of acceptable use. This ensures AI adoption is managed through existing governance structures rather than occurring informally. The whole process was overseen and driven by senior leaders and the AI project lead.

“Securing strong leadership buy-in is essential, as it sets the tone and direction for adoption across the Trust. When senior leaders understand the impact and potential of AI, they are far more likely to champion its use, allocate time and resources, and embed it strategically into school improvement plans. In our experience, leadership recognition that AI is becoming an integral part of modern education has been a key driver in accelerating progress.”

Case Study Spotlight – Prince Edward Primary School

This primary school enabled two members of staff - a member of the senior leadership team and the computing subject leader - to attend the research project meetings to help share the load and incorporate different standpoints. As a school, their “AI project was designed deliberately as a phased, year-long process to ensure the implementation remained manageable and staff had adequate time to explore the technology.” This included approaching AI policy from a safeguarding perspective and treating it as a living document to reflect the rapid development of the technology. An initial staff survey was completed in the autumn term to capture baseline information on training needs and staff use. Training was delivered in the spring term, and the AI leads deliberately supported early-adopters within the staff to deliver some of the session and share how they were using AI. This worked well to emphasise that no one person was the expert and that the school was working collaboratively to develop effective use and best practice.

Time constraints were reported as the biggest barrier to effective implementation, with little time for staff to be able to build on what they had learnt in the training. In response, the AI project leads ensured that any information that was disseminated was manageable, and the approved number of AI tools kept to a minimum to reduce any overwhelm. This approach has clearly been successful:

“Ultimately our biggest and most meaningful win has been the tangible human impact, with staff consistently reporting a profound reduction in their overall workload and a renewed sense of efficiency.”



Staff workload

Teacher and support staff workload was a key driver for many of the schools involved in the research project, unsurprising given the current challenges of recruitment and retention facing the profession. Overall, there emerged substantial evidence that the use of generative AI reduced time spent on routine activities. In four schools where teachers were surveyed at the start of the project (in the autumn or spring term), then again in the summer term, staff reported an increase in the effectiveness of AI for reducing workload (from an average of 2.28 to 3.29 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all effective and 5 = very effective). In one of these schools (primary), the proportion of staff who felt that AI was effective in reducing workload increased from 26% to 73% between spring and summer terms following targeted professional development. In another primary school, 94% of teachers agreed that their use of AI tools had become more effective in reducing workload over the course of the project, and time gains were approximately 100 minutes per week on average (from a total of 16 teachers).

However, workload reductions were not automatic across the board. In surveys, staff reported that AI sometimes made the process of creating materials longer, and that quality prompting and thorough checking were essential, especially during the early stages of implementation. As with any new technology or process, time spent on staff training is key – not only about the fundamentals of how AI works, but how to write effective prompts and exploring where the tools can make the most impact. Time to practise what has been introduced and develop effective workflows in using AI tools is also vital for staff to recognise the full benefits of the technology:

As a result, staff generally feel that they are finding ways to use AI to reduce their workload, although some still feel that using AI would take them longer than doing a task themselves as they have a “lack of knowledge and headspace to mess around with it.”

Primary AI Project Lead

Universal use of AI for all tasks is therefore not advisable. The greatest successes were reported where specific uses of best practice had been identified and shared across the staff body. In the second primary school case study below, a small working party was specifically examining the effect of using AI on workload and teacher wellbeing. They

reported that time savings on specific tasks such as report writing and creating resources were measurable. Generating whole lesson plans, however, was felt to be less effective due to the amount of checking and personalisation required.

Reported effective uses of AI included creating:

- ☐ Individual lesson resources
- ☐ Cover work
- ☐ Report and policy drafts
- ☐ Pupil reports
- ☐ Knowledge organisers
- ☐ SEND documentation
- ☐ Administrative communications
- ☐ Retrieval quizzes and formative assessment materials
- ☐ Professional development materials based on meeting notes

The time saved is only one factor when using AI; the quality of the resources is also important. A large secondary school had considerable success in creating more meaningful cover work when staff were on long-term sick leave. The time spent setting cover work was not always reduced, but the quality of the work was deemed much higher, leading to less loss of learning in affected classes (see the case study in [Teaching, Learning & Assessment](#)).

Case Study Spotlight – Norton Free Church of England Primary School

The main impact reported by this small, one-form entry primary school, was the time saved by using AI to plan theme days and whole-school events, for example assemblies. AI tools supported staff to develop a wider range of ideas more quickly, which reduced the time needed for the early stages of planning and preparation. As the AI project lead reports,

“in a one-form-entry school, where teachers do not have a year-group team to share planning with, this has been especially helpful in reducing workload.”

However, he also found that AI didn't always save time as expected:

Example texts were “not always pitched correctly for the age group, did not always match the style or structure needed, or still needed adapting to fit the learning objective. In these cases, the process of prompting, checking, editing and trying again could take quite a lot of time.”

Case Study Spotlight – Wybourn Primary School

This school established up a small working party (6 teachers) to examine the effect of using AI on workload and teacher wellbeing. In the post-intervention survey, 4 out of 6 teachers reported that their total workload was "slightly better" compared to before the trial, while the remaining 2 teachers found it "about the same". Despite these cautious estimations, the reported number of hours worked outside of core school hours nearly halved following the trial (average 7.8 hours in autumn term to 4.0 in summer term), although this could reflect the time of year rather than the impact of AI. Teachers reported saving between 0.5 and 2 hours weekly on resource creation and one teacher saved over 3 hours per week on report writing. Using AI for lesson planning was considered less effective at saving time, due to time spent 'tweaking' or personalising content (and 50% of the group reported using AI only rarely for this purpose).



Teaching, Learning & Assessment

Evidence relating directly to learning outcomes was more limited, due in part to the duration of the project. Impact was often seen more in terms of the “headspace” it gave teachers to think “creatively about how to deliver learning effectively.” (Primary AI project lead). There were, however, promising results from two schools using AI in very different ways – one to generate cover resources and the other to generate retrieval practice quizzes. See the case studies below.

Other effective uses of AI tools by participating schools to create learning materials included:

- ☐ Retrieval quiz generation
- ☐ Curriculum-aligned cover work
- ☐ Reading comprehension questions
- ☐ Text exemplars
- ☐ Age-appropriate vocabulary lists
- ☐ Dictated sentence examples
- ☐ Creation of self-assessment materials
- ☐ Generating knowledge organisers
- ☐ Support for formative assessment approaches
- ☐ Generating ideas for lesson activities.

However, there wasn't uniform agreement on all these uses. For example, text exemplars were given as an example of a resource that took longer to generate by AI in the previous case study. This is where time to explore, develop prompting techniques and sharing of

approaches between teachers is beneficial, in order to identify what works in a specific setting.

In addition to the list above, there were also several mentions of personalisation and adapting materials to support inclusive practice. You can read more about these in the next section: [Inclusive Practice](#).

Several participants reported that AI-enabled approaches strengthened existing pedagogical practices rather than replacing them:

“One teacher successfully used Google Gemini to “brainstorm and plan a Hywel Roberts style ‘botheredness’ lesson, illustrating how the tool can support specific pedagogical approaches.”

Primary AI Project Lead

Other effective uses involved tasks that would have been very time intensive without the use of AI:

- ☐ Developing a bespoke pantomime script for the end of year performance
- ☐ Generating ideas and activities for a class assembly on the Victorians
- ☐ Sourcing ideas for a topic that hadn’t been taught previously.

The majority of use cases involved the creation of teaching resources, rather than using AI directly with students to enhance lessons. However, in one primary school a teacher reported success with using AI to generate interactive, live illustrations from pupils’ descriptive writing to engage learners and spark discussion.

Across all studies, the vital role of the teacher in the creation of resources was highlighted – materials were rarely classroom-ready on the first output, and required careful checking of content, level and layout (e.g. to avoid too much text on slides).

“Sometimes getting what you want from an AI tool takes more time than creating the resource from scratch, but the more you get used to using AI tools the better you get at prompting for the outcome you are looking for.”

Primary Teacher – Survey Response

Many settings ensured that effective prompting was a high priority in professional development sessions for staff to achieve the highest quality outputs. Other participants encouraged the use of custom instructions within a specific tool to set the expectations for any work created (e.g. naming the specification or curriculum being used), which helped to reduce the number of ‘americanisms’ and lack of relevance to English national curriculum standards.

In terms of specific tools and their appropriateness for generating lesson materials, no one chatbot was highlighted as producing the best results – although one school found it challenging to encourage staff to move from using ChatGPT to Copilot, as they had become familiar with the tool. In general, schools used the tool that aligned with the enterprise model available in school, namely Google Gemini or Microsoft Copilot. Chalkie was explicitly mentioned in two schools as an effective tool for creating presentations (there is a free version with a limit of 5 resources per week). Brisk was also evaluated by one school and found to be useful as resources were fully editable, although slides could be rather text-heavy – see the [appendix](#) for the full review.

Case Study Spotlight – All Saints Catholic High School

A secondary school developed curriculum-aligned cover resources using Copilot, with staff commentary so that they could be delivered effectively by non-specialists. Some staff reported substantial time savings while simultaneously improving the quality and curriculum relevance of cover work. The Director of Maths used Copilot to create a bank of cover resources linked to topics in each year group and reported that:

“it’s been a massive time saver. There is no way we would have got as much done without using Copilot”.

It has been hard to measure direct impact on learners, but for students in subjects where teachers have had long-term absence, the project lead felt that there was definitely an impact:

AI-generated cover work has led to less loss of learning, “because they are getting something that is meaningful and links to their learning, so they are not going to fall behind in terms of their peers”.

An incidental observation from this project was that students were quick to identify when AI had been used and there was some resistance to this, so staff began to modify materials to fit existing department templates.

Case Study Spotlight – Lowfield Primary School

A primary school used AI tools to help generate science retrieval quizzes. Pupil voice and book scrutiny suggested improved recall of previous learning and greater consistency in retrieval practice across lessons in comparison with a control group where these weren’t used. Although the impact is most likely due to the use of the retrieval quizzes themselves, AI made the process of creating these quizzes easier and quicker for staff (100% of staff in the control group agreed that generating the quizzes was more manageable with AI) and therefore more likely to continue their use.



Inclusive Practice

Several schools identified significant opportunities for improving accessibility and inclusion. Examples included:

- ☐ Simplifying texts
- ☐ Simplifying worksheets or making them more challenging to suit learners needs
- ☐ Suggesting stretch and challenge activities on a topic
- ☐ Generating additional scaffolds
- ☐ Generating vocabulary lists
- ☐ Creating a vocabulary mat for a new child
- ☐ Creating alternative explanations for learners
- ☐ Producing SEND targets and documentation.

Many teachers felt AI could increase access to the curriculum when used thoughtfully and checked carefully by staff. One school used AI tools to rapidly create accessible versions of texts and adapt resources for pupils with differing needs, enabling teachers to focus more time on implementation and support.

In another primary school, the SENDCo (special educational needs and disabilities co-ordinator) used AI to help draft targets for pupils with SEND, making the process of creating personalised documentation quicker and more manageable.

In the case study below, you can read about how one school used AI to support the implementation of a new teaching approach to support sentence development. The technology was used to enhance the expertise of the teachers by allowing them to focus on the specific approach and spend less time finding suitable examples.

Case Study Spotlight – Abbeyfield Primary School

This primary school has a pupil referral unit for pupils with high levels of SEND need and nearly two thirds of all pupils have English as an Additional Language (EAL). The AI project lead found that teachers were keen to embrace the technology, and early adopters weren't necessarily the ones she expected. This may relate to the particular context of the school - AI tools enabled teachers to respond in a timely fashion to new arrivals who may not have much English nor have accessed the English national curriculum before. Teachers were able to generate bespoke resources to ensure that children could access the curriculum, but also, importantly, "make sure that they're included within the whole culture of our classroom".

Specific uses involved supporting the implementation of Colourful Semantics, a teaching approach to teach children how to build and understand sentence structures using visual colour prompts. AI was used to generate, for example, a three-part sentence using the key vocabulary for one child, but also four- and five-part sentences for other groups, so that they're learning in a systematic way to structure the English

language. This kind of differentiation would be hard to replicate in the course of a busy day without the support of AI.

Administrative staff at this school found AI very useful for simplifying language in school communications for parents, many of whom also have English as an additional language. This included generating text for their text-messaging service, which requires communication of the key messages in simple language within a restricted number of characters.



Staff attitudes

We know from the research that in order to effectively implement any change in organisations, we need to engage and unite staff in what is being implemented⁸. The use of artificial intelligence is no different, although one thing perhaps needs to be made clear at the start of this section: in our opinion, use of AI in schools shouldn't be mandatory. It is a personal choice to use AI tools to support a role and underpin the professional expertise of staff. Many teachers and support staff will be able to continue to carry out their roles effectively without its use. At the same time, settings may wish to provide every member of staff with the opportunity to use AI, underpinned with targeted professional development, clear guidelines on acceptable use and the opportunity to share good practice with peers. Even where a school or trust doesn't encourage the use of AI by staff within the school context, we recommend some essential professional development to inform teachers and support staff about the fundamentals of how AI works and its risks – both to inform staff of the reasoning behind any ban on AI, and to provide teachers with the key knowledge to help support learners in their understanding and use of the technology.

