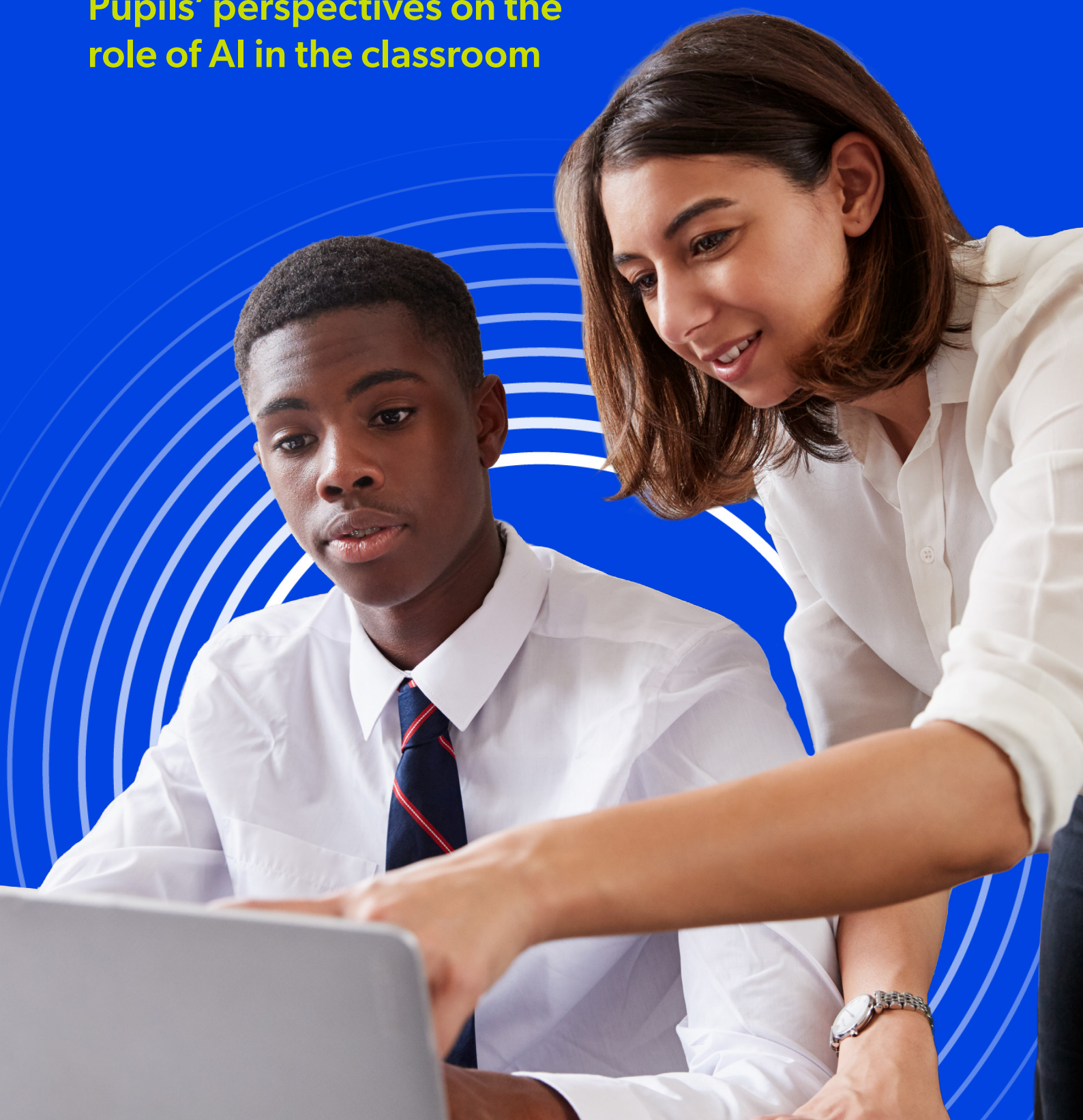
OXFORD

Navigating AI in Education

Pupils' perspectives on the role of AI in the classroom



In 2025, we published our ***Teaching the AI Native Generation*** report, one of the first pieces of UK research to hear directly from young people regarding their views on AI in Education. Following this, we wanted to delve further to understand what role teenagers see AI playing in their education and how they approach using AI in their schoolwork.

