



AI in schools and trusts

A toolkit for governing boards and school leaders

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Who is NGA?

NGA is the national membership association for governors, trustees and governance professionals in England's state schools and trusts.

We empower those in school and trust governance with valuable resources, expert support and e-learning. Together, we're raising standards and shaping stronger governance to ensure every pupil can thrive today – and tomorrow.

About this toolkit

The Department for Education (DfE) has highlighted the potential benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) use in schools and trusts, “from streamlining administrative processes to supporting operations, workload, teaching, CPD, inclusion and personalised learning.”

This toolkit is designed to help governing boards gain a foundational understanding of AI in schools and to support collaborative conversations between governors/trustees and school/trust leaders to enable effective oversight of AI.

With thanks

This toolkit was developed with support from expert contributors:



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Google is committed to making AI helpful for everyone, in the classroom and beyond. [Find out more](#)

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Jonathan draws on his experience as CEO of a 10-school multi academy trust and in governance roles across maintained schools.

His work has given him insight into governance at board level as well as the role of local governing bodies in both primary and secondary schools.



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1. Understanding AI in schools

What is AI?

AI refers to systems designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as recognising patterns, making decisions, understanding language or learning from data.

Most of us already use AI every day. Examples include Netflix suggestions on what to watch next based on what you previously enjoyed, or an online customer service chatbot.

- **Generative AI** can be used to create new content (such as audio, text, video and simulations) based on large volumes of data using models trained on a variety of sources. ([DfE](#))
- **Large Language models (LLMs)** are a type of AI trained on massive amounts of text data to understand, process and generate human-like language. Think of it as a highly advanced predictive text system.

How is AI used in schools?

It is up to each school and trust to decide how they want to use AI, considering both the benefits and potential risks. Example use cases include:

Area	Uses
Teaching and learning	• Producing teaching resources • Assessment tools • Supporting personalised learning • Drafting curriculum plans • Digital assistants such as personal tutors • Automated marking
Administration and management	• Report generation • Compliance checks • Budget and spending analysis • Drafting parent and staff communications • Governance support (such as generating reports or summaries)

Building AI literacy

Gaining skills and knowledge that enable us to understand and critically evaluate AI is an important first step. This is true for everyone: school staff, governors, trustees and pupils.

For pupils, learning about AI may be embedded into subjects like computing and PSHE. Educational programmes like [Experience AI](#) offer resources on AI and machine learning for teachers and pupils aged 11–14.

Support and training for school staff

Safe and effective use of AI tools requires a culture of ongoing learning. Consider how this approach might fit with your school/trust's existing CPD programme, including:

- foundational training that covers the basics and builds confidence
- role-specific training and guidance
- demonstrations that show practical application, encourage critical evaluation and help to inspire users – this could take place during staff meetings for example
- gathering regular feedback from staff and pupils to adjust your approach accordingly

Enterprise AI tools (see [section 4](#)) typically provide access to dedicated technical support and training for staff. **Google** offers free [training and certification](#) for educators on the use of AI tools which can be delivered as school CPD or can be accessed asynchronously.

Support for governors and trustees

- NGA offers a [two-hour workshop](#) for governors and trustees that is designed to demystify AI and build confidence and understanding.
- [AI Skills Boost \(government curated training\)](#) includes beginner learning materials.
- [Grow with Google - AI Essentials course](#) focuses on foundational knowledge and practical application.

Potential benefits

Research has identified that using AI in schools can:

- **Free up time for face-to-face teaching and human interaction** by handling repetitive, time-consuming tasks.
- **Improve school operations and business efficiency** by assisting with financial planning, budget analysis, rota management and data-driven insights for attendance or behaviour.
- **Develop pupils' AI literacy and critical thinking** as they learn to evaluate AI outputs for bias, accuracy and ethical implications; helping them to navigate the workplace where AI-generated information will be commonplace.
- **Support teacher recruitment and retention** by reducing the administrative burdens that can make the profession less attractive.

[Section 3.2 of DfE video transcripts](#) on the use of AI in education provides further examples of how AI tools can “support teaching, reduce workload, and enhance learning for all students.”

Communicating with AI models

The way that users guide AI models through “prompts” has a big impact on the quality and relevance of response. A prompt could be a simple question or a complex set of instructions.

The PARTS framework is a structured approach to create effective prompts:

- **P - Persona:** The role or perspective the AI should adopt.
- **A - Action:** The exact, specific task you want the AI to execute.
- **R - Recipient:** The audience who will consume the output.
- **T - Theme:** The context, tone, or key information the AI must prioritise.
- **S - Structure:** The format you want the final response to take.

