

EMBRACING THE promise of AI

Schools are rapidly adapting to the impacts of AI, as new tools reshape how students think and learn, writes Nathan Sclaro.



Kilvington Grammar has been mindful in using AI as a learning support that doesn't replace critical thinking.

At Kilvington Grammar School in Melbourne's south-east, a recent survey found that 94 per cent of students in years 9–12 routinely use artificial intelligence in their school work, while focus groups showed that students as young as years 5 and 6 are also regular users.

The findings mirror data from the Digital Education Council, an international body that tracks AI use in schools globally, highlighting the speed at which the technology has become embedded in classrooms.

"There is no turning back the clock," says Alice James, Kilvington's head of teaching and learning. "AI is already an uncontrollable presence in students' education, and the responsibility for schools now is to teach students how to use it effectively, ethically and responsibly, not to pretend it isn't there."

At Kilvington, AI has been deliberately integrated as a learning support in classrooms, rather than as a shortcut that replaces thinking.

"Students are taught how AI platforms such as Google Notebook LM and Gizmo can help summarise and organise notes and support revision, while large language model chatbots such as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot can act as personalised study tutors, explaining concepts in different ways and allowing students to revisit material at their own pace," James says.

"Crucially, AI is available to students when they need it, creating

opportunities for personalised learning. It also allows students to ask questions privately, which can be particularly important for those who are more reserved or reluctant to ask questions in front of their peers."

Teachers, too, are finding practical uses for AI tools, without losing sight of the human elements of their practice. At Kilvington, teachers are using the technology to generate ideas for lesson planning, tailor materials to different learning levels, develop lesson activities and assessments, and assist with administrative tasks such as writing emails.

As AI began to gain momentum in education a few years ago, Westbourne Grammar School, a coeducational school in Melbourne's western suburbs, established dedicated AI academies for staff and students.

The two academies function as structured hubs, providing practical guidance on how AI, particularly generative tools, can be used responsibly across teaching practice and student work.

Westbourne's head of middle school, Emma Watters, says one of the aims of building the academies has been to give teachers clear and practical frameworks to engage with AI technologies.

"The AI Academy for Staff is essentially a repository of information that gives staff an idea of what they could do with AI in their general teaching," she says. "It includes a prompt library with examples that show how to get the most out of tools like ChatGPT and other generative AI programs.

"For example, we encourage staff to personify the tool: give it a role,



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explain who you are, request what you want it to do, provide detail, specify the format, tone, voice and audience. That way, when teachers are using generative AI, they understand how to use it effectively rather than going in blind.”

Watters says recent discussions in the AI Academy for Students have focused on when AI use is appropriate in a task, and how it should be referenced.

“The school is introducing a five-level AI assessment scale, which uses colour-coding to signal to students how much AI use is permitted for a task,” she says. “It’s based on the AI Assessment Scale, developed in 2024 by [academic researchers led by Mike] Perkins and colleagues, and allows us to indicate whether a task is a green-light assessment, where AI can be used freely, or a red-light, where it can’t be used at all.

“Red-light assessments show what students have retained and can demonstrate independently,” she says. “The other levels are more nuanced. For example, amber indicates that AI can be used for editing but not for generating content.”

Rather than trying to police the use of AI, Westbourne has focused on redesigning learning. The school’s bespoke Geared program focuses on

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fabrication and innovation skills, with many tasks, such as building a birdhouse, that cannot be carried out using AI.

“We also focus on students’ humanity,” Watters says. “You can’t ask AI for a personal reflection that genuinely reflects who someone is, for example.

“I think these tools are creating a positive culture shift by forcing us to look harder at what learning is all about. It’s more than just rote memorisation – it’s about what students do with the information once they find it. If we move away from framing AI use as cheating and instead focus on making learning experiences meaningful, we honour adolescents’ and students’ futures, because this technology isn’t going [away].”

James is also positive about the systemic shifts AI is creating in education, adding that, when used well, the tools can strengthen critical thinking by forcing students to question sources, evaluate information and reflect on how knowledge is constructed.

“Ultimately, the goal is not to produce students who are good at using AI, but students who are thoughtful, ethical and confident thinkers,” she says. “If education gets this right, AI won’t diminish learning; it will raise the bar for what learning can be.”