We heard from almost 4,000 young people across the UK, including a survey of 3,100 13-18-year-olds and additional qualitative school studies with over 700 pupils of the same age.

Key findings

- Teenagers are unclear over the appropriate use of AI in their education: only four in ten think it's cheating to use AI to complete all of their homework.
- Qualitative studies indicate young people are hesitant about using AI as a default for schoolwork: 72% choose not to use AI when given the option in a school task.
- Students value teacher's support: 73% point to skills their teacher has which AI can never replace.
- Despite concerns, pupils are excited about the impact of AI on their education and more than three quarters want to see their teachers use AI tools in lessons.



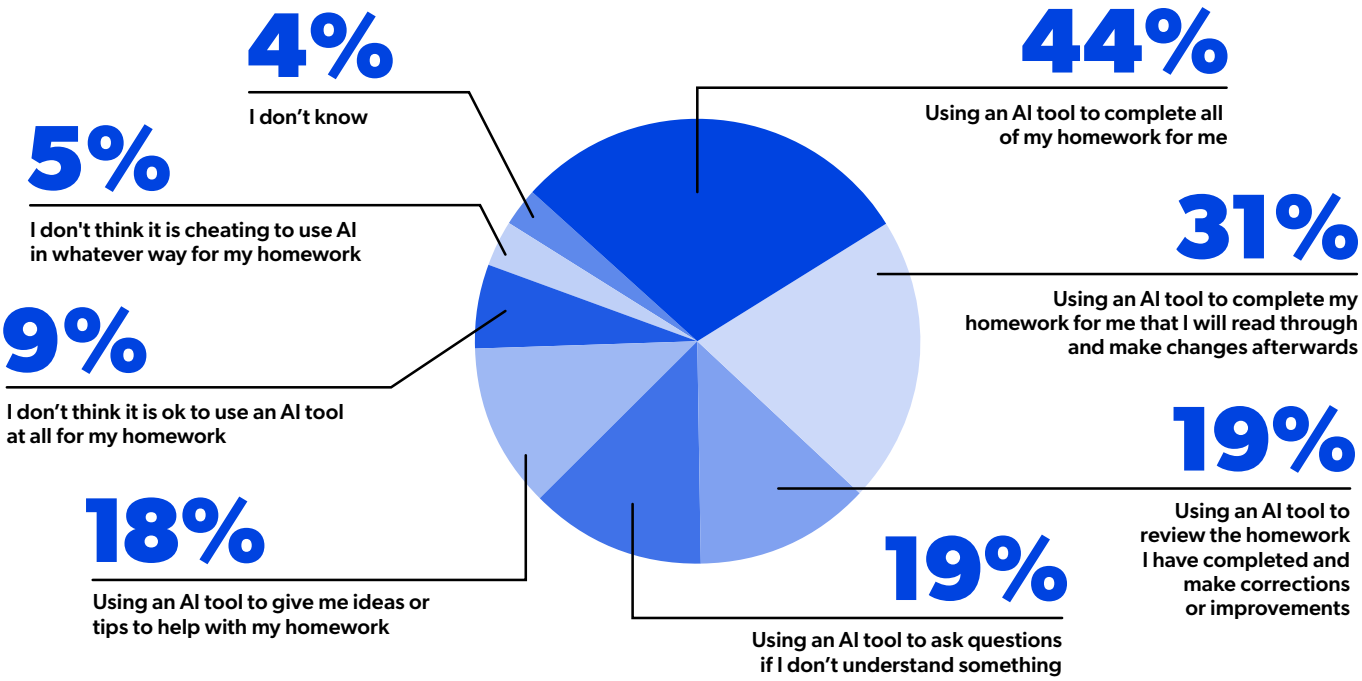
Dr Alexandra Tomescu, Head of Product AI, at Oxford University Press discusses the key findings from the research

Students are divided over the appropriate use of AI in their education

Appropriate use is a grey area as students are unclear on what constitutes cheating. While only four in ten (44%) think it is cheating to use AI to complete all of their homework, almost one in five also think it is cheating to simply ask an AI tool to give them homework tips. Students are calling for more support from schools with just 15% stating they have been given enough guidance.