Source: [Google prompting guide 101](#)

For example:

- **Persona:** “Act as an expert Year 7 science teacher and curriculum designer.”
- **Action:** “Create a 45-minute introductory lesson plan about the water cycle. Include a quick 5-minute warm-up activity, a 20-minute core explanation with a hands-on demonstration example, and a 10-minute check-for-understanding quiz.”
- **Recipient:** “The lesson is for a diverse classroom of 11-to 12-year-old students, some of whom are English language learners, so definitions should be clear and avoid jargon.”
- **Theme:** “Focus on the core concepts of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation.”
- **Structure:** “Format the output using clear headings for each section of the lesson, bullet points for the required materials, and a numbered list for the quiz questions at the end.”

Risks associated with AI in schools

Key risks include:

- **Data privacy breaches:** Using AI tools can lead to the unauthorised collection, storage and processing of personal data, potentially violating UK GDPR.
- **Intellectual property (IP) infringement:** Entering pupil or teacher work into AI systems without permission to train models can infringe on their IP rights.
- **Bias and discrimination:** AI systems can reflect and amplify historical biases or stereotypical attitudes present in the data they were trained on.
- **Safeguarding threats:** AI introduces unique risks such as “deepfakes” (manipulated images/videos), AI-generated scams and exposure to inappropriate or harmful content.
- **Overreliance in learning:** Pupils may delegate too much thinking to AI whereby they produce work without understanding it or developing critical thinking skills.

Governing boards should also be aware of risks that pupils may face when using AI outside of school. Child protection (including online safety) and behaviour policies should be updated to reflect the rapidly changing risks from AI use. [Section 3 of this toolkit](#) covers risk management.

Discussing benefits, risks and opportunities

DfE research highlights successful AI adoption where school leaders have taken a “curious and cautious” approach, balancing innovation and risk with an understanding that the landscape is still changing rapidly.

NGA research shows that governors and trustees are also building an understanding of AI benefits. However, there remains some uncertainty:

“AI can provide inaccurate information so users have to be mindful of this.”

“[AI] has the potential to save time in administrative tasks.”

“AI can help with more informed and faster decisions with trend spotting in attendance, behaviour and finance.”

“Challenges of misinformation is a concern.”

“Saving hours of research and reading.”

Make time to discuss (perhaps in a governing board meeting) the potential benefits and risks of AI use. Initially, you could invite everyone to indicate where they would currently place the school/trust on the following scale:

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1. **Very cautious** – “We’d rather avoid AI for now. The risks feel too high”
 2. **Cautious** – “We’re aware of AI but not comfortable using it yet.”
 3. **Beginning to explore** – “We’re open to learning more but would move carefully.”
 4. **Curious but unsure** – “We’re hearing more about AI but still have lots of questions.”
 5. **Finding a balance** – “We can see both the risks and benefits. We’re starting to explore limited uses.”
 6. **Growing confidence** – “We’re becoming more comfortable and seeing where AI might help.”
 7. **Open and positive** – “We’re happy for AI to be used in sensible, well-managed ways.”
 8. **Confident** – “We’re actively exploring how AI can support our school or trust.”
 9. **Very confident** – “We’re using AI in a range of ways and seeing clear benefits.”
 10. **Embracing opportunities** – “We’re confident using AI and keen to make the most of its potential.”

2. Developing an AI policy

There are exciting opportunities to innovate, test and learn about new AI technologies. To ensure safe, ethical and legal use, schools need to set out clear parameters and expectations in a policy. This could be standalone and/or feature across existing policies.

Where AI is not enabled, staff may be tempted to use personal accounts to access AI tools to support their workload. It is important to bring this inside the school's domain, visibility and security.

Decisions on how AI is used need to take into account each school's unique context, including pupils' age, needs, and any barriers they may face as well as staff knowledge and confidence.

Key questions to get started

While school/trust leaders are responsible for drafting policies, governors and trustees should be able to understand and evaluate decisions about how AI is used.

Conversations between the board and leaders should begin at an early stage of exploration and continue throughout policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Initially, there may be different levels of understanding and mixed views. Start by exploring:

1. What are the specific goals we want AI to support (such as addressing learning gaps, reducing workload, providing personalised learning support)?
2. What are examples of AI use that might support our goals?
3. What are examples of AI use that are not appropriate for our school?
4. How do the potential use cases fit with our culture and values?
5. Do we know how AI is already being used and what impact it is having?

