

State of the Nation: AI in Education, May 2026

Linking Research to the Framework

AI Literacy

- 76% of teachers now use AI tools for day-to-day work, up from 53% a year earlier (National Education Union, 2026).
- Teacher adoption quadrupled in roughly 30 months: from 17% in April 2023 to 42% by November 2023 (Department for Education, 2024), to 62% in the previous month (Sutton Trust, 2025), to 76% (National Education Union, 2026).
- Only 21% of state school teachers have received formal AI training, compared to 45% in private schools (Sutton Trust, 2025).
- Private schools are three times more likely to have an AI strategy (27% vs 9%) and use AI daily at nearly double the rate (18% vs 11%) (Sutton Trust, 2025).
- A quarter of teachers lack confidence and only 9% feel ready to teach AI (Pearson, 2025).
- There is no evidence of systematic AI literacy integration across ITT providers; the DfE's free training materials (June 2025), co-developed with the Chartered College of Teaching, do not address the structural absence of AI from initial qualification (Department for Education, 2025b).
- Only 47% of pupils feel confident identifying whether AI-generated content is accurate (Oxford University Press, 2025).
- The WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025 identifies AI literacy among the fastest-growing skills globally (World Economic Forum, 2025).
- 66.5% of 13–18 year olds had used generative AI in 2025, with weekly use rising from 31% to 46% (Picton and Clark, 2025).
- 50% of 8–17 year olds have used AI tools, up from 46% the previous year (Ofcom, 2025a).
- In Scotland, SQA research (2,687 learners) found 64% had used AI but 62% feared being perceived as cheating (SQA, 2025).
- 52% of children in private schools had used generative AI compared to just 18% in state schools (Hashem et al., 2025).

Policies and Ethics

- The DfE upgraded its product safety guidance to formal Product Safety Standards on 19 January 2026, introducing mandatory requirements on cognitive development, emotional and social development, mental health, and manipulation (Department for Education, 2026).
- The standards prohibit anthropomorphic design including first-person pronouns, person-like names, implied consciousness, and relationship-cultivating interactions (Department for Education, 2026).
- The standards require distress detection with tiered response pathways and escalation to designated safeguarding leads; products must not use pupil IP to train models (Department for Education, 2026).
- New sections require progressive disclosure and scaffolding rather than immediate full answers, with cognitive offloading tracked and reported to teachers (Department for Education, 2026).

- The JCQ issued Revision 2 of its AI Use in Assessments guidance (April 2025), strengthening malpractice definitions, ruling AI cannot be the sole marker, and requiring students to acknowledge AI sources with tool name, URL, and date (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2025).
- Scotland published its first national AI-in-schools guidelines (25 March 2026), co-developed with the EIS union, emphasising child rights, privacy, and teacher judgement (Scottish Government, 2026).
- Wales' inspectorate Estyn published *A New Era* calling for a coherent national approach; the Welsh Government has begun refreshing the Digital Competency Framework alongside £1.4m over three years for computing and digital skills (Estyn, 2025; Welsh Government, 2025).
- In Northern Ireland, the Education Authority, PSNI, SBNI, and INEQE issued a joint letter (February 2026) warning of AI-generated sexualised images of children, classifying such material as child sexual abuse imagery under law (Education Authority et al., 2026).
- The Education Committee launched its AI and EdTech inquiry in February 2026, covering safeguarding, inequalities, digital rights, and assessment (House of Commons Education Committee, 2026).
- 49% of schools have no AI policy and 66% have no rules governing student use (National Education Union, 2026).
- Ofsted's updated guidance states that where AI is used, inspectors will consider how leaders understand its risks and benefits, the policies and safeguards in place, and whether use is appropriate and responsible (Ofsted, 2025b).
- SQA research found 62% of learners worried about being perceived as cheating when using AI (SQA, 2025).
- The proportion of young people copying AI outputs directly into homework rose from one in five to one in four (Picton and Clark, 2025).

Tools and Systems

- The DfE Technology in Schools Survey recorded 44% of teachers using generative AI at least sometimes, with lesson planning as the leading application at 35% (Department for Education, 2025a).
- The authoritative usage breakdown: lesson planning 35%, administration 20%, written feedback and reports 15%, live lesson delivery 7%, marking 5%; under-35s were markedly heavier adopters (Department for Education, 2025a).
- Snapchat's My AI was the most used AI platform among 13–17 year olds at 51% (Ofcom, 2025a).
- UK ChatGPT visits rose from 368 million to 1.8 billion between 2024 and 2025 (Ofcom, 2025b).
- The 5Rights Foundation's audit found AI tools used for educational purposes expose children to inappropriate trackers (5Rights Foundation, 2025).
- The DfE 2026 standards require embedded filtering rather than bolt-on, and mandate that products must not use pupil intellectual property to train models (Department for Education, 2026).
- SEND support is identified within the DfE's product safety standards as a valid use case, particularly through personalised learning and accessibility tools (Department for Education, 2026).
- UK EdTech VC funding dropped from \$547m to \$222m between 2023 and 2024 (techUK, 2025).

- The first UK RCT evaluating Oak National Academy's Aila will not report until autumn 2026 (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025).

Digital Pedagogy

- The EEF/NFER ChatGPT trial found a 31% reduction in lesson planning time, approximately 25 minutes per lesson, with no compromise to resource quality (Roy et al., 2024).
- 61% of school leaders and 43% of teachers reported technology had reduced workload over three years (Department for Education, 2025a).
- There is no robust evidence that AI improves learning outcomes; Ofsted, Estyn, and the EEF confirm workload benefits are documented but causal evidence of impact on attainment does not exist (Ofsted, 2025a; Estyn, 2025).
- Ofsted's early-adopter study of 21 schools and FE colleges concluded that evidence of impact on learning outcomes "remains far from conclusive" (Ofsted, 2025a).
- Ofsted concluded that more research and evaluation of AI in education is required, specifically on what works effectively to achieve gains in knowledge and influence pupil outcomes (Ofsted, 2025a).
- De-skilling risks are identified: one in four young people copy AI outputs into homework (Picton and Clark, 2025) and only 47% can identify accurate AI content (Oxford University Press, 2025).
- The DfE 2026 standards require progressive disclosure and scaffolding rather than immediate full answers, with cognitive offloading tracked and reported to teachers (Department for Education, 2026).
- Internet Matters found 64% of children use AI chatbots, with 12% doing so because they have no one else to talk to (Internet Matters, 2025).

Community and Collaboration

- The current patchwork of four national approaches creates inconsistency for schools, suppliers, and families; minimum UK-wide standards are recommended (report's own recommendation drawing on all cited evidence).
- Scotland's guidelines were co-developed with the EIS union and aligned with Scotland's AI Strategy 2026–2031 (Scottish Government, 2026).
- The DfE's free training materials were co-developed with the Chartered College of Teaching (Department for Education, 2025b).
- Frameworks such as AiEd Certified, with over 300 enrolled institutions, demonstrate that educator-led approaches are scalable and in demand (report's own claim).
- The Education Committee's inquiry covers England from early years to FE, examining safeguarding, inequalities, digital rights, and assessment (House of Commons Education Committee, 2026).
- Schools with a strategy outperform those relying on individual initiative (Sutton Trust, 2025).
- The AI divide between private and state schools on training (45% vs 21%), strategy (27% vs 9%), and student usage (52% vs 18%) underscores the need for sector-wide collaboration (Sutton Trust, 2025; Hashem et al., 2025).
- In Northern Ireland, the Education Authority, PSNI, SBNI, and INEQE collaborated on joint safeguarding guidance (Education Authority et al., 2026).