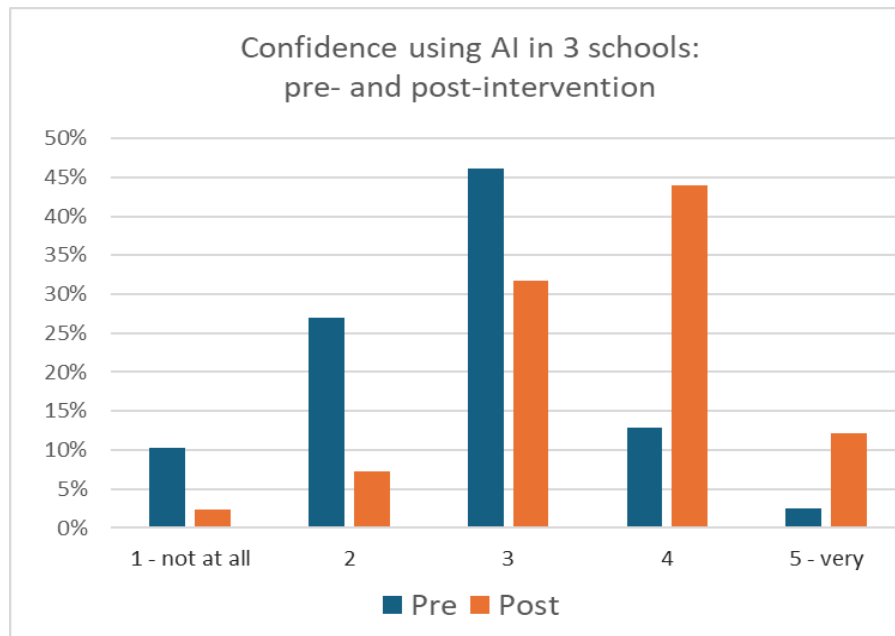
One aspect of engaging staff in the adoption of a new technology is its perceived usefulness (for example the Technology Acceptance Model from Davis found a strong correlation between perceived usefulness and actual use of a specific information technology tool)⁹. Ease of use was also found in this research to have a bearing on acceptance, and below you can read how confidence levels in using AI changed during the project. There was also another significant dimension to whether or not teachers and support staff were using AI across the project, namely the ethical concerns of the user.

During the course of this year-long project, staff confidence and attitudes across participating schools changed significantly. The average level of staff confidence in using AI tools to support their role (among both teachers and support staff) in three schools prior

⁸ See recommendations from Education Endowment Foundation. (2026). A school's guide to implementation.

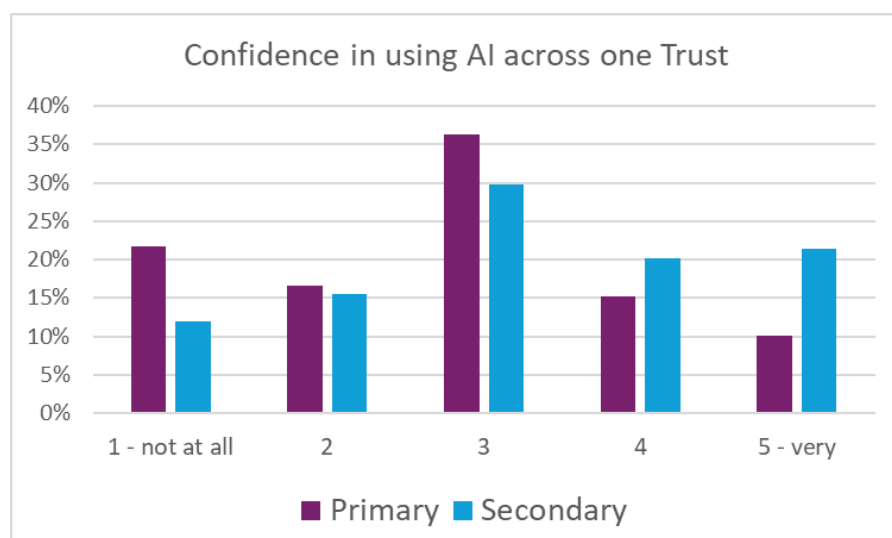
⁹ Davis, F.D. (1989). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease Of Use, And User Acceptance.

to intervention and training was 2.69 (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is very confident, total number of respondents = 79). Post-intervention this increased to 3.60, among 41 staff members. The chart below illustrates the distribution of responses, and notably the change in the number of staff responding with a 4 or 5 out of 5, indicating higher levels of confidence (the proportion of staff increased from 16% to 56%).

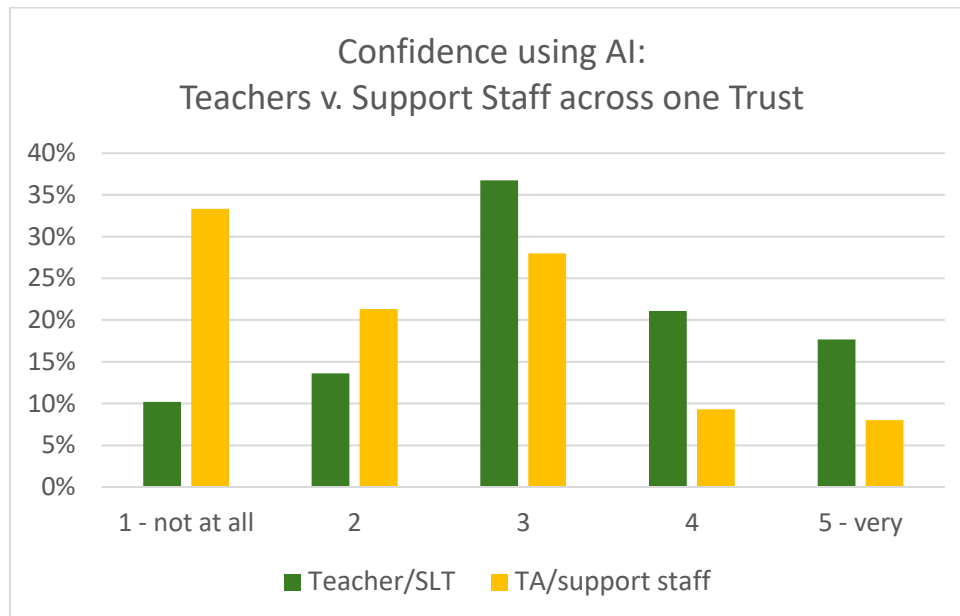


The average confidence level across all surveyed schools in the summer term and a total of 371 members of staff was 3.36, with 46% rating themselves as a 4 or 5.

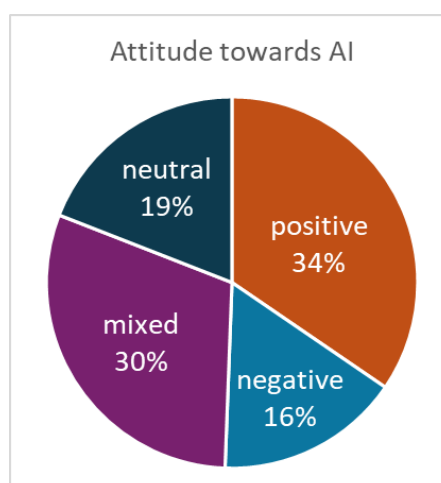
Although there wasn't a large difference across the whole group in terms of secondary and primary staff in summer term, there was a notable difference across one trust where no formal training had been provided prior to the survey being completed: staff in the secondary settings (3 schools), reported higher levels of confidence, with 22% rating themselves as a 5 (very confident). Across the primary schools (7 schools), only 10% rated themselves as a 5, with 22% rating themselves as a 1.



This disparity is partially explained due to there being nearly twice as many responses from support staff (including teaching assistants) working in the primary settings compared to secondary (41% versus 23% of the total responses). Support staff were three times more likely to score themselves as 1 out of 5 in confidence than teachers and members of the senior leadership team (SLT) - 33% versus 10%.



Attitudes towards the use of AI in schools also varied across the staff cohort. In the summer term surveys, around a third held primarily positive views, just under a third held mixed positive and negative views, with 16% holding negative views and the remainder neutral or unsure. When asked to select a word or phrase to describe their attitude toward the technology, the top three across 4 schools and 281 members of staff always included three of the following: excited, curious, cautious and optimistic. The other possible responses were: conflicted, nervous, not keen, not sure and neutral.



Where staff weren't using AI tools, the main reason given was the lack of training, although there were also a large number of responses citing data privacy concerns, the

environmental impact, and ethical concerns such as over-reliance, misuse by pupils on assessments, copyright issues, stifling creativity and lack of accuracy.

In qualitative responses, attitudes were even more clearly differentiated prior to any training:

“I am opposed to the use of generative AI on a professional and ethical level.”

“AI is terrible for climate change and for our brains, it is also unreliable and I have stopped using it after a trial as it was producing material with incorrect facts in.”

“I feel it sets a bad precedent for pupils: children mirror what they see in adults, so if they see us using AI for lessons it encourages them to do so as well.”

“I love using AI, it makes 1 hour tasks into 10 minutes. Of course, you have to be cautious with the response it provides but it can be really helpful.”

“I’m excited to use AI as it can save on workload but need to double check as it can still give up errors.”

“Limitless possibilities and potential”

A common theme across all schools at the start of the project was a sense that AI wasn’t something a good teacher should be using, that it might undermine their skills or make them lazy. This echoes wider concerns from the research base. The report from the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 notes that “[a]s AI becomes more integrated into the classroom, apprehension is growing that teachers could face de-professionalisation, with their role diminishing as their responsibilities are gradually outsourced to AI.”¹⁰ A study from Newman et al conducted in 3 secondary schools found that 7% of teachers “suggested that their professional identity is depleted by their use of AI.”¹¹

One of the project participants, working in a primary school, noted that, “initially there was a strong sense of professional guilt.” Staff felt that using AI meant they were lazy or they were concerned that they might do something wrong. However, after a programme of professional development:

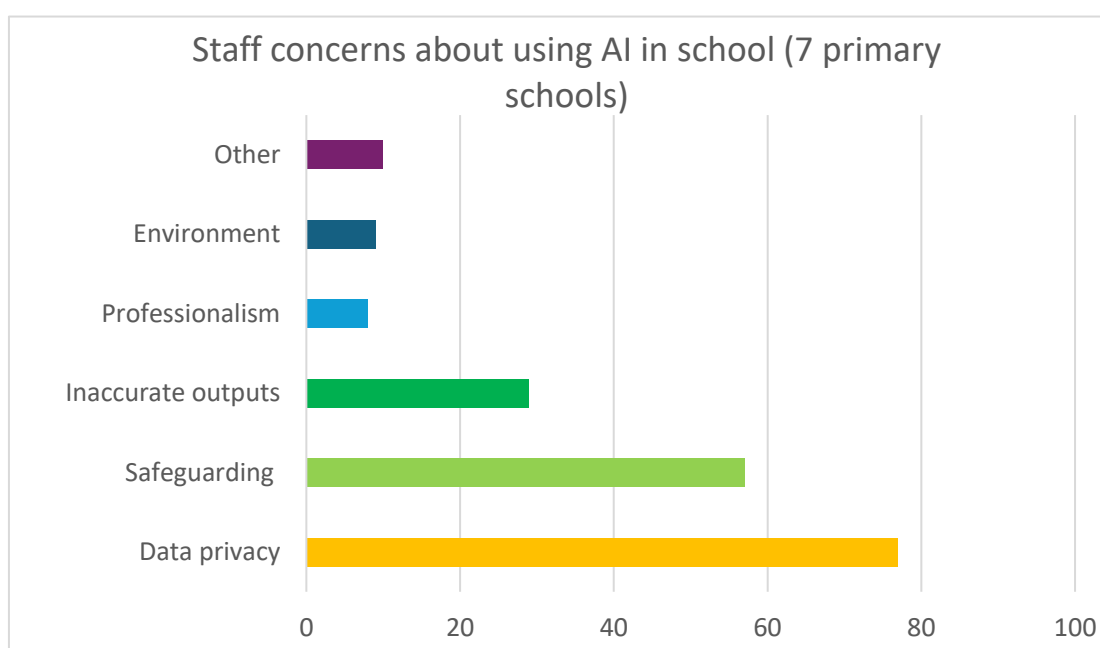
“the sense of professional guilt and the fear of being viewed as lazy or ‘not working hard enough’ has completely vanished from the comments in the second survey. Teachers no longer see AI as an unethical shortcut or cheat, but more of a legitimate tool to help reduce their workload.”

¹⁰ International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030. (2025). Promoting and protecting teacher agency in the age of artificial intelligence: position paper.

¹¹ Newman, R., Cumming, S., & Bungay, N. (2026). Autonomy and agency in the age of algorithms: How is AI shaping professional knowledge, identity and practice? : Chartered College.

In another primary school, 50% of the members of the working group (6 teachers) felt that using AI had affected their sense of being a 'real teacher' in a slightly positive way, giving them time for the more important parts of the role. The remaining teachers reported no impact on this measure.

Below you can see the main risks and concerns about using AI in school identified by staff in 7 other primary schools (from a total of 144 respondents) following a program of professional development and time to explore tools:



The main concern was data privacy mentioned by over half of the respondents (53%), followed by safeguarding risks and misuse of the technology (40%). Many staff were worried about the accuracy of outputs from AI (20%) and this was reflected in the qualitative responses across the project. Other common concerns were the effect of using the technology on their own professionalism (6%) and the environmental impact (6%). Other concerns raised included cognitive offloading, bias, the effect on jobs and creativity, copyright, and the quality and relevance of outputs.