In which of the following instances, if any, do you think it is cheating to use an AI tool with your homework?



Qualitative studies indicate young people are hesitant to use AI as a default for their schoolwork

We conducted qualitative studies with over 700 students in 20 schools across the UK via Oxford's ***Educational Research Forum***.



Judith Grey, Market Research Manager at Oxford University Press, explains how the qualitative school studies were conducted.

> "Too often, discussions about AI in education focus on what technology can do for students without asking what they want. Yet this research shows that young people are already thinking carefully about the role AI should play in their learning, its potential benefits, and its limitations. Their perspectives on learning, academic integrity, and the enduring value of human relationships in education are thoughtful and nuanced. If we are to build an educational future that truly serves learners, student voice must be at the heart of the conversation."
>
> *Dr Sara Ratner, Principal Investigator, AI in Education Oxford University (AIEOU)*

Of those who had access to AI, almost three quarters

72%

decided not to use it.

“It wouldn’t be actually what I truly think, it would be a vague interpretation of what I’ve told a robot to expand on, and it might not even make sense.”

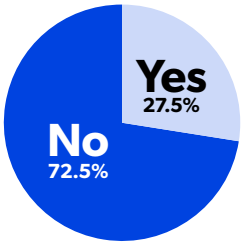
Student

The qualitative school studies

Each pupil was given the same task:

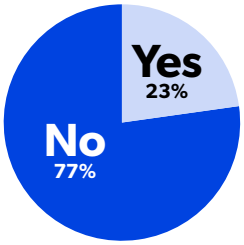
Please write a short paragraph (5-6 sentences) in answer to the question “What impact do you think Generative AI is having on your education?” There is no right or wrong answer, we want to hear your honest opinions. You can use a Generative AI tool for this task if you like. There is no limit or restrictions on how you use the tool.

Pupils were offered the choice of using a generative AI tool if they wished. Of those who had access to AI, almost three quarters (72%) decided not to use it.



Did you choose to use a Generative AI tool in any way for this task?

Of those who didn’t have access, less than a quarter (23%) said they would have liked to have used an AI tool if they had been able to do so.



Would you have liked to use an AI tool if you had been able to access one?



Year 10 pupil Phillip, from The Mosslands School, reflects on how he found the AI task

Students gave various reasons why they didn’t want to use AI with many stating they preferred to express their own opinion than use AI.

“I would rather my work for a survey to be my own, as AI doesn’t know me as well as myself.”

“It wouldn’t be actually what I truly think, it would be a vague interpretation of what I’ve told a robot to expand on, and it might not even make sense.”

“AI doesnt have opinions so it cant write what you are thinking and what you believe and sometimes it gives you fake information.”

Those that chose to use AI did so for a variety of reasons. Some used an AI tool to save time, organise their thoughts, for spelling and grammar or simply because they didn't want to do the task themselves:

"helped me organize my ideas clearly and quickly"