AI champions and working groups

[DfE research](#) shows that many early adopter schools have assigned an AI champion who is instrumental in bringing other staff on board and can play a role in demystifying AI. In larger schools and MATs, the research refers to multiple stakeholders working together. Consider forming a working group to help explore AI usage and policy development in your school(s). This might include pupils, teachers, support staff, IT leads and governors/trustees.

"AI leadership brought together their data management teams, IT systems managers and curriculum leads. This kind of structure recognised that, unlike other forms of technology, AI requires skills and knowledge across more than one department."

DfE research – 'The biggest risk is doing nothing'

Build your policy

[Use our policy builder](#) to help guide collaborative conversations and make decisions about how AI can be used safely, ethically and effectively. Most importantly, ensure that your policy decisions are driven by clear goals, rather than the technology itself.

3. Managing AI risks

As with all areas of school life, keeping pupils safe is the most important priority when deciding how to use AI.

Conducting regular risk assessments and reviewing policies is essential to address the unique challenges of AI. The following table describes key risk areas and potential mitigation steps.

Risk area	Example scenario	Mitigation
Data protection	A teaching assistant asks an AI system for help adapting learning materials for a pupil with SEND and includes the pupil's name.	- Personal data must be protected in accordance with the GDPR. - A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) will help to identify risks associated with personal data. - Key staff (including the DPO) need a good understanding of how the chosen AI tools process data. - Users should consider whether it is safe and necessary to include personal data in prompts or uploads.
Intellectual property (IP)	A teacher enters a pupil's work, without their permission, into an AI system for marking or feedback, which then uses their work to train the AI model.	- Use of any intellectual property is consented to by the copyright owner and, in the case of pupils under 18, parental or guardian permission sought. - Ensure staff are aware of this requirement and what is permitted.
Safeguarding	A pupil is asked to collate images for an art project. They are invited to experiment with AI to generate their own images. However, this results in the pupil viewing offensive and potentially harmful images.	- Comply with age restrictions for specific AI tools. - Ensure the tools comply with DfE product safety standards. - Provide staff with training to recognise and manage risks. - Educate pupils on digital literacy and online behaviour. - Integrate online safety into the wider curriculum and staff training.
Academic integrity	A pupil produces an essay that is part of a coursework submission. However, their teacher realises that the pupil cannot explain their work or thought process and is concerned that the essay was produced entirely by an AI tool.	- Proactively address questions about ethical use of AI and implement appropriate measures. - Consider expectations for homework tasks. - Engage with parents: clarify the approach to AI, communicate how the school is making use of these tools.

Keeping a “human in the loop”

The DfE’s teacher toolkit explains that **human oversight, professional judgement, and critical evaluation** should remain at the centre of AI use in education. This principle of keeping a human in the loop is important because:

- AI systems can “**hallucinate**” (produce fake facts or made-up quotes that sound realistic).
- Humans are needed to identify and mitigate **inherent biases** in AI models that result from non-representative training data.
- Some AI tools may lack **deep subject knowledge** and understanding of **pupil-specific learning journeys**.
- Final responsibility for any document or resource generated by AI always rests with the **professional who produced it** and their organisation.

“AI offers predictive models and [flags] at-risk pupils or cohorts. However, caution is needed around bias, privacy and pupil data as well as becoming too dependent on AI without human oversight.”

NGA research participant

Ofsted expectations

AI is not evaluated separately during Ofsted inspections; however, inspectors may ask what steps the school has taken to support adoption. For example:

- Were risks considered properly when introducing an AI application?
- Does the school have assurance processes to identify emerging risks?

See [Ofsted guidance](#) for more information on how AI is considered during inspection.

AI and school complaints

Schools are seeing more complaints written using AI. These can be longer and more complex, but it’s important to identify the key issues and respond constructively.

ParentKind has produced a [free parent guide to school complaints](#) in partnership with the DfE. It emphasises that the best way to resolve concerns is through **clear, respectful communication** and urges parents to use AI with caution:

“AI doesn’t always get it right when citing laws and can make a complaint more complex than necessary.”

4. Selecting AI tools

Once your school/trust has a clear vision and goals for AI use, leaders can explore which tools are useful and appropriate for your specific context.

The role of enterprise tools

Schools are encouraged to use enterprise tools which are designed for use across an entire organisation. Such tools need to be enabled by suitably qualified staff (such as an IT manager), ensuring that all staff use the enterprise/business or education version, rather than a consumer version that can often be accessed without logging in. If an AI tool does not require users to log in using their school account, the data entered is much harder to manage and keep secure.