In the case studies below, you can read how the AI project leads in two primary schools worked to reassure staff about the risks and facilitated a change in attitude. As with any change process, making the benefits and relevance clear to staff is vital. The most effective factor in increasing engagement was not simply training about AI, but opportunities to use AI in ways that addressed immediate professional needs and concerns.

Case Study Spotlight – Watercliffe Meadow Community Primary School

At the start of the project, over two thirds of staff were using AI to support their role (72%) and average confidence was 2.52 (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all confident and 5 = very confident). However, the technology wasn't embraced fully:

"Initially there was a strong sense of professional guilt. Staff worried that using AI meant they were "not working hard enough," that it was a lazy "short cut," or that they might "do something wrong" and compromise their role. There was also active anxiety regarding job security."

Following two staff meetings and time to explore the tools, these kinds of responses were absent from the final survey. However, staff were still cautious about the reliability of the technology and were not always convinced using it was in the children's best interests.

Average confidence in the final survey had increased to 3.08, and "the barrier of not knowing what tools exist or how to access them has largely been resolved for teachers. Most are now confidently using tools such as Google Gemini to support with some administrative tasks and production of resources to be used in the classroom."

Case Study Spotlight – Nether Green Junior School

The headteacher and computing lead led this project within school, and they encountered considerable resistance to the use of AI among staff at the beginning.

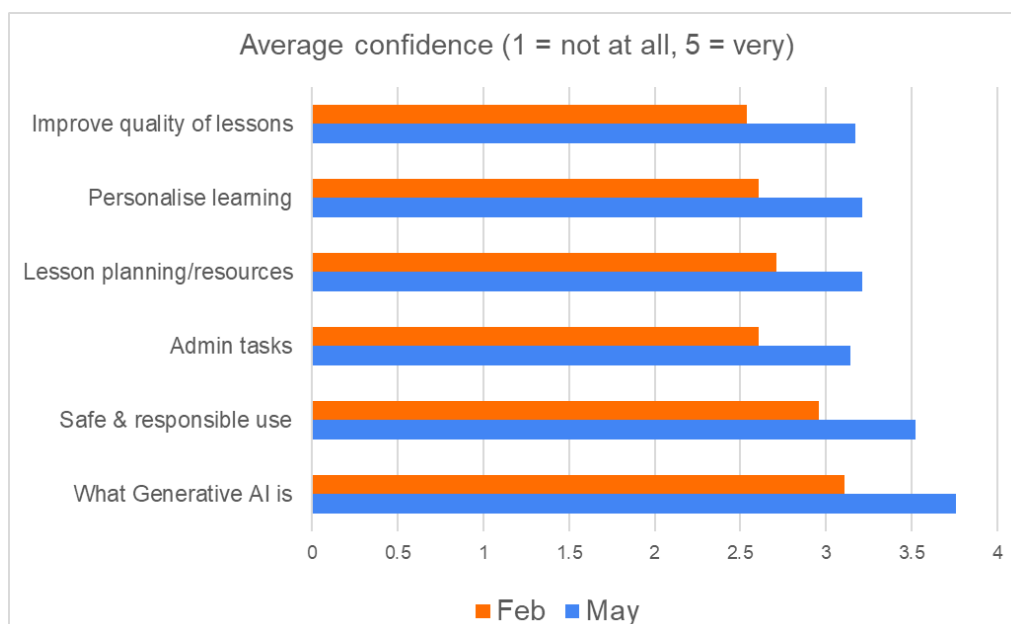
There were "a lot of people who said that they never use AI, that they shouldn't use it and that it takes away all teachers' skill from teaching."

They delivered three training sessions to staff, outlining the risks and acknowledging the drawbacks of the tools at the start, but then moving on to demonstrating a variety of tools, with clear guidance on how they could be used to complement a teacher's expertise. Finally, teachers were asked to deliver a lesson that had been part-created by AI.

Following the professional development sessions and hands-on exploration of the tools, there was a measurable shift in attitudes, with one of the biggest opponents moving to using it every day to personalise learning for his pupils. Between February and May, the proportion of staff rating their confidence as a 5 (where 1 was not at all confident and 5 was very confident) more than doubled, from 14% to 32%.

In February, around a fifth of staff rated themselves as not at all confident (21%). By May, this reduced to 4%, representing just a single respondent.

Confidence increased across all areas of using AI to support their role and understanding what Generative AI is (see the chart below – this includes all staff, teaching and non-teaching, n=29):



Interestingly, the only area where confidence fell (from an average of 2.96 to 2.90) was in talking to pupils about AI, which may reflect staff being more aware of what they don't know as they received more training in the subject.



Barriers

The main barriers to successful implementation of using AI tools to support staff roles were predictable, although there were some very specific barriers relating to the nature of the technology. The following were all reported by project leads:

- ☐ Low staff confidence and AI literacy
- ☐ Insufficient time for training and experimentation
- ☐ Concerns about reliability and quality of outputs
- ☐ Professional, ethical and creativity-related concerns
- ☐ Safeguarding, privacy and governance concerns
- ☐ Leadership confidence and organisational readiness
- ☐ Student resistance to AI generated content in lessons

“High amongst [the barriers] was navigating a wide spectrum of staff attitudes, ranging from cautious to over-enthusiastic, which required careful balancing. Time proved to be our most consistent constraint.”

Primary AI Project Lead

A notable finding from the project is that most barriers were human and organisational rather than technical. Schools generally found that once governance was established and staff received practical training and support, concerns reduced and adoption increased. The evidence suggests that successful AI implementation in schools is primarily a change-management and governance challenge rather than a technology challenge.

There were also some more specific challenges encountered across the project. For example, teachers in one school had been using ChatGPT effectively and then were asked to move to Copilot, requiring time and effort to get used to a new platform. Co-researchers in two schools commented on the resistance of students to AI-generated materials:

“I have noticed that pupils can sometimes become less engaged if they feel a task has not been created or adapted personally by the teacher.”

Primary AI Project Lead

One participant also noted that AI brought new challenges in the shape of parental communications, including complaints, and a number of job applications that had clearly been written by AI and lacked personal voice. This reflects wider conversations with school leaders about the changing landscape as a result of wider access to AI tools.

Recommendations

Considered as a whole, the findings suggest that successful AI adoption depends less on the tools themselves and more on leadership, governance, staff confidence and organisational readiness. The following recommendations are designed with this in mind to support schools and trusts in implementing AI safely, ethically and effectively.

1. Start with governance, not technology

The project demonstrated that successful and safe implementation of AI begins with clear governance. Schools that prioritised responsible use and safeguarding developed their AI policy alongside clear acceptable use expectations for staff before attempting large-scale adoption.

We recommend that schools and trusts:

- ☐ Develop an AI policy and acceptable use agreement for staff and pupils
- ☐ Align AI governance with existing safeguarding, GDPR, online safety and information governance processes
- ☐ Establish clear accountability for decision-making and oversight
- ☐ Review policies regularly to reflect the pace of technological change
- ☐ Ensure all staff, governors and trustees understand the opportunities and risks associated with AI.

2. Focus on educational value and organisational priorities

AI should not be adopted simply because it is there. The most successful projects focused on a clearly defined problem, such as workload reduction, adaptive teaching, retrieval practice or generating cover work. Implementation was most effective where AI supported existing priorities rather than creating additional initiatives.

We recommend that schools and trusts:

- ☐ Identify specific problems AI may help to address
- ☐ Define clear success criteria before implementation
- ☐ Prioritise educational impact over novelty
- ☐ Evaluate whether AI improves outcomes, efficiency or accessibility
- ☐ Be prepared to stop using tools that do not add sufficient value.

However, one project lead recommended that, “when implementing AI, schools should focus on the broad, cross-school utility of the technology rather than trying to make it too niche or specific right away. AI thrives when it is used to solve universal challenges across various roles - from teaching assistants and classroom teachers to subject leaders and the SLT.” She found that different members of staff came across ways of using the AI tools that

were effective for their own practice, but that weren't necessarily predictable at the start, so narrowing it down risked missing out on these opportunities for development.

3. Invest in professional development

Across the project, staff confidence and attitudes towards AI were the strongest predictors of successful implementation. Schools that provided training, opportunities for experimentation, and time for discussion and sharing of experience reported higher levels of engagement and more effective use of AI tools. Time spent on effective prompting, in particular, helped staff to be more efficient and led to higher quality outputs.

Addressing wider staff attitudes and concerns (for example around the ethical issues and sense of using AI as being unprofessional) is also vital for informed buy-in to any implementation of the technology.

We recommend that schools and trusts include professional development on:

- ☐ Understanding AI and how it works
- ☐ Safeguarding, GDPR and ethical considerations
- ☐ Effective prompting techniques
- ☐ Critical evaluation of AI outputs
- ☐ Practical classroom and operational use cases
- ☐ Opportunities to share examples of effective practice.

4. Establish approved tools and clear processes

A recurring theme throughout the project was the need for consistency in tool selection and usage. Several schools and trusts found value in creating approved-tool lists and requiring an appropriate data protection impact assessment before introducing new tools.

We recommend that schools and trusts:

- ☐ Create an approved list of AI tools
- ☐ Consider GDPR, safeguarding and age restrictions before adoption
- ☐ Use existing procurement and DPIA processes where appropriate
- ☐ Provide clear guidance on when AI should and should not be used
- ☐ Monitor developments and review approved tools regularly.

5. Maintain professional judgement and quality assurance

The project consistently found that AI outputs require careful review. Participants reported inaccuracies, assumptions, curriculum misalignment and bias across all major AI tools.

We recommend that schools and trusts ensure that:

- ☐ Responsibility for content remains with the member of staff using it
- ☐ All AI outputs are reviewed for accuracy, accessibility and bias
- ☐ AI use supports professional expertise rather than replaces it

- ☐ AI tools are not used to make decisions that impact on pupils or staff.

As one participant noted, AI is often most effective as a "thinking partner" or drafting tool rather than a finished solution.

6. Prioritise collaboration and communities of practice

One of the most successful aspects of the project was the opportunity for schools to learn from one another. Participants repeatedly highlighted the value of sharing examples, discussing challenges and exploring implementation collectively.

We recommend that schools and trusts:

- ☐ Establish AI working groups or champions
- ☐ Encourage peer sharing of effective practice
- ☐ Collaborate across schools where possible
- ☐ Share examples of successful prompts, resources and processes
- ☐ Create mechanisms for staff feedback and reflection.

7. Use AI where evidence and experience suggest the greatest benefit

Choosing when to use AI is as important as the tools you use - not all tasks can be enhanced or made more efficient by using the technology. Particular promise was identified in individual resource creation, generating cover materials aligned to schemes of work, creation of retrieval practice quizzes, and personalising content. However, schools and trusts should remain cautious about assuming impact on pupil outcomes without appropriate evaluation and evidence gathering in their own setting.

We recommend that schools and trusts:

- ☐ Provide time to staff to explore effective use
- ☐ Establish processes for sharing good practice
- ☐ Collect evidence as to the impact of different use cases
- ☐ Examine the existing evidence on what works

8. Contribute to the growing evidence base

One final recommendation from this project is that schools continue to engage critically with AI and contribute their findings to the wider profession. The technology is developing far more rapidly than formal educational research can currently respond.

We recommend that schools and trusts:

- ☐ Evaluate implementation systematically
- ☐ Gather both quantitative and qualitative evidence
- ☐ Share findings through networks and professional communities
- ☐ Investigate impact on pupils as well as staff
- ☐ Continue to question where AI genuinely improves education.

Final Reflection

Evidence from this project suggests that the greatest risk is neither adopting AI nor rejecting it entirely but failing to engage with it thoughtfully. Schools that approach AI through clear governance, professional development, collaboration and evidence-informed implementation are best placed to harness its benefits while managing its risks. While evidence relating to pupil outcomes remains limited, there is growing evidence that AI can improve efficiency, creativity and accessibility when accompanied by these processes. Above all, AI should be viewed as a tool that can enhance professional practice, not as a substitute for the expertise, judgement and relationships that remain at the heart of effective education.

“The impact of this project on our school community has been incredibly positive:

Confidence Boost: *Staff who were initially hesitant are now much more confident in navigating and using AI in their day-to-day roles.*

Workload Reduction: *Across the board, staff are reporting a noticeable, genuine reduction in their overall workload, freeing up time for high-impact teaching and learning.*

Future Readiness: *We have built a robust, secure foundation that ensures we are well-prepared to safely expand our AI initiatives in the years to come.”*

Primary AI Project Lead

Next Steps

Participants in the research project agreed, overwhelmingly, that one of the highlights had been the opportunity to learn from and share ideas with colleagues across the city. The group will continue to meet via the existing AI working group in Sheffield to maintain these connections. The majority of participants also plan to continue their research within their own settings and maintain momentum with professional development and adoption.

Learn Sheffield has already recruited schools for the next year of the research project, and there are plans to extend this to an online project for schools outside of the region. For more information or to get involved please email cdicentre@learnsheffield.co.uk.

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Appendix

Policy templates

These templates can provide a starting point for policy development in schools:

- South West Grid for Learning – [Artificial Intelligence in Schools Policy Template](#)
- Mark Anderson (ICT Evangelist) – [AI Policy Template for Schools](#)
- London Grid for Learning – [Online safety policy updated for AI](#)

Plus there is an example of an [Draft Acceptable Use Policy](#) co-created as part of the Sheffield AI Work Group.