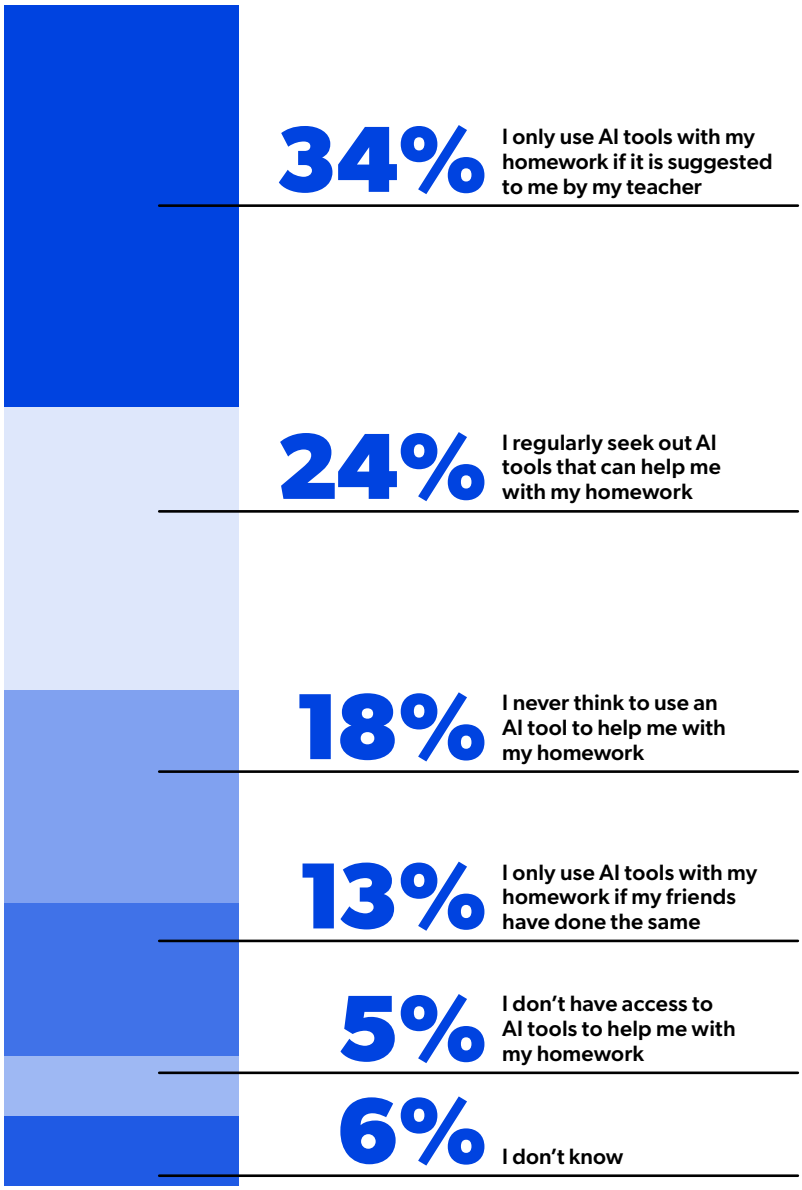
"It's easier and takes less time and effort"

"Because I was too lazy to write it out myself"

Students used the AI tools in a variety of different ways, from using it to write the whole task, to improving their argument, researching points for their opinion or to find good vocabulary.

The qualitative studies mirror survey findings, which highlight that young people do not use AI as a default for their homework with only one in four (24%) regularly seeking out AI tools. Furthermore, one in three (34%) only use AI tools to help with their homework if suggested by their teachers compared to just 13% who are influenced by their friends.

Which of the following, if any, best describes your usage and attitude to using AI tools for your homework?



"Whilst the research highlights that the appropriate use of AI is still a grey area for students it's reassuring to see young people's sophisticated attitude towards AI. Both the research and qualitative studies show AI is not necessarily a default for all students, and despite being excited about its impact on their education they still inherently value the role of their teachers and look to school for guidance. It's vital therefore that we support teachers with the resources and tools they need to responsibly guide their pupils and harness AI's potential in the classroom."

Dr Alexandra Tomescu, Head of Product AI for Oxford University Press

> “I was surprised by the discussion. I thought that students would be completely in favour of AI.”
>
> *Deputy Head, London*

> “They worry they won’t be able to learn how to learn if they use AI too much.”
>
> *Head of Department, North-West England*

Feedback from teachers

Following on from the task, the students took part in a group discussion with their teacher. A few teachers shared their surprise:

“I was surprised by the discussion. I thought that students would be completely in favour of AI. Responses in discussion were much more nuanced. It was clear that they understood the dangers that AI pose.” *Deputy Head of a Local Authority in London*

“When I asked the students, “How many of you used Generative AI?” if I counted correctly, only about 5 of the 31 students used AI for the task. I would have thought at least half of the class would use AI.” *Maths teacher at an Academy in South-East England*

“Some of the pupils said it was easier to write themselves than log into AI. (...) They also mentioned they worry they won’t be able to learn how to learn if they use AI too much.” *Head of Department at a Local Authority in North-West England*