In practice, using enterprise tools means that school/trusts can:

- manage how staff use AI, set specific permissions and implement safety controls
- monitor usage and, if necessary, suspend activity to ensure compliance
- ensure that pupil or teacher work is not used for model training or shared with other users
- train the tools on their own specific materials, such as school policies or curriculum content

Enterprise grade tools often function as "integrated AI agents" within existing applications. For example, allowing business managers to analyse budgets directly within reporting software.

Safety features

The DfE's [generative AI safety standards for developers and suppliers](#) outline the capabilities and features that AI tools should have in place to be considered safe for users in educational settings. These include:

Feature	AI tools should:
Security	• offer robust measures to prevent unauthorised access
Privacy and data protection	• be transparent about how personal data is processed • ensure a lawful basis for data collection
Intellectual property	• not store, collect or use intellectual property created by pupils, teachers or the copyright owner to train models (unless consented to)
Design and development	• ensure child-centred design and operation • detect signs of learner distress • benefit from expert oversight and monitoring (from educators, psychologists etc.)
Filtering, monitoring and reporting	If you intend to use AI directly with pupils (not just staff), the AI tools should: • embed filtering systems that prevent access to harmful content • alert staff to possible safeguarding issues • provide reports that help identify trends and safeguarding issues

Supporting personalised learning

AI tools can create, adapt and personalise educational content to support individual pupil needs. For example, by simplifying writing and extracting keywords. There are also specialist AI tools that can be used to improve accessibility, such as by describing a scene in detail to those who are visually impaired.

However, many long-standing accessibility features, such as voice typing, screen readers, text-to-speech and colour overlays, don't necessarily use AI at all. DfE guidance explains that these established tools remain valuable and shouldn't be overlooked in favour of newer AI-based solutions.

What tools are available?

NCA members have cited the following being used in their schools/trusts:

Provider	Overview
Google	- Google has created a suite of AI tools with the aim of enhancing and enriching teaching and learning experiences. - Google's AI tools (like Gemini and NotebookLM) can be enabled by schools already using Google Workspace or enabled as an add-on standalone tool.
Microsoft	- Similar to other LLM-based tools, Microsoft Copilot can answer questions, generate content, and respond to prompts in a human-like manner. - Copilot often functions as an "integrated AI agent", allowing it to perform tasks and make decisions directly within familiar Microsoft software.
Scriba	Scriba tools are designed to make meetings and associated administration more efficient, with a focus on governance processes and minute-taking.

Consumer AI tools (that do not require log in with a school account) usually have a minimum age requirement of 18+, making them unsuitable for independent use by most school-aged pupils.

Questions to ask

- Can we use **what we already have?** (i.e. AI agents within existing technology suites) – also consider whether you're making best use of non-AI technologies to achieve your goals
- Do the selected tools provide **controls** for leaders to monitor and manage safe use?
- Is there **evidence** that the tool has been effective in other educational settings?
- What **support** will staff and pupils need to use this tool safely, critically and effectively?
- What are the **age restrictions** for the chosen tool(s)? – Is parental consent needed?

"Leaders need to understand the capabilities and limitations of AI to ensure everyone can enjoy its benefits safely. It's important to be clear with all staff on the tools that have been evaluated and made available to staff and emphasise that only AI tools approved for your setting should be used."

DfE Leadership Toolkit

5. Test and learn

Piloting AI tools can help to test new ideas, gather feedback and shape discussions about how AI might be used. This testing is likely to be limited to lower-risk applications.

[DfE research](#) describes the benefits of this approach:

“... They used internal trials and staff working groups to help them understand which tools might meet a provider’s needs best. One MAT digital lead described it as ‘getting the fundamentals and the foundation pieces right and then that makes the next level journey much easier.’”

Google has undertaken several school-based pilots to evaluate the impact of AI on teacher workload for example. One 6-month study of teachers and leaders using Gemini found they saved 10 hours per teacher per week.

Why pilots are useful

Taking initial small steps before committing to full-scale adoption can support:

- **Risk management** – creating a controlled environment where mistakes can be viewed as learning opportunities rather than systemic failures.
- **Tool selection** – Internal trials and working groups can help to build an understanding of which tools meet the school’s needs best.
- **Building buy-in** – When staff see first-hand evidence of AI impact, they become more willing to embed it into their practice.