Survey instruments

Staff Survey

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet provided, and
 - Consent to taking part in the research
 - Do not consent to taking part in the research (meaning responses will be used by the school only)
2. Name of school/organisation
3. What phase(s) do you teach?
 - EYFS
 - Key stage 1
 - Key stage 2
 - Key stage 3
 - Key stage 4
 - Key stage 5
 - N/a
4. What is your role in school?
 - Member of SLT
 - Teacher
 - Non-teaching staff
 - Other
5. Does your school have an AI policy or strategy in place? *
 - No
 - Currently in development
 - Not sure
6. How confident do you feel using generative AI tools to support your role? (1 = not at all / not relevant - 5 = very)
7. How do you feel about using generative AI to support your role in school? (Tick all that apply) *
 - Excited
 - Cautious
 - Optimistic
 - Nervous
 - Curious
 - Conflicted

- Neutral
 - Not keen
 - Not sure
8. Can you add any detail about your response above?
9. Which of the following tools have you used to support your role in school?
- ChatGPT
 - Microsoft CoPilot
 - Google Gemini
 - Perplexity
 - Grok
 - Midjourney
 - Teachmate AI
 - Magic School AI
 - SLT AI
 - Canva AI tools
 - Google NotebookLM
 - None of the above
10. Are there any other tools you use regularly?
11. How do you use these tools?
- I don't use these tools
 - Admin e.g. writing letters
 - Lesson ideas
 - Creating lesson resources
 - Assessment/grading
 - Teaching activities i.e. using AI in lessons
 - Personalising content for learners
 - Other
12. Please add any more detail about how you use AI tools in your role.
13. If you don't currently use generative AI tools, what are the reasons for this?
- Lack of training/support
 - Ban on generative AI in school
 - Privacy/ethical concerns
 - Environmental concerns
 - Not relevant
 - Other
14. Please add any detail about your response above
15. How effective are AI tools in reducing your workload currently? (1 = not at all/ not applicable - 5 = very)
16. Have you received any training for using generative AI in your role?
- Yes - in school CPD
 - Yes - external training
 - Booked onto some in the future
 - No
17. Would you like training on AI to support your role?
- Yes - to learn more about what it is
 - Yes - to support admin tasks
 - Yes - to support lesson planning
 - Yes - to support inclusive practice
 - Yes - to be able to teach about it to pupils
 - No
18. Please add any more commentary here about your use of generative AI in school

Case Studies

[Abbeyfield Primary Academy](#)

[All Saints Catholic High School](#)

[Arbourthorne Primary School](#)

[Cascade MAT](#)

[Inova MAT](#)

[Lowfield Primary School](#)

[Nether Green Junior School](#)

[Norton Free CoE Primary School](#)

[Prince Edward Primary School](#)

[Watercliffe Meadow Community Primary School](#)

[Wybourn Primary School](#)

GIAI Case Study – Abbeyfield Primary Academy

1. School details

Abbeyfield Primary Academy is part of the Five Rivers Multi Academy Trust consisting of two primary schools. It includes a bespoke provision for pupils with high levels of SEND (Social Emotional Mental Health difficulties). Pupils speak more than 36 languages, and more than half of the intake have English as an Additional Language.

2. Research Question

What is the impact of using AI to support the implementation of the Colourful Semantics approach in school?

Colourful Semantics is a teaching approach developed by Alison Bryan to teach children how to build and understand sentence structures. It uses visual colour cues as prompts for the meaning roles in a sentence, for example *Who? What doing? What? Where?*

3. Policy

The Trust has AI policy in place plus a whitelist of AI tools, including Copilot, TeachMateAI, Canva AI, and AI tools built into Arbor MIS. Pupils are not allowed to use generative AI tools in school.

4. Systems & Processes

The Trust set up an AI work group in the autumn term, consisting of the Trust CEO, heads of schools and other members of senior leadership with an interest in the technology. This group developed an AI policy including a list of approved tools.

The AI project lead delivered whole school training on AI in the Autumn term to outline risks and benefits of the technology, and this was followed up in the spring term using a lesson study model in small groups of teachers and teaching assistants to explore how AI could be used to develop materials for the Colourful Semantics approach. Early adopters were paired with less confident staff members to work together, which worked well. Throughout the year information was also



provided by the AI project lead during ECT (Early Careers Teacher) mentor meetings to support these teachers to use AI productively.

4. Barriers

The main barrier was teacher confidence and concerns around data privacy, however targeted professional development helped to mitigate both of these.

5. Successes

There were a number of successes through the year. Primarily, AI was found to be really useful in creating bespoke resources to support the Colourful Semantics approach, for example generating a three-part sentence relating to the topic being studied. This is really important as the school has a high number of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and about a fifth have SEND needs (special educational needs and disabilities), so there is a need for personalised content for a wide range of pupils. At the same time, there may be children in a class who have just arrived in the country, completely new to English and the curriculum. AI enables teachers to quickly produce content at a suitable level for these learners to ensure they are included in lessons, whilst also pushing pupils working at greater depth. So AI isn't the approach itself, but it enables teachers to concentrate on implementing the approach effectively, whilst reducing their cognitive load of that a resource looks like for every child. Teachers reported that they were able to give a much better degree of scaffolding for all of their learners.

In the pupil referral unit, teachers are using Canva AI to produce bespoke, highly-personalised resources for the children, harnessing their particular interests in order to fully engage pupils. The year 5 teacher used AI to generate a pantomime script for the end of year performance, which the pupils loved. Without AI they wouldn't have had the capacity to be so creative. The admin team use AI in communications, as information needs to go out in simple English for parents, many of whom have English as an additional language. It is used to simplify letters, but also for the text-messaging service which has a character limit – AI is really helpful in producing a text in 150 characters in simple language.

6. Teacher attitudes

One of the surprising aspects of the project was how many members of staff were early adopters. According to a survey conducted in September 2025, over half of staff (53%) were already using AI. In any initiative you often get a few pockets of keen adopters, but in the case of AI there were already a large number of staff that were using it, and then sharing that within their individual teams. Attitudes toward the technology were also generally positive. This is likely a consequence of the high level of mobility and need for adaptive teaching in school – teachers recognised that AI could be something that helped with this.

One experienced teacher wasn't keen on the use of AI, as they felt they had the expertise to tech without it. After hearing other teachers talking about the tools and specific uses, she recognised the benefit of it and was also aware of who to go to for support.

Overall, AI use has become embedded in general practice and is saving time when used for specific tasks.

GIAI Case Study – All Saints Catholic High School

1. School details

All Saints Catholic High School is part of St Clare CMAT. It is a 11-18 school with 1400 students on roll and 100 teaching staff.

2. Research Question

What impact does the use of AI for creating cover resources have on staff workload and wellbeing?

3. Policy

AI was written into the Acceptable Use Policy for staff and students from September 2026 at a school level. Agreed tools shared in CPD with staff in conjunction with Network teams (Microsoft Co-Pilot).

4. Systems & Processes

Initially the plan was for a smaller working group which was voluntary: mainly staff with a Subject or Curriculum Leadership role as they were responsible for setting cover in case of longer term staff absence. This expanded to include individual teaching staff who wanted to develop use for their own planned absences. Ideas and resource sharing was the main focus of meeting time.

The focus was on creating cover work which was directly linked to the Scheme Of Work in a subject. Often cover is generic and a 'time-filler' rather than specifically linked to current learning. Where non-specialist staff were delivering work the aim was to ensure that learning was purposeful and resources supported cover staff to be able to deliver content which was not within their specialism. This was trialled with example activities created but only then implemented when staff were absent.

Small opt-in workshops held during staff Teach-meet to cover the basics of Generative AI systems, uses, risks, effective prompting. Similar workshops held as part of wider trust Inset. Data was collected at start of year to assess current use and again at the end of the year.

5. Barriers

Time for training was biggest barrier in an already busy CPD calendar. Not all staff have been able to attend training due to opt in nature of Teach-meets with multiple different CPD sessions running at the same time. Sessions repeated a number of times and again during whole trust Inset to try to cover as many staff as possible. Initially, setting cover took more time - staff were not using previously created activities which could just be picked up and used. This was a particular barrier at certain times of the year when workload was at its highest (e.g. assessment marking weeks). However, benefits to students' learning were seen as a priority.

6. Successes

Maths: The Director of Maths has used Co-pilot to create a bank of cover resources linked to each topic and for each year group. For each unit, 3 worksheets and answer copies were created. By using the custom instructions function, this meant that the correct SOW and exam specifications were followed each time without needing to add these into the prompts. In addition, teacher work-



thoughts were created meaning that non-specialist staff could follow these with the class to support students to access the work.

Worksheets could be easily simplified or made more challenging using co-pilot and asking for a version aimed at Grade 3 or Grade 7. “It’s been a massive time saver. There is no way we would have got as much done without using Co-Pilot”

Modern Foreign Languages: During the first half term a member of the languages team was absent from school for a period of three weeks. The languages team created cover work for these lessons but these were generic work sheets linked to the topic but not necessarily accurately following the scheme of work or specific content required for each lesson. The team reflected on the need for a different approach to long term absence in the department so that classes were not left at a disadvantage.

When there was a further period of staff absence later in the year, the Subject Leader for MFL inputted the relevant Knowledge Organisers and schemes of work for each year group into Co-Pilot. Co-pilot produced cover worksheets which matched the content from the SOW. Further prompting adapted the worksheets by adding in explanations of key grammar points which students needed to remember/ understand. Co-pilot was then prompted to create answer versions for students to self-assess their work. Finally, a cover-teacher explanation sheet was produced which gave the cover teacher a simple explanation they could give to students about how to complete a task.

In addition, Co-Pilot was used to adapt existing lesson resources so that certain of these could be delivered by a non-specialist. For example, Co-Pilot was prompted to add detailed explanations to PowerPoint lesson slides which in a usual lesson would be added verbally by the class teacher. The aim was for the cover teacher to be able to deliver more of the curriculum in line with the scheme of work. For some lessons, particularly at Key Stage 3, these were successful and simple enough to be delivered by a non-specialist. However, creating these was more time consuming than creating worksheets, as individual slides had to be modified one at a time so these were not used often during the period of absence.

Feedback from cover staff was positive about the cover worksheets: “having the explanations meant that I could help the students instead of them having to ask other people in the class if they didn’t understand”.

English: AI was used to create summaries of core texts for cover teachers to give them an understanding of students’ prior learning. This enabled cover teachers to better understand the tasks students were being asked to complete and to give examples and support from the cover teacher summary sheet.

“I’d been thinking about doing this for a while but never had the time. AI was able to do it really quickly.”

Science: Whilst Co-Pilot was not used to create cover resources, the science department used it to generate ideas for cover work which linked to prior learning. This was successful in creating more variety in the work given for students, particularly if a member of staff was missing multiple lessons with the same class over a short period of time. Examples included: AI being used to create a data

set for an experiment which students could then analyse in the cover lesson. AI being used to add dual coding to a text to allow students to understand key terms without specialist input. AI being used to suggest challenge and stretch tasks and to scaffold and simplify texts so that all students in a class could access the work with a non-specialist.

7. Failures/Challenges

Staff lacked confidence in prompting to generate effective output meaning initially tasks took longer than setting more generic cover work, increasing workload. Encouraging staff to see the benefit of using AI to make the cover work link to the SOW was important as the temptation was to fall back on existing resources.

High levels of quality assurance and checking required to ensure outputs were high quality and met needs. Often AI added in assumed prior learning when this had not been covered in the SOW. Revision of prompts needed to ensure work was accessible to students. Mistakes were identified in content during checking.

8. Recommendations

- Custom instructions in Co-pilot supported with effective prompting. Eg. Always use UK English. Assume use is UK secondary school. Use White Rose maths curriculum. AQA French specification 8652 etc. Saved a lot of time and made output more accurate.
- Quality assurance of output is key. Check for errors, assumed prior knowledge.
- Students are becoming expert at recognising AI use (formatting, mistakes). Reformatting work into school / department style, font, layout was helpful to avoid this.

9. Survey data

Staff are increasingly using AI in school particularly for creating lesson and cover resources but also admin tasks and personalising content. More are now using Co-Pilot as the approved tool for use in school. Staff training has increased confidence and given ideas for how to use AI effectively to support teaching and learning and more are finding it a useful tool to reduce workload although few find AI makes a significant difference to their workload.

10. Next steps

Further training needed for all staff, as this was opt-in. Whole school priority for 2026-27 is adaptive teaching strategies so AI training will be developed to have more of a focus on this area of practice. Development of resources with the Computing department and PSHE lead to teach students about the benefits and risks of AI along with effective uses for revision.

11. Feedback on the AI Research Project

Would absolutely recommend – has been excellent CPD in an area I was not confident in at all. Has supported with the development of an AI AUP for staff and students. The research project has supported me to develop CPD which has meant that staff are more aware of risks as well as benefits of using AI – we are further ahead than we would have been on our journey because of the project. Has been useful to collaborate with colleagues from other schools – would have been helpful to have other secondary schools involved but much of the learning from the primary school projects has been applicable to our school context.