Some teachers reported that young people viewed AI as a tool:

“They use AI as a tool, rather as they use google etc. they don’t often feel strongly about it. They were aware that it would be wrong to simply ‘cut and paste’ chunks of information from AI.” *Volunteer Coordinator at a Grammar School in Northern Ireland*

One teacher expressed concern that using AI could impact on their pupils’ skills:

“I was surprised by the sheer volume that used AI to do the task about AI. Only a couple of students out of the near 30 I had didn’t use AI to do the task, I worry that they will lose the ability to do it for themselves and those skills just won’t get developed.” *Head of Department at an Academy in North-West England*

One teacher reflected on the importance of schools working together with pupils when it comes to AI:

“From talking to the students about Generative AI - something that I probably would not have done - it is clear that they are using it widely but not always effectively. However, it is also clear that they see it as a tool and not a replacement for putting in some effort. Doing this has prompted me to have a discussion with the technology team in school in terms of perhaps extending any of the AI work we are doing as teachers to include groups of students.” *Head of English at an Academy in South-East England*



Henry Emoni, teacher at The Beacon School shares his surprise at how his students approached the AI task

What support teachers want

Following the discussions, teachers reflected on what further support they need.

> More training in pros and cons for both staff and students *Head of Department at an Independent school in the West Midlands*

> I would like to share ideas more in a productive supportive environment. Shared examples of what went well and times where AI has not worked effectively. I would like clearer guidelines on how to use AI safely and training on how to support pupils in using AI properly. I would love to use AI more effectively given the tools and training *Head of Department at a Local Authority in North-West England*

> How do we stop students from "cheating," for example with their maths homework *Head of department at a Local Authority in London*

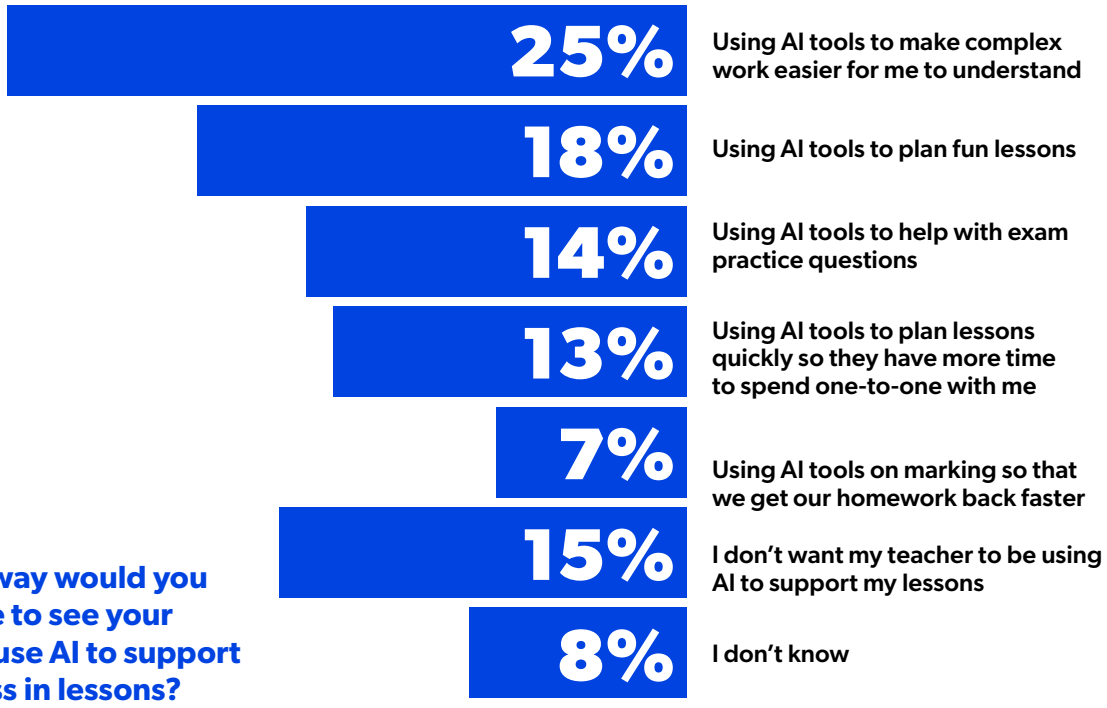
> Resources for teaching students how to use AI in a safe and productive way. Model policy documents. *Deputy Head of a Local Authority in London*