AI pilot checklist

[Insights from early adopters](#) explain important steps to take for a successful pilot:

1	Start with calculated risks Focus on small, manageable projects that allow staff the space and time to experiment without the pressure of immediate perfection.
2	Perform a "pre-mortem" Act as if a pilot has already failed. By working backwards and talking about the reasons why, leaders can identify and plan for potential risks such as personal data being used inappropriately.
3	Complete essential training first Pilots should only begin once staff have received foundational training on the technical, ethical and safety implications of AI.
4	Maintain human oversight Ensure the "human in the loop" principle is central, where human experts check all AI outputs for accuracy and appropriateness before they reach the classroom.
5	Plan for ongoing evaluation Evaluate pilots through direct feedback from staff and pupils, such as low-stakes quizzes to track knowledge recall and termly surveys.

6. AI governance

AI oversight is much like any other governance responsibility, but the complexity and pace of technology change means boards need to be proactive and keep their understanding up to date.

Staying strategic

Effective governing boards stay focused on their organisation's strategic priorities. The same applies when deciding on and evaluating the use of AI:

"... our first consideration is, what are we trying to fix? ... If our main priorities are recruitment and retention, then we might be looking at AI in the sense of reducing staff workload. If we're thinking about attendance and SEMH, we might be ... looking at technology, including AI, to make the learning space more inclusive, more accessible for our learners."

AI Kingsley MBE, MAT chair, speaker and writer ([DfE AI Leadership toolkit](#))

Key monitoring areas for governing boards

Area	Questions to ask
Strategy	- What specific problems are we trying to solve with AI tools? - What does success look like for our setting? - How will we evaluate the impact of AI on learning and staff workload?
Policy	- Has pupil voice been used in a meaningful way to develop and evaluate our AI policy? - Are decisions informed by staff and stakeholders from across a range of departments and disciplines (i.e. an AI working group)? - Have we completed a small-scale pilot to help test our thinking? - Have existing policies been updated – such as staff code of conduct, safeguarding and child protection, behaviour and homework?
Safeguarding	- Do existing risk assessments and annual safeguarding reviews specifically consider AI-related harms? - Is our use of AI compliant with statutory duties in Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance and the filtering and monitoring standards? - What support might pupils need to ensure safe and appropriate use of AI? - How are pupils building AI literacy and critical thinking skills to help them identify misinformation and bias?
Procurement	- Does the cost of our AI tools represent value for money, and can we sustain this expenditure in the medium-to-long term? - Are we utilising existing resources, such as AI tools already integrated into our current software? - Is there credible evidence that the tools identified improve outcomes or reduce workload before we commit to a large-scale rollout?

Training and support	• Is the board itself receiving specific training or support to understand the strategic risks and benefits of AI? • Who will provide advice, training and technical support for staff? • What mechanisms are in place to gather feedback from staff to inform future CPD? • Are AI tools having a positive impact on staff workload and effectiveness? • Do teachers feel able to experiment within safe parameters and share their experiences? • How are we maintaining a "human in the loop" to quality-assure AI outputs and prevent over-reliance?
Communication	• How are we communicating our position on AI and academic integrity to parents and pupils, explaining when AI use is and isn't acceptable? • Have we explained what we hope to achieve – the "why" behind our adoption?

Using AI to support governance activities

AI also brings opportunities for governing boards to improve their efficiency and reduce administrative burdens, leaving more time for valuable strategic discussion.

Whilst many governors, trustees and governance professionals are already using AI successfully, caution is needed:

- The board's use of AI should fall within the parameters established by the school/trust (as set out in the relevant policy), particularly when it comes to using approved tools.
- Governors, trustees and governance professionals need appropriate training and access to support. This may be available through the school/trust or via a third party like NGA.
- Governing boards deal with highly confidential and often sensitive information – additional security and data protection measures may be needed.

"AI has a place in helping to produce briefing notes, highlighting changes between documents, drafting correspondence/policies and producing minutes (where appropriate). Ultimately, it will create time for people to focus on what's important, whether they're a governor, senior leader or governance professional"

NGA research participant

Sources

The following sources were consulted when developing this toolkit and may be useful to extend your knowledge of AI in education:

- [DfE policy paper - Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in education](#)
- [DfE: 'The biggest risk is doing nothing': insights from early adopters of artificial intelligence in schools and further education colleges](#)
- [DfE - AI in schools and colleges: what you need to know](#)
- [DfE - The safe and effective use of AI in education, Leadership toolkit video transcripts](#)
- [DfE - Generative AI safety standards for developers and suppliers](#)
- [Google prompting guide 101](#)
- [How Ofsted looks at AI during inspection and regulation](#)
- [NCSC Machine Learning Principles](#)
- [ICO guidance - What are the accountability and governance implications of AI?](#)
- NGA research on AI adoption and attitudes (available on request)