GIAI Case Study – Arbourthorne Community Primary School

School details

Arbourthorne Community Primary is a larger than average primary school based in the heart of the Arbourthorne Estate in the South East of Sheffield. The school is over-subscribed with 488 children on roll, including children in our 78 place Nursery. Our catchment is one of the most deprived in Sheffield and the country. 87% of our pupils come from households ranked IDACI 1 (most deprived).

The school has a highly complex demographic with 70% of pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium, a rising figure, and the proportion of pupils supported with SEND significantly above the national average at 40% SEND support and 8% EHCP. We host a Primary Integrated Resource Unit for children from across Sheffield with significant and complex learning needs. The percentage of pupils in the school with English as an additional language has increased significantly over time to 34% currently.

Policy

Prior to embarking on this research project, the school made the decision to have the use of Generative AI, by staff, as a 2025/26 focus. Therefore, the school's Online Safety and Acceptable Use policies were updated in September 2025 to include a policy on the use of Generative AI. When writing Generative AI into any policy this needs to be kept under regular review as AI opportunities and risks are continually developing. It was also agreed that the school's governing body would also have Generative AI as one of its focus areas as this is a rapidly developing technology with implications across many aspects of the school including safeguarding.

Research Question

How can selected AI tools be used effectively to provide time saving opportunities when creating lesson resources based on a teacher's planning?

Research and Findings

All Staff

A Professional Development Meeting (PDM) in September supported colleagues' basic understanding of AI, safety considerations, acceptable use and how AI presents opportunities for staff with various roles across the school. This baseline training will be repeated on an annual basis to keep all staff up-to-date and aware of developing trends, risks and opportunities. Following this PDM, staff completed a Generative AI survey in order for us to identify, in greater depth, their thinking about the use of AI in their role and perceived barriers to this.

Survey 1 Outcomes

67% of responses by colleagues expressed positive feelings about using Generative AI in their role, with only 19% of the team feeling confident about using AI tools. 26% of colleagues at the time of survey one felt AI was effective in reducing their workload.

Survey 2 Outcomes

Colleagues expressed similar levels of positive feelings towards using Generative AI in their role as they had at the time of survey one. However, 73% of colleagues completing survey two felt AI was effective in reducing workload up from 26% and 55% of the team now stated they felt confident to use AI tools compared to 19% at the time of survey one. It is noted that fewer people returned survey two.

Project Group

A small group of colleagues volunteered to be part of a project group to explore, trial and feedback their experience of using Generative AI tools in their resource and lesson preparation. Four project group sessions took place across the year to explore current use of AI in resource creation, share AI tools explored to date and carry out a group evaluation of a shortlist of tools. All tools in the shortlist were free to use or trial versions of a paid product. The project group agreed on the following shortlist of tools to evaluate: Chalkie AI, Gemini in Google Classroom and Brisk - a browser extension.

Having used the tools in their role as class teachers the group evaluated the three tools in terms of Benefits and Aspects to Consider.

AI Tool	Benefits of using the Tool	Aspects to Consider
Chalkie AI https://chalkie.ai/en-gb	- Built specifically as a tool for teachers/schools. - Calibrated to the National Curriculum. - Generates child-friendly slides and resources, visuals matched with the knowledge content of a slide. - Slides include appropriate images and diagrams to support the lesson content and AI generated audio within the slides. - Follow-on tasks created in the form of a worksheet can be adapted easily to partner or group activity.	- The free version limits you to five resources per week, and restricts AI editing capabilities. - Think about how the content generated aligns to pre-agreed schemes of work in your school. - Chalkie AI is owned by OpenAI, since April 2026.
Gemini in Google Classroom https://classroom.google.com	- A large range of tools available - Google slides generated had subject content appropriate for the year group. - Slides were not overloaded with content. - The re-level text tool is useful for creating different versions of a text for a range of abilities in your class	- Google Workspace for Education / Google Classroom needs to be set up and in place for teachers. - Some errors in content - for example in the comic strip creation tool spelling mistakes were made - the comic strip is not editable after generation. - Images chosen on the slides were not always useful or did not give strong visual support to the text. - Watch out for American spellings in the re-levelled text tool. This is the case even when the text inputted is British English.

Brisk https://app.briskteaching.com/	- Integrates with Google Workspace or Microsoft 365. - Some subject calibration with the National Curriculum. - Resources that are generated are fully editable. - Brisk add-on allows for editing within documents and/or slides. This includes features such as changing the reading level of a Google Doc within the document.	- Text heavy slides that need to be edited, potential for cognitive overload. - Images chosen on the slides were not always useful and could create misconceptions in learning if not swapped out.
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Project Group Outcomes

- Sometimes getting what you want from an AI tool takes more time than creating the resource from scratch but the more you get used to using AI tools the better you get at prompting for the outcome you are looking for.
- What you input has to be detailed to get the best out. Be specific with the prompt when creating slides or lesson ideas.
- I've shown other colleagues in my phase the AI tools we have trialled.
- Between 1 and 2 hours of time per week was estimated to have been saved by the teachers in the project group when using these tools compared with not using AI.

Recommendations

- To use Generative AI effectively you need to combine clear and specific prompting with agreed pedagogical approaches, secure teacher subject knowledge and an eye for detail.
- Watch out for inaccuracies. This could be in subject knowledge, AI hallucinations or the defaulting of many AI tools to American English. Critical thinking skills are key.
- Consider the importance of consistency across the school in the tools used. Do you want all colleagues to use tools from an agreed list? How will this list of tools be agreed, evaluated and kept up-to-date?
- Continual review of policy and practice is necessary with this rapidly developing technology and its implications across many aspects of the school including safeguarding.

Next steps

As a school we continue to keep developments in Generative AI within our school development plan. Maintaining a clear up-to-date policy which supports consistency and effective use by staff of Generative AI tools, across the range of roles colleagues hold within the organisation will continue to be a focus. In addition, we plan to work to support parents in developing their understanding of Generative AI and how they support their child/children to navigate this developing technology in a safe and informed way.

GIAI Case Study – Cascade MAT

1. Organisation details

Cascade Multi Academy Trust is made up of 6 primary schools (Beck, Hucklow, Whiteways, Owler Brook, Limpsfield and Sharrow Primary).

2. Research Question

What impact does training on the implementation of policy and understanding of acceptable use have on the safe use of AI for staff and children?

3. Policy

A draft Trust Policy and AUP were created. Information was drawn from the AUP generated by the AI working Party and wider research including DfE guidance. All staff in Cascade schools signed AI AUP as part of this project.

4. Systems & Processes

We created a Strategic AI group with representatives from each of the Cascade schools (either Head/Deputy or Computing Lead). The group met every half-term to review current developments in AI in education and discuss experiences across the schools.

The Policy and AUP were introduced to staff in all Cascade schools as part of an AI staff meeting. One staff meeting was delivered in each school by the research project participants (computing lead and MAT chief executive). The presentation included information on the risks and benefits of using AI covering the following topics:

- What is AI?
- Machine Learning & generative AI
- Risks - Cybersecurity, GDPR, IPR, Safeguarding, Bias & unreliable results, Environmental impact
- Benefits – time saving, efficiency
- Effective Prompting
- Teaching children about AI
- Approved AI tools for use in school (Copilot, TeachMate, SLT AI). The reasoning behind this was driven by safeguarding and data protection considerations and DfE guidance on Meeting Digital and Technology Standards in Schools and Colleges.

All staff completed a survey before the initial meeting and then again after.

5. Barriers

Time/timescale was an issue, the first staff meeting was delivered in February and the final staff meeting was on 20th May. Within that time, the content of the presentation had to be changed as technological advances moved at such a fast pace. Due to the rate of change in AI tools and usage, we possibly need to deliver follow-up meetings.

Another challenge was getting access to all staff in meetings to disseminate information – not all staff were available and staff meeting schedules were very busy.

Some staff understanding and confidence was low but there was a willingness to try. Early adopters were confidently using a wide range of AI tools. The AUP and policy currently limits the number of approved tools in order to protect staff and pupils. Limiting staff use to approved tools could be seen as restricting their use but the reasoning behind this was explained.

6. Successes

- Staff awareness of risks and benefits of using AI was low prior to the staff meetings/training (22.5% of staff had considered the risks and 28.5% had considered the benefits of using AI). Following the meetings/training there was a marked increase in confidence and awareness of the impact of using AI in school.
- There was an increased understanding of how AI tools can be used to support learning
- There was a keen interest in how staff could reduce the environmental impact of their use of AI and how effective prompting can improve efficiency.
- Understanding of the importance of acceptable use to protect staff and pupils was high after the meetings/training (96% of staff said they understood the acceptable use of AI).

7. Failures/Challenges

Limiting staff to a few approved AI tools was seen as a negative by some staff. Many staff were familiar with other tools and some felt that these were better/more effective than those on the approved list. The reasoning behind the approved tools list helped staff understand this decision. This approved list is subject to change as the strategic group continue to monitor advice and best practice in this area.

8. Recommendations

Prior to joining the project, we carried out a staff survey into AI usage. Following on from this, we established our Strategic AI Group to begin to plan for the use of AI across the Trust. Establishing a Strategic AI Group has been very useful in terms of having a forum for discussion, planning and disseminating information across the trust. Ensuring staff meeting time is committed to this process was vital to ensure the AUP and Policy were shared with as many staff as possible. If there is capacity in the staff meeting cycle, allow for a follow up session to support staff with further training (e.g. on prompting).

Attending the Learn Sheffield research group meetings ensured that our strategic group were kept up to date with latest advances and were able to share experiences with other schools across the city.

9. Other survey data

What do you feel are the main risks of using AI in school?

24% of staff expressed concerns around data protection, GDPR and security. Other concerns included misuse of images and inappropriate pupil use (14%), an over-reliance on AI and the high environmental impact of using AI.

What do you feel are the main benefits of using AI in school?

60% of staff said that the biggest impact of using AI was in saving time and making tasks quicker. 13% of respondents answered that AI was good for supporting lesson planning, creating resources, and generating ideas.

10. Next steps

The Cascade Strategic AI Group to continue to meet and plan for next steps. Further staff training is being considered on effective prompting to streamline use of AI. We aim to establish AI champions in each of the Trust schools and share good practice through this group.

We have begun to pilot and deliver lessons on teaching children about AI. These lessons will be embedded in computing schemes across the Trust using the Sheffield AI lessons from September 2026.

11. Feedback on the AI Research Project

It was really helpful to be part of a group of schools exploring the impact of AI in education. The sessions were very informative and well researched and this helped us to refine the research questions in light of current thinking. It was great to be able to share ideas and ask questions in a supportive environment. There were lots of opportunities to explore different tools and reflect on what works best for our organisation.

I would highly recommend taking part in this research. If there are opportunities for the group to continue in some form (for example as part of the Sheffield AI research group) that would be good.

GIAI Case Study – INOVA Multi Academy Trust

1. Organisation details

INOVA Multi-Academy Trust comprises 3 secondary schools and 7 primary schools.

2. Policy

Our AI policy is currently with the executive team for approval. It has already been shared with key stakeholders and leaders across the Trust, as well as our Data Protection Officer, to gather feedback. We initially developed the draft using a template from The Key, which we then expanded and tailored to our organisation. For anyone developing a policy, I would recommend starting with a strong template and then circulating it widely to gather input and ensure it reflects a range of perspectives.

3. Systems & Processes

We have restricted access to AI tools across the Trust's schools, with the exception of Copilot, TeachMate AI, and built in AI features within software that has been approved through our DPIA process. Copilot has recently been approved for the use of personal data, and we are currently seeking approval to allow children's work to be entered into the tool.

A staff survey has been issued this week to identify interest in joining an AI working group. This group will begin in the final half term, meeting regularly, and will act as champions on the ground, sharing best practice and highlighting new tools. Any AI tool will only be permitted for use once a DPIA has been completed. We have also circulated a Trust-wide survey to understand how staff are

currently using AI; however, the response rate has been around 20% from approximately 1,000 staff.

To support safe and effective use, we have developed an AI checklist poster for staff, outlining key considerations before using AI-generated content. This includes ensuring the teacher understands both the subject matter and the AI output, checking for bias, and identifying potential hallucinations. In addition, we have shared an AI statement outlining the Trust's position, along with a FACTS poster for display in classrooms. The policy itself will be reviewed on a half-termly basis to reflect the pace of change in AI.

Finally, all staff will be required to complete mandatory AI training in September, including a short assessment to confirm understanding. The training content has been produced in partnership with an external provider and is aligned with the UK government's "Using AI in Education" support materials. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/using-ai-in-education-settings-support-materials>

4. Barriers

The main barriers for staff have been confidence levels, limited training opportunities, and concerns around environmental impact and ethical considerations.

5. Successes

We are still at an early stage in our AI journey, but we are already seeing clear benefits. Personally, Copilot has saved me a significant amount of time by helping turn rough notes into polished documents and emails that are ready to send after a quick proofread. I also use it to summarise notes dictated into Word during 1:1 coaching meetings, which has reduced hours of manual work.

In addition, I used Copilot to support the creation of a Post-Implementation Review following an Office 365 migration that did not go as planned. It guided me through each stage of the process, allowing me to build out the document with minimal initial input, while using its prompts to develop a comprehensive report that was ultimately submitted to the executive team.

6. Failures/Challenges

None so far.

7. Recommendations

Securing strong leadership buy-in is essential, as it sets the tone and direction for adoption across the Trust. When senior leaders understand the impact and potential of AI, they are far more likely to champion its use, allocate time and resources, and embed it strategically into school improvement plans. In our experience, leadership recognition that AI is becoming an integral part of modern education has been a key driver in accelerating progress.