Majority of young people want teachers to use AI in lessons but equally value skills their teachers have which AI can never replace

Over three-quarters of school children (77%) would like to see their teachers use AI to support their class in lessons. Key areas include using AI to make complex work easier to understand and lesson planning:

Over three-quarters of school children 77% would like to see their teachers use AI to support their class in lessons

In what way would you most like to see your teacher use AI to support your class in lessons?



73%

point to a skill their teacher has which could never be replaced

However, pupils were also acutely aware of their teacher's unique value, with 73% pointing to a skill their teacher has which could never be replaced. In particular, young people highlighted traits such as personability, empathy, and human understanding.

"Being a real empathetic human that has spent years of their life to get the knowledge necessary to teach well." *Girl, aged 14*

"Understanding when a student is struggling and explaining things in a different way until it clicks. Also noticing if someone is upset or needs extra help." *Boy, aged 15*

"A personality that brings the subject to life." *Girl, aged 15*

Despite concerns, pupils are excited about the impact of AI on their education

Four in ten students (39%) are more excited than worried about the impact of AI on their education, compared to 16% who said they were more concerned and less than one in three (30%) who felt neither way.

Students who are more excited than worried, point to ease and practicality of AI tools within their education:

"Because it is bringing us up to date with the latest technology available in our school, whilst maintaining traditional teaching methods" *Boy, aged 14*

"AI enables me cover a lot of my homework projects, it makes work faster and gives me more room for creativity" *Girl, aged 13*

"Because when a teacher is busy helping others, I can use AI to guide me with the parts of the lesson I don't understand, instead of sitting clueless" *Girl, aged 15*

However, those who are more concerned about the impact of Generative AI on their education, point to misinformation, a lack of creativity, environmental impacts, and laziness:

"It had an impact on the environment, and it's replacing jobs and taking away creativity" *Girl, aged 16*

"Don't feel like AI is a good thing, pictures look fake, and information is sometimes wrong" *Girl, aged 13*

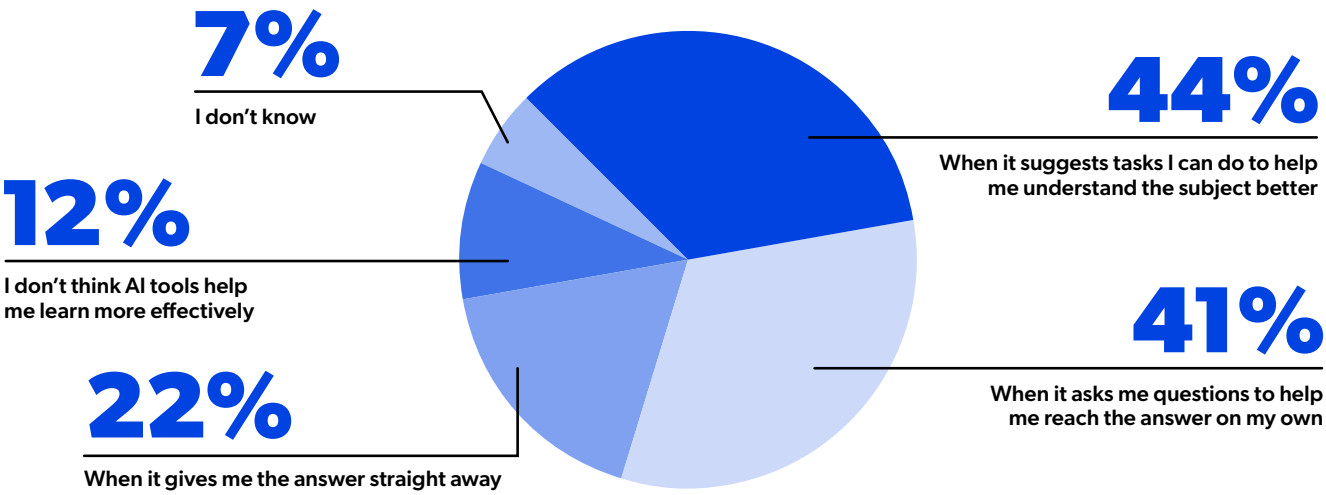
"Using AI makes you more lazy at doing reports or anything. Just type in text and it is done. You end up doing more work as you now have to check everything" *Boy, aged 14*

