



A STARTER GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

Getting Started with AI in Your School or College

A practical introduction for educators and school leaders who want to understand what generative AI means for their institution, and what to do about it.

This guide covers

- What generative AI is and isn't
- How students are using it right now
- The five questions every institution should answer before writing an AI policy
- Common mistakes schools make when responding to AI
- Where to start with staff training

■ What generative AI is and isn't

Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot, predict likely-sounding text, images, or code based on patterns in the data they were trained on. They don't look things up, and they don't know whether something is true. That's why they can sound confident while stating something false, an error often called a "hallucination."

What it is: a tool that can draft, summarise, explain, translate, and brainstorm faster than a person can type.

What it isn't: a search engine, a fact-checker, or a replacement for a student's own thinking. It has no understanding of your school's curriculum, your students, or your academic integrity policy unless you tell it, and even then, it can still get things wrong.

Practical takeaway: treat any AI output as a first draft from an over-confident intern, not a finished, verified answer.



■ How students are using it right now

This isn't a future problem, it's already the majority behavior in classrooms:

- 92% of UK undergraduates reported using AI tools in some form in 2025, up from 66% the year before; 88% had used it for assessed work specifically, up from 53% (HEPI, 2025).
- 84% of US high school students reported using generative AI for schoolwork by May 2025, most often for brainstorming, editing, and research (College Board, 2025).
- 54% of K-12 students and 53% of core-subject teachers used AI for school in 2025, both up more than 15 percentage points in a year or two (RAND, 2025).
- Over 80% of students say no teacher has explicitly taught them how to use AI for schoolwork (RAND, 2025).

The pattern across every survey is the same: usage is far ahead of instruction. Most of this is happening for explaining concepts, summarising reading, and getting started on a blank page, not, for the most part, having AI write entire assignments outright.

■ The five questions every institution should answer before writing an AI policy

1. **What counts as acceptable use, by task?** A blanket "no AI" rule doesn't match how it's actually used. Be specific about brainstorming versus drafting versus submitting AI text as your own.
2. **How will you detect and handle misuse, and how confident can you be?** AI-detection tools have known accuracy problems and false-positive rates. A policy that leans on them alone will create disputes you can't win.
3. **Who is accountable for keeping the policy current?** Tools change monthly. Decide now who owns updates, rather than revisiting this from scratch every year.
4. **What data are students and staff putting into these tools?** Many free AI tools store and train on what's typed in. Decide what's off-limits, including student names, grades, safeguarding information, and unpublished assessments.
5. **How will you communicate the policy to students, staff, and parents, and in what format?** A policy that lives in a PDF no one reads isn't a policy. Plan the rollout, not just the rule.

■ Common mistakes schools make when responding to AI

- **Banning it outright, then not enforcing it.** Only 19% of teachers report working at a school with an actual AI policy, and enforcement is inconsistent where policies do exist. This gap breeds confusion, not compliance (Walton Family Foundation / RAND, 2025).
- **Writing a policy only for students, not staff.** Teachers are using AI to plan lessons and grade work at nearly the same rate students use it for homework. A policy silent on staff use only solves half the problem.
- **Over-relying on AI-detection software.** These tools flag false positives regularly, especially for non-native English speakers, and can't be treated as proof of misconduct on their own.
- **Treating this as an IT decision.** Because it touches teaching, assessment, and student wellbeing, it needs input from teaching staff, not just a technology sign-off.
- **Waiting for certainty before acting.** Guidance consistently lags behind classroom use, with usage rising more than 15 points a year while formal policy and training move far slower. Schools that wait for a "final" answer fall further behind each term.

■ Where to start with staff training

Training is the biggest gap right now, not the policy itself:

- As of late 2025, only about half of teachers (50%) had received even one professional development session on AI, though that's rising fast, up from 42% a year earlier and just 13% in 2023 (EdWeek Research Center, 2025).
- 68% of teachers say they got no formal training and largely taught themselves (The 74 / Walton Family Foundation, 2025).

Practical starting points, roughly in order:

1. **One shared staff session, not a mandate memo.** Show real examples of what AI does well and badly, using your own subject material.
2. **Pick two or three supported tools, not a free-for-all.** Fewer tools, evaluated for data privacy, are easier to train on and support.
3. **Build a small working group** (a few teachers across subjects, plus one leader) to pilot use cases and report back before a school-wide rollout.
4. **Revisit every term.** Given how fast usage and tools are changing, treat this as an ongoing conversation, not a one-time rollout.



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