It is also important to establish a dedicated working group early on. Bringing together a cross-section of staff allows you to share responsibility, draw on a range of expertise, and ensure that implementation is both practical and safe. This group can act as early adopters and advocates, helping to test tools, develop guidance, and support colleagues across schools. By distributing the workload and building a network of informed practitioners, you create a more sustainable and scalable approach to introducing AI across the Trust.

8. Next steps

Ensure the approved AI policy is clearly communicated and readily accessible to all staff, so everyone understands expectations, responsibilities, and safe working practices. This creates a consistent baseline across the Trust and helps build confidence in using AI appropriately.

Establish regular meetings for the AI Working Group early on, giving the group a clear structure and purpose. These sessions should focus on sharing best practice, exploring successful use cases, and identifying opportunities and risks across different schools. Encouraging collaboration in this way helps spread innovation while maintaining a consistent and safe approach.

Alongside this, prioritise comprehensive training for all staff on the safe and effective use of AI. This should cover not only practical applications, but also key considerations such as data protection, identifying bias, and verifying outputs. Ongoing professional development and refreshers will be important to ensure staff remain confident and up to date as AI continues to evolve.

9. Feedback on the AI Research Project

It has been really valuable to follow the journeys of other schools, as well as to share effective tools and examples of best practice. Seeing how different settings are approaching AI has helped broaden our perspective and provided practical ideas that we can adapt within our own Trust.

It has also been particularly beneficial to contribute a technical perspective to the programme, balancing the strong teaching and learning focus of others. Bringing these two viewpoints together has helped ensure that both the educational and technical considerations are aligned, leading to a more robust and practical approach to implementation.

I would absolutely recommend this kind of collaboration to others. It would be great to continue these conversations and reconnect over the next year to see how everyone's journeys are progressing, share lessons learned, and build on the momentum already created.

GIAI Case Study - Lowfield Primary School

“What impact does the use of AI to create retrieval quizzes have upon pupil outcomes?”

When the research project was initiated I knew that some staff were already using AI in a range of ways. However, Lowfield Primary did not have an agreed policy at this point. From our analysis of data and reflections on pupil progress we undertook some research regarding metacognition and cognitive load in order to look at ways to adapt teaching. We wanted to ensure that children were able to recall and remember more of their learning. One aspect that we felt was a useful tool to begin to implement throughout our practice was the use of retrieval quizzes. Staff had begun to implement these across lessons. My research project then grew from this. I was conscious that staff were spending time and energy to create these quizzes and if that over time their enthusiasm for this may diminish. I wanted the quizzes to be used to impact pupil learning but also be manageable so that they become sustained practice.

We had a number of barriers that we had to consider when planning and implementing the project. As always we were conscious of time. Our staff development meetings had already been planned and assigned so we had to look at ways that the working party could meet without this being an additional workload. One of our strategies was to use assembly time on a Monday morning. We



had also planned our school development around the need to improve our writing outcomes across school. This had been moving at pace and we had been asking staff to make changes to current practices. I was conscious that I needed to look at the pace of any new development. That was one of the main rationales for developing a small working party in the first instance. With the remaining staff we would focus purely on the safe use of AI.

I undertook a staff survey to establish current skill levels and understanding of AI. The results of which showed a mixed response in terms of confidence and feelings towards AI. In terms of tools used and what for the results were also mixed. 72% of teachers surveyed did not think that AI helped reduce workload. 36% did not feel that it was relevant to their job.

I set up a small working party containing one teacher from the year groups 2, through to 6. We shared some examples of retrieval quizzes that had been used in their lessons. One of the teachers shared a quiz that he had created using chatGPT. In our group we all created a quiz that could be used in an upcoming science lesson using chatGPT or Padlet. Staff then continued to work independently, liaising with colleagues when needed, to continue the use of AI in generating quizzes.

Alongside the working party we used the template from The National College to produce a policy outlining safe use of AI and a policy specific to the use of AI in the classroom. A staff meeting took place to share the policies and the implications of these to staff. The computing lead and I also delivered a staff professional development session to inform staff of what AI was, how it can be used inline with our policies and some AI tools.

After the training staff were now saying “Oh I didn't realise that was AI. I do use AI then”, “I could use this to create a vocab mat for my new child” and “I am going to have a look at some ideas for my geography lesson.” This was a turning point for us. However, this also created us with the issue that now my original planned control group would also be benefitting from AI within their lessons. Although I do not have a direct comparative to the initial percentage of staff feeling it was not relevant to their job (different staff at the meeting where I collected final responses) when asked 13 out of 18 teachers stated that they had started to use AI. The biggest change is in our SEN team where our lead Senco who is also assistant head teacher has begun to use AI to reduce her workload in terms of report writing.

To measure the impact of the project I completed pupil voice activities alongside a book scrutiny. This was matched to our end of unit key learning outcomes. Children in the trial classes reported “We have done these quizzes where we show our answers on a whiteboard. They have helped me to remember what we learnt last week.” “I like the quizzes in each lesson as if I haven’t remembered last week's lesson and I don't have work in my book, I can see it in the quiz”. Work in books demonstrated learning against the planned purpose and objective. Children spoken to could recall the key learning from each lesson. This felt to be more secure than the control group where I needed to offer more prompts to establish the key learning.

100% of the staff in the trial group said that they felt generating the quizzes became increasingly manageable and found them a great point to assess learning. 60% of these staff also include a quick summary at the end of each lesson.

Overall, we were able to say that AI generated quizzes had a positive impact upon pupils' outcomes in science in a manageable way for staff. As a school our next steps are to look into controlling the AI that staff use in school in a more carefully thought through way in order to ensure that we can ensure all staff can achieve the outcomes that they want in a safe and secure way.

I would certainly recommend that schools embrace AI and carry out their own research projects in order to impact upon staff workloads and pupil outcomes.

GIAI Case Study – Nether Green Junior School

1. Organisation details

Nether Green Junior School is a large junior school for pupils aged 7 to 11.

2. Research Question

'What impact does ongoing professional development in responsible use of AI delivered 2 terms have on teacher confidence and effective classroom implementation for all teaching staff?'

3. Systems & Processes

To start with, we collected results on a survey about staff confidence and use of AI within the school. We measured what they were confident with and what they weren't. What they wanted help with etc. The main theme was people didn't know how to use it so were fearful. We also had a culture of 'AI is cheating' in the school.

We held three full staff CPD sessions, telling them what AI is, the risks etc and outlining what our policy said for GDPR. All staff then had a task to make a lesson just using AI. This was to highlight the limits as well as the positives and each year group focused on one AI system. We used ChatGPT, Gemini, TeachmateAI and Magic School. We then came back and said what we enjoyed, found useful etc. We also said what wasn't so good and had different staff members contribute about what they have done since the first meeting. After the feedback, we introduced some more AI systems (Chalkie and Claude) for staff to use. Staff loved Chalkie.

At the third and final meeting we came back and contributed to a live document about which AI systems we have used, the positives and negatives of them for all staff to see. We then did the final exit survey (same as the first to get the data on who has improved in confidence).

4. Barriers

The massive culture of 'AI is cheating' at the start made it hard to get some staff engaged. Some year groups had one member who was confident doing more of the work, which wasn't the point of the task. To overcome this, we made it compulsory that a lesson created from both AI and teacher input must be taught in the classroom. Furthermore, a lesson made by the headteacher using Chalkie for our school logos was taught across school.

Outline any barriers to implementing AI effectively in your setting or carrying out the research project, plus how you addressed these

5. Successes

- Huge love for Chalkie as a tool.

- Confidence:

High Confidence (Scores of 4 & 5): Rose from 46.4% in February to 68.0% in May (an absolute increase of 21.6%).

Top-Tier Mastery (Score of 5): More than doubled, jumping from 14.3% to 32.0% of the entire school staff.

Not Confident At All (Score of 1): Plummeted from 21.4% down to just 4.0% (reducing to a single respondent).

7 out of 8 of the areas questioned rose in confidence:

Understanding what generative AI is: 3.72 / 5 (Up from 3.04)

Knowing how to use tools safely & responsibly: 3.44 / 5 (Up from 3.11)

Reducing admin tasks (excluding planning): 3.16 / 5 (Up from 2.75)

Supporting lesson planning & resource creation: 3.12 / 5 (Up from 2.86)

Differentiating & personalising learning: 3.12 / 5 (Up from 2.75)

Improving lesson/intervention quality: 3.08 / 5 (Up from 2.68)

Supporting colleagues to use AI tools: 2.92 / 5 (Up from 2.50)

-Safe & Responsible Use:

High Confidence around safe and responsible use (Scores of 4 & 5): Grew from 46.4% in February to 64.0% in May.

Top-Tier Safety Confidence (Score of 5): More than doubled, escalating from 10.7% up to 24.0%.

The "Comfort Zone" (Score of 4): Became the single largest consensus group on the staff, representing 40.0% of all exit responses.

- Cheating culture declined, with staff regularly using teaching-based AI programmes (TeachMateAI, Chalkie AI) daily.

6. Failures/Challenges

- Teachers feel less confident talking to pupils about AI safety.
- Still 8 members of staff who never use AI.
- HLTAs don't use AI at all in our school
- A culture of frustration that it takes a lot of editing, so may as well do it yourself.
- Slight fear of 'deskilling' staff.

7. Recommendations

Since starting the process, the confidence for me has grown too. Doing research into AI models has been really effective. I think it is important to accept that not everyone will like the models you do, and some will be rubbish when they seem good. For example, Magic School seemed really good on paper but wasn't very useful when actually used. Pushing people out of their comfort zone is also good as most will embrace the AI if supported in how and when to use it.

8. Survey data

Understanding AI: High confidence (scores 4–5) increased from 46.4% to 68.0%, with top-tier confidence (score 5) more than doubling from 14.3% to 32.0%. Absolute uncertainty (score 1) dropped to 4.0%.

Safe & Responsible Usage: Staff feeling highly confident in data safety and compliance rose from 46.4% to 64.0%, successfully addressing initial baseline anxieties regarding GDPR and privacy.

Support Staff Engagement: Teaching Assistants and Learning Mentors saw their average confidence score climb from 2.73 to 3.79 out of 5, with 64.3% reaching the high-confidence tier by May.

The Student-Facing Gap: Confidence in explaining AI to pupils at an age-appropriate level declined, with high confidence scores falling from 39.3% down to 28.0% (average score dropped from 2.96 to 2.84).

Non-Adoption Core: A persistent group of 8 support staff members (primarily HLTAs and TAs) continue to report "Never" using AI tools for work, remaining mostly unchanged from the baseline of 10.

Tool Evolution: Staff workflows expanded beyond generic ChatGPT usage to specialized, education-specific platforms, most notably Chalkie, alongside TeachMate AI, Claude, and Notebook LM.

9. Next steps

Developing a student-based curriculum focusing on AI. This can then address the staff who are less confident teaching pupils about AI safety. CPD session from a professional would also be good.

More CPD needed for TAs and HLTAs for interventions. They were the group that used AI the least and had the least confidence, so it would be good to help them with that.

Still encourage critical editing on AI. Some staff who are worried about it deskilling members can be educated on critical thinking.

To continue building on what we have done, we need to ensure confidence continues to grow, rather than keeping at a steady level, or diminishing as AIP continues to develop.

10. Feedback on the AI Research Project

The project has been a big success in our school. It has helped boost confidence in staff members on using AI and has diminished the negative outlook on using it for lesson planning. The confidence has improved through our survey results. It would be good for lots of schools to use this, especially those with resistant staff to AI.

GIAI Case Study - Norton Free C of E Primary School

1. Research Question

“What impact does implementing AI as a virtual year group partner delivered over one academic term have on collaborative planning, resource variety and reducing administrative tasks?”

2. Policy

An AI Policy will be in place for September 2026.

3. Systems & Processes

We started the project with a staff questionnaire to find out who was already using AI and how it was being used across school. This involved all staff at first, before the work moved into a smaller working group made up of the Year 4 class teacher and me as the Year 6 teacher. We held three review meetings across Autumn 2, Spring 1 and Spring 2 to talk through what had worked well, what had been less useful, and what we were learning as the project developed. We did not have an agreed list of approved AI tools at the beginning, but as the project moved on, we began to focus mainly on Copilot. Staff were also given time in staff meetings to share useful prompts, resources and examples that had helped them in their own work.

4. Barriers

The main barrier during the project was finding enough time to carry out the research alongside the usual demands of teaching, planning and assessment. Like many school-based projects, it had to fit around everything else that was already happening, so opportunities to test tools, reflect on their impact and share findings were sometimes limited. Another challenge was the difference in staff knowledge and confidence when using AI. Some colleagues had already started exploring AI for planning or admin tasks, while others were unsure where to start or were cautious about using it in a school setting. To support this, we focused on modelling practical uses of AI, sharing simple tools and prompts, and reminding staff about safe and responsible use, especially around professional judgement and data protection. Over time, this helped many staff feel more confident and less hesitant. Although a small number of colleagues are still reluctant to use AI, most staff are now more open to it and more willing to use it for admin tasks such as drafting resources, adapting materials and reducing workload in routine areas.