"Young people aren't waiting for permission to use AI, and this research confirms what we see daily across our schools at Bourne Education Trust. They want guidance, not prohibition. But if students are using AI to take shortcuts thats a task design problem. When we focus on the process of learning rather than the product students may be less likely to disengage. AI has narrowed the gap between what a young person can imagine and what they can actually create. The question for all of us in education is whether we have the ambition to match it."

Chris Goodall, Data & Digital Innovation Director at Bourne Education Trust

When asked what helps them learn more effectively when using AI, the majority expressed preferences for AI tools that suggested tasks they can do to help them understand the subject better, or asked them questions to help them reach the answer on their own, over just wanting an AI tool to give them the answer straight away:

When you use an AI tool, which of the following approaches from the AI tool, if any, helps you learn more effectively?



Pupils outline the skills they need to use AI more effectively

To get the most out of the AI tools for schoolwork, young people would like guidance on how to write prompts more effectively, how to ensure they are not 'cheating', and how to use AI tools for meaningful revision.

"Asking deeper questions, prompts, is good as it makes me think for the questions to ask to get better answers and that in turn makes me understand more" Boy, aged 14

"Rules for what you are allowed to do, and also help with prompts to use that are helpful and not cheating" Girl, aged 15

"Processes for ways to do things and how to approach certain tasks. How to word things and put things in a certain way, so it sounds better" Boy, aged 18

In the qualitative school studies, developing effective prompts was also a key discussion point, as observed by one teacher:

"Many talked about the importance of developing prompting skills, curiosity, etc." Maths teacher at an Academy in South-East England

> "Many talked about the importance of developing prompting skills, curiosity, etc"
>
> *Maths teacher*

> "Help with prompts to use that are helpful and not cheating"
>
> *Girl, aged 15*

Regional spotlight

Our survey was equally weighted across the UK* to enable us to build a better picture of regional AI usage and sentiments among young people.

Young people in London reported a higher usage of AI at school and at home (for work or leisure) compared to all other regions. A few other interesting regional findings included:

- Over half of young people (52%) are using AI on a weekly basis at home (for work or leisure) with teenagers in London most likely to be using AI daily at home (24%) versus only 10% in Wales.
- Young people in the South-West have the least access to AI at home, almost one in five (18%) never use AI at home compared to one in ten in London (10%).

Over half of young people 52% are using AI on a weekly basis at home (for work or leisure)

- South-West had the highest proportion of teenagers (49%) who felt that using an AI tool to complete all of their homework was cheating, compared to 44% nationally.
- Nationally, 7% state they use AI tools regularly in lessons. In London this rises to 14% compared to just 1% in Northern Ireland.
- A third of pupils in the Midlands state they haven't been given guidance on when they should be using AI tools for their schoolwork compared to just one in five (21%) London pupils feeling the same way.
- Young people in the North-West are most likely to regularly seek out AI tools that can help them with their homework, with 30% choosing to do so compared to 24% nationally.

While these results give us insights into young people's use of AI across the UK our sample sizes do not support drawing a definite picture across regions.

> "It's crucial that any AI tools developed for education have learning design principles at their core and are grounded in strong pedagogy."
>
> *Dr Penelope Woolf, Director of Impact and Learning Design at Oxford University Press*

Developing responsible AI tools: our values and principles

To build on the trust that generations of teachers and learners have placed in us, we have developed a framework of considerations for the responsible use of AI. Our AI Framework for UK School Resources is made up of a set of values and principles which apply to any of our products which use AI capability.