5. Successes

The biggest successes have been in planning theme days and whole-school events. AI has helped staff come up with a wider range of ideas more quickly, which has reduced the time needed for the early stages of planning and preparation. In a one-form-entry school, where teachers do not have a year-group team to share planning with, this has been especially helpful in reducing workload. The SENDCo has also used AI to help draft targets for pupils with SEND within My Plans, making the process of creating personalised documentation quicker and more manageable. Another success has been using AI to create knowledge organisers and to broaden the range of ideas available when teaching specific topics. For example, the Year 4 teacher, who is new to that year group and had not taught the Titanic topic before, found AI particularly useful for generating fresh ideas and possible approaches. We also found that staff became better at prompting as the project went on. This was shared through CPD sessions, where staff looked at how simple, focused prompts linked to the curriculum could produce more useful and relevant responses.

6. Failures/Challenges

One of the main challenges was that AI did not always save time in the way we first expected. For example, when creating example texts for writing lessons, it sometimes took several prompts and edits before the response was suitable to use with the class. The first version was not always pitched correctly for the age group, did not always match the style or structure needed, or still needed adapting to fit the learning objective. In these cases, the process of prompting, checking, editing and trying again could take quite a lot of time. There were times when it would probably



have been quicker to use an existing high-quality example text found online and adapt it for the class, rather than trying to create something new through AI. This was a useful learning point, as it showed that AI works best when it is used selectively and for a clear purpose, rather than as the default option for every task.

Another barrier was moving away from ChatGPT and towards Microsoft Copilot. Some staff had already become used to ChatGPT and had started to feel more confident using it for things like generating ideas, rewording text or creating draft resources. Moving to Copilot meant changing habits, and for some colleagues this felt a bit like starting again. We decided to focus on Copilot after discussions during the course, as we are a Microsoft school and it made sense to use a tool that fitted with the systems already in place. It also helped us take a more consistent approach to safeguarding, data protection and professional use, as staff were working within a platform that linked more naturally with our existing Microsoft environment.

Although this change took some getting used to, it was not a serious barrier to the project overall. Staff needed time to explore the differences between the tools and to understand that the same prompt might not always give the same kind of response in different AI platforms. One of the key learning points was that staff training needs to include time to experiment, compare tools and talk things through, rather than assuming that confidence with one AI tool will automatically transfer to another. Importantly, there were no serious issues during the project. No concerns were identified around inappropriate staff use, and the project helped reinforce the importance of checking AI-generated content carefully before using it with pupils. Overall, the challenges were manageable and helped us develop a more thoughtful and cautious approach to using AI in school.

7. Recommendations

One of the main things we have learnt is that AI can be a useful time-saving tool, especially in a one-form-entry school where individual teachers are often responsible for planning lessons across all subjects without the same level of year-group collaboration that larger schools may have. It has been particularly helpful for long- and medium-term planning, as it can generate initial ideas, organise sequences of learning and suggest a wider range of possible activities. This has given staff more time and headspace to focus on short-term lesson planning, adapting resources for their own classes and thinking creatively about how to deliver learning effectively. My advice to other schools would be to agree a clear approach to AI use from the start. This should include moving towards an agreed platform, such as Copilot in our setting, and being clear about the areas where staff are encouraged to use it, such as planning support, model texts, resource ideas or test question generation. If we repeated the project, I would involve a larger group of staff from different key stages to see whether the impact and challenges varied depending on year group, curriculum area or staff confidence. One other point to consider is pupils' own awareness of AI. Children are increasingly aware of when something may have been generated using AI, and some are quick to comment on this. I have noticed that pupils can sometimes become less engaged if they feel a task has not been created or adapted personally by the teacher. This reinforces the importance of using AI as a support tool, rather than a replacement for professional judgement, teacher creativity and knowledge of the class.

8. Survey data

The initial staff survey showed an even split between colleagues who were already using AI to support their role and those who were not. Some staff who were not using AI said they did not currently plan to use it, which suggested that confidence, familiarity and seeing a clear practical benefit were important factors in whether staff felt ready to try AI. Among those who were already using AI, examples included generating definitions of key historical concepts, identifying updates needed for new policies, and creating SATs-style spelling tests. These responses showed that staff were starting to use AI in a range of ways, particularly for tasks linked to planning, admin and resource creation.

One of the main conclusions from the survey and follow-up conversations was that staff are more likely to use AI when they can see a clear and immediate benefit to their own workload. One colleague who had first responded that they had never used AI later asked for support with planning a class assembly on the Victorians. After using AI to generate an initial structure and ideas, they were pleasantly surprised by the quality and usefulness of the response, and said it would have taken them hours to prepare the same starting point themselves. This showed the importance of giving staff practical examples, modelling effective prompts and allowing time to try AI in a supportive way. Overall, the survey suggested that confidence is a key factor in whether staff are willing to use AI, and that small, successful experiences can help reduce hesitation and encourage wider use.

9. Next steps

The next step is to put a clear AI policy in place for the school, ready for September 2026. This will give staff a more consistent framework and will help make sure that AI is used safely, responsibly and in line with school expectations. Alongside this, we will continue to provide staff CPD focused on building confidence, sharing practical examples and developing effective prompting skills. The aim is to make AI feel accessible and useful for all staff, rather than something only a small number of colleagues feel confident using.

Next year, we want clear processes in place so that all staff either feel comfortable using AI independently or know where to go for support when they need it. This will include encouraging staff to use AI selectively for tasks where it can genuinely reduce workload, such as planning support, adapting resources, drafting admin documents and generating initial ideas. We also want to keep giving staff opportunities to share what has worked well, so that confidence grows through practical examples and peer support. Building on the work from this year, the focus will be on making AI a helpful tool within everyday practice, while continuing to emphasise professional judgement, safeguarding and the need to check and adapt all AI-generated content before it is used in school.

10. Feedback on the AI Research Project

The AI Research Project met my expectations and gave a detailed and interesting introduction to how AI is developing within education. I found the course very useful, particularly because it made us think carefully about both the opportunities and responsibilities that come with using AI in a school setting. I would recommend the project to other teachers and leaders who are interested in technology, workload reduction and the future role of AI in education, as it gives a helpful chance

to explore practical uses while also thinking about safeguarding, professional judgement and responsible use.

The main thing that could be improved would be having more time within the project for staff to experiment with AI, reflect on its impact and gather evidence of how it is being used in practice. This is not really a criticism of the course itself, but more a reflection of how busy school life is, and how difficult it can be to give research projects the time and focus they need alongside day-to-day responsibilities. Even so, the project has had a positive impact in school. It has helped several members of staff feel more confident using AI and has shown that, when used carefully and selectively, it can help reduce workload by supporting planning, resource creation and admin tasks. For some colleagues, it has made AI feel less intimidating and more like a practical tool that can save time, while still needing teacher knowledge, adaptation and professional judgement.

GIAI Case Study – Prince Edward Primary School

1. School details

Prince Edward Primary School has approximately 451 pupils on roll, ranging from nursery to Year 6 (aged 3-11) with a highly complex demographic profile: 45% Pupil Premium, 23% SEN support (including 15 EHCPs and 22 Extended Support Plans), 43% English as an Additional Language (EAL) and 60% Black, Minority & Ethnic (BME).

2. Research Question

What is the impact of AI on teacher workload when implemented under agreed safety and reliability frameworks?

3. Policy

We approached the governance of Artificial Intelligence by integrating it directly into our existing frameworks, specifically rewriting our Online Safety Policy to include robust, dedicated references to AI. To ensure our approach was grounded in educational best practices, we utilised the LGfL (London Grid for Learning) template as a foundational starting point, heavily customising the text to ensure it was relevant and tailored to our school's specific context. Because the AI landscape evolves rapidly, the policy is treated as a living document; it has already been updated to reflect the latest government guidance (June 2026) alongside our own day-to-day observations of staff usage, and we have established ongoing monitoring to meet our evolving needs.

To ensure school-wide consistency, we shared the draft during a Professional Development Meeting (PDM) to gather staff opinions and feedback. The reception was highly positive, with staff noting that it is "a forward-thinking way to support our workload while monitoring safeguarding," as well as describing it as "very comprehensive" and providing "clear guidance and professional boundaries." For other schools embarking on this process, our advice would be to build on the trusted policies and safeguarding frameworks you already have in place, utilising recognised templates as a baseline while ensuring you personalise them to consider the unique needs and culture of your own school.

4. Systems & Processes

Our AI project was designed deliberately as a phased, year-long process to ensure the implementation remained manageable and staff had adequate time to explore the technology. The project began in the Autumn term when our research leads attended specialised external training and subsequently fed back to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to discuss initial concepts. From these discussions, we formulated a structured, academic-year action plan that clearly defined responsibilities, purposefully focusing initial implementation stages on teachers and SLT rather than support staff. To assess our baseline, we conducted an initial survey to capture staff attitudes and identify immediate training needs. This survey also allowed us to gather information on how certain staff members were already utilising AI tools and to map out the specific types of software being used across the school; this was supported by informal conversations and observations of staff and lessons. By the Spring term, we used this information to create our formal policy and deliver specific staff training. This training established clear parameters by introducing a strictly agreed-upon list of approved AI tools—specifically Google Gemini and NotebookLM. It explicitly addressed curriculum, risks and benefits of AI, effective prompting strategies, and sharing existing good practice from a wide range of staff.

5. Barriers

The barriers we encountered throughout this project were largely standard across the teaching profession and came as no surprise to us. High amongst these was navigating a wide spectrum of staff attitudes, ranging from cautious to over-enthusiastic, which required careful balancing. Time proved to be our most consistent constraint: the school year's CPD overview had been mapped out prior to our initial training, finding dedicated slots to deliver staff training was a challenge. Furthermore, balancing teaching commitments left limited time for us as research leads to focus on the project, and staff similarly lacked the time to deeply explore the tools, build confidence, or seek our direct assistance. This time pressure also meant that following our initial Spring term PDM, there was little opportunity for staff to engage in peer-to-peer discussion to share their experiences after trialling the AI tools. We overcame these challenges by remaining highly mindful of staff cognitive load, deliberately choosing not to overwhelm them with resources or information so as not to scare them off.

6. Successes

Our journey with AI has yielded significant successes, most notably marked by the adoption of tools by unexpected staff members who may have initially been sceptical. By pacing the rollout thoughtfully and leveraging our own staff as experts, we demystified the technology while firmly keeping safeguarding and GDPR compliance at the forefront. This measured introduction has fostered an understanding of AI's mechanics, limitations, and reliability across the entire school. Far from being restricted to personalised learning, the impact was deliberately widened to encompass all school roles—including non-teaching staff, Subject Leaders, and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)—and woven into every aspect of the curriculum. Due to our limiting the tools allowed in school, Gemini emerged as our primary and most successful tool.

The practical applications have been vast and deeply integrated into daily routines. Examples are where staff have successfully used the technology to generate targeted assessment questions at the end of units, compile age-appropriate vocabulary lists, and source suitable words for dictated



sentences. Beyond the classroom, it has revolutionised administrative and leadership tasks, proving invaluable for drafting school policies and rapidly turning meeting notes into structured Professional Development Meetings (PDMs). Ultimately, our biggest and most meaningful win has been the tangible human impact, with staff consistently reporting a profound reduction in their overall workload and a renewed sense of efficiency.

7. Failures & Challenges

While our integration of AI has brought clear efficiencies, it has not been without its learning curves. A primary frustration was the time lost to vague or unrefined prompting, which frequently yielded generic, oversimplified, or entirely irrelevant results. In many cases, staff spent more time repeatedly tweaking prompts to get a usable output than they would have spent creating the resource from scratch.

Additionally, the frequent appearance of Americanisms—such as American spellings (e.g., "colors", "programmes" replaced with "programs") and terminology mismatches (like referring to "grades" instead of "Year groups" or "recess" instead of "playtime")—posed a constant hurdle, as did results with an American accent when speaking. When staff forgot to explicitly specify the context of a UK primary school, the tools defaulted to US-centric standards, requiring meticulous proofreading and editing that eroded many of the time-saving benefits.

Beyond the day-to-day classroom frustrations, our journey revealed a broader, more complex set of challenges regarding how AI is used outside of our internal staff planning. We quickly had to develop a heightened awareness of how external stakeholders interact with AI.

This shift in awareness was particularly sharp in two main areas:

- **Job Applications:** We noticed an influx of highly polished, formulaic applications that lacked personal voice or genuine, context-specific classroom examples, suggesting heavy reliance on generative text. Some applicants even forgot to remove the AI prompts from their applications.
- **Parental Communications:** We had to navigate instances where parent emails and formal queries appeared to be AI-generated, sometimes leading to overly formal, sterile, or misaligned tones that made genuine, collaborative communication more difficult to establish.

8. Recommendations

Reflecting on our journey, our primary recommendation for any school embarking on an AI integration project is to start with a limited selection of tools before expanding. In the early stages, it is easy for staff to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of platforms available and also to navigate the robust safe use of different platforms. If we were to repeat the project, we would focus heavily on embedding one or two core tools, which we know are linked to our already established school technology (such as Gemini linked to Google), deeply into school culture before introducing others, ensuring confidence and mastery are established first.

When implementing AI, schools should focus on the broad, cross-school utility of the technology rather than trying to make it too niche or specific right away. AI thrives when it is used to solve universal challenges across various roles—from teaching assistants and classroom teachers to subject leaders and the SLT. By looking at systemic, school-wide uses—such as drafting policies, generating quick assessment questions, or reducing administrative burdens—you create a shared language and community of practice.



Based on our experiences, schools should prioritize the following when planning their rollout:

- Keep it simple early on: Master one versatile tool to prevent platform fatigue.
- Focus on transferable skills: Teach strong prompting techniques early to avoid the trap of generic or Americanised outputs.
- Appoint staff experts: Use peer-led training to make the technology approachable for more hesitant staff members.
- Look beyond the classroom: Actively involve non-teaching and leadership staff to maximize the impact on overall school workload.

9. Next steps

Building on the strong foundations laid this year, our primary aim for next year is to intentionally shift our internal focus toward fully supporting and training our support staff. While teaching and leadership roles have successfully embedded AI into their routines, ensuring our teaching assistants and administrative teams are equally confident will unlock even greater school-wide efficiency.

We will also continue to cultivate a culture of collaboration by sharing good practice within the school across an ever-growing range of needs. Through ongoing experience and structured reflection, we aim to continually deepen our staff's collective understanding of how AI works, refining our prompting skills to eliminate the difficulties identified this year.

A major strategic shift for the upcoming year will be bringing AI literacy directly into the classroom for our pupils. We plan to adapt our Computing and Online Safety curriculums to explicitly include AI. The goal is not necessarily to have young children using the tools to do their work, but rather to teach them the fundamentals of how AI works. By deconstructing the technology early, we will prepare them to be critical, safe, and discerning users of AI as they grow older.

As the market matures and more products become available, we must also look at the long-term sustainability of our setup. A key next step for the leadership team will be to carefully consider the cost implications of different AI platforms, balancing the benefits of free tools against the potential value of premium, paid features. Alongside this, we will map out any associated training costs to ensure our professional development remains high-quality, targeted, and cost-effective.

We are also interested to know whether teacher workload reduced due to less time being spent on admin tasks rather than making resources for learning which was our initial intention??? Do we need something on this or just leave it.

10. Feedback on the AI Research Project

The AI Research Project has been a good initiative that allowed us to greatly develop our knowledge and practice. Its greatest value lay in giving us the dedicated time and space to focus solely on AI, allowing us to plan a structured, thoughtful introduction for our school rather than rushing into it.

The external support was a major highlight. Having direct access to the expertise of Learn Sheffield provided us with crucial guidance, while the opportunity to collaborate, problem-solve, and share triumphs and challenges with school staff from across the wider Sheffield area was invaluable. Being part of this professional network meant we didn't have to navigate this rapidly changing landscape in isolation.

The impact of this project on our school community has been incredibly positive:

- **Confidence Boost:** Staff who were initially hesitant are now much more confident in navigating and using AI in their day-to-day roles.
- **Workload Reduction:** Across the board, staff are reporting a noticeable, genuine reduction in their overall workload, freeing up time for high-impact teaching and learning.
- **Future Readiness:** We have built a robust, secure foundation that ensures we are well-prepared to safely expand our AI initiatives in the years to come.

We would whole-heartedly recommend this research project to other teachers and school leaders. The combination of Learn Sheffield's expert guidance and the collaborative network of local schools turned what could have been an overwhelming implementation process into a shared, highly successful journey.

GIAI Case Study – Wybourn Primary School

This summary report focuses on the findings from the Generative AI and Teacher Workload Research survey, which captured the experiences of six teachers following a trial period using various AI tools.

1. Impact on Workload and Time Management

The trial demonstrates a generally positive trend in workload reduction, though the impact varied depending on the task and the teacher's role.

- **Total Workload Perception:** The majority of participants (4 out of 6) reported that their total workload was "slightly better" compared to before the trial, while the remaining 2 teachers found it "about the same".
- **Hours Worked Outside Directed Time:** Two teachers reported working only 0–2 hours outside of school time per week, while others ranged between 3 and 8 hours. This represents a shift for some staff who previously worked significantly longer hours.
- **Specific Time Savings:**
 - **Report Writing:** This was the most effective area for time recovery, with one teacher saving over 3 hours per week. Others saved between 0.5 and 2 hours by using AI to generate and refine sentences.
 - **Resource Creation:** Teachers saved between 0.5 and 2 hours weekly. One respondent noted that AI generated resources in minutes that would "take hours to make normally".
 - **Lesson Planning:** Results were more modest; while some saved up to an hour, two teachers reported 0 hours saved, often because they spent time "tweaking" or personalising the output to ensure it was suitable for their pupils.

2. Teacher Creativity and Professional Identity

The research sought to determine if reducing administrative tasks allowed for more creative teaching.

- **Creativity Levels:** 50% of the cohort reported that their creativity "slightly increased", while 50% felt it "stayed about the same".

- **Sense of Professionalism:** Half of the participants felt AI had a positive effect on their sense of being a "real teacher". They attributed this to having more time to focus on the "important parts" of the role rather than administrative drudgery.
- **Innovation in Practice:** One teacher successfully used Google Gemini to "brainstorm and plan a Hywel Roberts style botheredness lesson," illustrating how the tool can support specific pedagogical approaches.

3. Quality, Ethics, and Technical Challenges

While the potential of AI was recognised, teachers remained critical and cautious regarding its use.

- **Professional Responsibility:** Every participant strongly agreed (5/5) that they maintain full professional responsibility for all AI outputs.
- **Quality Concerns:** Issues included the use of American language, the generation of "cartoon images" when real photos were needed, and the tool's occasional inability to understand the specific needs of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) pupils.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Multiple teachers raised significant concerns regarding the environmental impact of AI, specifically the water usage required for cooling data centres. One respondent expressed a fear of being surrounded by "AI slop" and cautioned against using AI as a "wellbeing washing" strategy.

4. Future Outlook

The consensus is that AI has potential but requires intentional integration.

- **Continued Use:** Most teachers intend to continue using AI, particularly for resource creation and report writing.
- **Training Needs:** Almost all participants identified ongoing training and CPD as the primary factor that would help them use AI more effectively.
- **Overall Value:** All respondents agreed that they had learnt something valuable, and most (5 out of 6) felt the trial was worthwhile and should continue in some form within the school.

GAIA Case Study - Watercliffe Meadow Community Primary School

1. School details

Watercliffe Meadow Community Primary school is 2 form entry from Nursery to year 6 with 475 pupils on roll.

2. Research Question

What impact does the use of generative AI for teacher resource preparation and administrative tasks have on teacher workload and teachers' attitudes towards AI?

3. Policy

Our draft policy is under review by SLT and governors.

4. Systems & Processes

I conducted a survey, using a Google form, for all teachers and teaching assistants at a staff meeting to help me get a better insight into their knowledge, usage, concerns etc regarding artificial intelligence.

I shared with them some examples of how we could use AI tools to help reduce workload and produce personalised class-based resources and to complete some admin tasks. I also tried to show them that AI does make mistakes and that it has its pitfalls and drawbacks so we need to think about how we use it and always check what it produces before using or sharing it. I gave them a simple three-step process to follow when writing prompts based on the acronym SET which is used by the Teach mate AI tool: be Specific; Evaluate the response; Tweak the prompt to refine the response.

After the PDM I asked staff to express any interest in being part of a team to help investigate how we can use AI to address our research question however there was limited response to this. Only 4 or 5 teachers replied to this request and we found it difficult to find a time when we were all able to meet. Over the months that followed, we communicated with each other mostly by email to share examples of practice which we then shared with the wider staff team during the next PDM.

During this second meeting, held in February, I shared with staff our draft usage policy and showed them how to set up a Google Gemini account linked to their school-based email and explained why I wanted them to use this as our main AI tool. I shared a wide range of examples of how we have been using AI across the school to help prepare and personalise learning to help support with teaching and learning across year groups from 2 to 6. Towards the end of the year, in June, I asked teachers to complete the same survey that they had done in November to help me gauge the change, if any, in usage of and attitudes to AI in education. I also used this survey to help me identify future training requirements.

5. Barriers

From the initial survey conducted in November, a large percentage of the staff selected "Lack of training/support" as their primary barrier. Many explicitly stated they "wouldn't know how best to use them going forward" or simply had "no idea what it is." The results from the initial survey suggested most staff were unaware of what AI can do.

Staff Confidence levels

- Some staff were reluctant to use AI due to concerns over privacy and security of information shared.
- Others were reluctant to use it as they were not convinced that it would save them time in the long run as it would take too long learning how to use it. They felt that they couldn't dedicate any time to do this as their schedules were already full.
- Initially there was a strong sense of professional guilt. Staff worried that using AI meant they were "not working hard enough," that it was a lazy "short cut," or that they might "do something wrong" and compromise their role. There was also active anxiety regarding job security.
- Also in most year groups, many of the plans and resources that teachers need are already in place so teachers feel there is little need for AI to do anything for them.

Barriers to implementation:

- Some of the SLT members don't feel confident or knowledgeable enough about AI tools and how we can use them to help with teacher related administrative tasks such as preparation of materials and resources, report writing, analysing data or summarising large amounts of information. As a result, there have been pockets of experimentation with AI tools amongst teaching staff encouraged by the research project alone.
- Teachers have been shown which AI tools to use and how to do this by writing effective prompts and then reading and evaluating responses, to quality control outputs and ensure they meet the needs of the task. This may still be seen as a long process for some and they may be using AI tools other than those suggested and have perhaps not been thorough enough in their critical assessment of what is produced. This has been difficult to manage and to develop where staff have found initial barriers to be too off putting.

6. Successes

The sense of professional guilt and the fear of being viewed as lazy or "not working hard enough" has completely vanished from the comments in the second survey. Teachers no longer see AI as an unethical shortcut or cheat, but more of a legitimate tool to help reduce their workload

The barrier of not knowing what tools exist or how to access them has largely been resolved for teachers. Most are now confidently using tools such as Google Gemini to support with some administrative tasks and production of resources to be used in the classroom.

Administrative tasks include drafting subject policies and summarizing DfE and Ofsted documents. Some staff have used AI to read and summarise evidence informed research documents to produce materials such as infographics and videos to share with the staff team during professional development meetings. Many teachers have used AI to help generate personalized end-of-year student reports tailored to their individual writing styles. Classroom based tasks cover a wide range across all year groups from year 2 upwards and include using AI tools to design scaffolded worksheets, reading comprehension questions, text exemplars (WAGOLLS), and interactive, live illustrations driven by the pupils' own descriptive writing.

As a result, staff generally feel that they are finding ways to use AI to reduce their workload, although some still feel that using AI would take them longer than doing a task themselves as they have a "lack of knowledge and headspace to mess around with it." Even when they have been given a set of instructions on how to use AI to support with report writing, for example, one member of staff said that they "read the instructions and feel it would take me too long."

7. Failures & Challenges

Teachers discovered that they cannot blindly trust AI outputs, meaning the time gained generating a document is often then lost closely auditing and adapting it. In the summer survey, one teacher noted it is "Useful and time saving but need to make sure documents etc are checked and suitable," while another pointed out that "Trusting what is given to me" remains an ongoing concern. For some staff they felt that the time taken to learn how to use AI effectively would take longer than using traditional methods.

Teachers were instructed not to use any pupil names or other details with AI tools, so this avoided any safeguarding issues, but some reported that "it just needs a bit of thinking through before I use

it with excluding children's personal details!" Manually deleting student details before typing a prompt adds a time-consuming step to some tasks.

Other issues arose around staff concerns related to creative and critical thinking. One member of SLT team stated that it worries them that staff may turn to it before thinking for themselves. Teachers made comments regarding the effect on creativity. One noted they were "wary of over reliance and taking creativity away from teaching and planning". Another added that they were left "not sure that it will always be for children's best interests". Other staff expressed some concerns over job security and others stated environmental issues as influences on their use of AI tools.

8. Recommendations

In conducting this research project, I have learnt that although many members of teaching staff see the potential benefits of using AI as a workload reduction tool, there is still a high level of uncertainty and some anxiety about how we should best use it. Creativity, reliability, job security and pupil safety are the main barriers for those reluctant or hesitant to use AI to help with any tasks and reduce workload.

However, levels of use and confidence have increased overall and staff are still expressing an interest in wanting to find out more about how AI can help them reduce their workload and prepare more personalised learning resources for pupils. They want more dedicated time to learn how they can use some suggested AI tools rather than being given instructions to follow in their own time.

9. Next steps

The draft acceptable use policy needs to be reviewed by SLT and governors and then all staff need to read and sign this. Staff meetings need to be planned across the year to give time for staff to share how they have used AI, ask any questions and have time to experiment, making resources and conducting a min task with support. We need to look at some common tasks e.g., producing word mats, dictation sentences etc using certain groups of words or phonemes, producing models for writing or specific types of reading comprehension questions. If staff are given PDM time to produce resources that they can then use in the classroom, this may help encourage a few more reluctant users or late adopters to get on board.

Perhaps look at some very simple examples of how to prompt Gemini to do simple tasks that people can take away and use e.g., some dictation sentences using certain words/ phonemes, some sentences that use vocab from reading lessons

10. Feedback on the AI Research Project

The AI research project has been useful in helping me to try to narrow down implementation to one or two specific areas and to take into account teachers' thoughts, expertise, confidence and opinions both before and after the process. It has helped me to analyse all of these variables and to address some key issues to help the school move forwards in the direction that I was hoping. More staff are more confident about using AI, are using it more often and are reducing their workload.

The time period that we have had has been relatively short, but it has given us some clear gains and some key areas that we know we need to work on to develop these in the coming academic year.