Dr Penelope Woolf outlines our set of values and principles that guide the responsible use of AI

Practical teacher tips for tackling AI anxiety

Daniel Williams, Associate Assistant Headteacher at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School in Sutton Coldfield, shares his advice for teachers who are anxious about using AI in the classroom.

Start with low-risk teacher tasks

The best place to begin is with low-risk teacher tasks, rather than using AI directly with pupils straight away. For example, AI can help draft a parent email, rewrite instructions, create a retrieval quiz, structure a report comment, adapt a reading passage or produce a first draft of a worksheet. These uses allow teachers to build confidence privately, without immediately raising issues around assessment integrity, safeguarding or pupil data.

Give AI very specific instructions

My practical advice would be to give AI very specific instructions. A weak prompt might be: "Make me a quiz on forces." A better prompt would be: "Create ten multiple-choice questions for a Year 10 GCSE Physics class on resultant forces. Use AQA-style language. Include four options for each question, make the distractors plausible and provide the correct answer with a one-sentence explanation." The more context you give, the better the output tends to be. It helps to include the year group, subject, topic, exam board, ability level, purpose of the task and the format you want.

Provide AI with the resources you are working with

Another useful approach is to provide the AI with the resources you want it to work from, where your school policy allows this. For example, uploading or pasting in a lesson outline, mark scheme, knowledge organiser, worksheet, specification extract or model answer can significantly improve the quality of the output. It gives the AI a clearer reference point, rather than leaving it to guess the curriculum, level or style required. This usually leads to more accurate, relevant and usable responses.

Ask AI to improve and refine its answer

I would also encourage teachers to ask AI to improve or refine something, rather than expecting a perfect answer first time. Useful prompts include: "Make this explanation clearer for a lower-attaining Year 9 class", "Rewrite these instructions so they are easier to follow", "Suggest five common misconceptions pupils might have about this topic", "Turn this into a short retrieval starter" or "Check this resource for possible errors or misleading explanations." AI is often most useful when it acts as a thinking partner or editor, rather than when it is asked to produce a finished resource from scratch.

Treat AI as a first draft

Anything AI produces should be treated as a first draft, not a final answer. AI can sound confident while being wrong. It may include errors, misconceptions, invented references, American curriculum assumptions or explanations that do not fit the needs of a particular class. The teacher remains the expert in the room. Their subject knowledge, understanding of their pupils, awareness of common misconceptions and knowledge of the exam board are what make the material useful.

Ensure your school has clear policies and guidance

Schools also need clear policies and guidance. Teachers should know which tools are approved, what types of use are permitted and what the expectations are around pupil data, assessment, safeguarding and academic honesty. Staff should stay within their school's policy and seek advice if they are unsure. They should only upload resources they are permitted to share and should avoid including personal, confidential or identifiable pupil information. Clear boundaries reduce anxiety because teachers are not left to make difficult decisions on their own.

Don't use AI everywhere - use it deliberately

Used well, AI can reduce workload by supporting planning, feedback, accessibility, modelling and resource adaptation. Used poorly, it can increase workload, spread misconceptions or weaken teacher ownership of planning and assessment. The aim should not be to use AI everywhere, but to use it deliberately where it genuinely improves teaching or saves time.

Give pupils clear guidance

Pupils also need clear guidance on what AI use is allowed, what must be acknowledged and what is not acceptable. One useful classroom activity is to give pupils an AI-generated answer and ask them to find the errors, improve it or compare it with a mark scheme. This helps pupils understand both the strengths and limitations of AI.

Most importantly, anxiety about AI should not be seen as resistance. It is often a sign of responsible professional caution around accuracy, bias, workload, data protection, safeguarding and pupil motivation. Teachers do not have to be enthusiastic about AI, but it is worth being curious enough to try one small, safe task. AI should be seen as a helpful assistant, not a replacement for teacher expertise, relationships or accountability.

Further support

To support schools, OUP has a dedicated AI and Education site which is regularly updated with articles, insights and tools for teachers. You can visit the site here.



**The market research surveyed 300 teenagers in each region with the exception of the North-East and Wales (150 teenagers) and Northern Ireland (100 teenagers) where recruiting larger sample sizes wasn't possible.*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS