Assessing the Effectiveness of School Responses to Artificial Intelligence

Justin Gu, William Wu, Dylan Nestel

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Abstract

This investigation examines whether current school responses to artificial intelligence are sufficient to prepare students for ethical and effective AI use. It argues that many schools have responded in one of two limited ways: through blanket restrictions on AI in assessments or through brief educational interventions that do not produce lasting understanding. Using a mixed-methods design, the investigation draws on an anonymous student survey and short teacher interviews to examine student behaviour, recall of school-based AI education, and attitudes towards clearer ethical guidance. The findings suggest that prohibition-based approaches do not reliably prevent misuse, while brief instruction often lacks the depth and continuity needed to shape student behaviour meaningfully. Teacher responses further indicate that schools are increasingly relying on supervised assessment formats in response to AI-related concerns, a strategy that may not remain sustainable in increasingly digital learning environments. Overall, the investigation concludes that a more standardised and sustained model of AI education is needed, one that prioritises practical AI literacy, ethical reasoning, and clear boundaries around appropriate academic use.

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1 Introduction

Artificial intelligence has rapidly become part of everyday school life[1], shaping how students research, write, revise, and complete assessment tasks. Tools such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Claude, and other generative AI platforms[2] are now widely accessible, allowing students to produce explanations, summaries, plans, and extended responses within seconds. This has created both opportunity and concern.[3] On one hand, AI can support learning by clarifying concepts, generating practice questions, and providing feedback. On the other hand, it can be used to bypass genuine thinking, undermine academic integrity[4], and weaken the development of independent skills.[5]

As a result, schools have been forced to respond quickly. In many cases, however, these responses have remained narrow and reactive. Broadly, schools tend to adopt one of two approaches: imposing restrictions on AI use in assessments, or providing brief introductory instruction that is often too limited to produce lasting understanding. Neither approach is fully adequate. Restriction alone is difficult to enforce beyond supervised settings, while shallow instruction rarely equips students with the ethical judgement and practical understanding needed to use AI responsibly.

This issue is significant because AI is no longer a temporary or peripheral challenge within education. It is part of a wider structural shift in the learning environment, one that is already influencing both classroom practice and assessment design. In response to concerns about misuse, some schools have increased their reliance on supervised tasks, handwritten responses, oral assessments, and in-class writing. Although such measures may help preserve authenticity in the short term, they do not address the deeper issue of how students should be taught to engage with AI critically and ethically.

This investigation therefore examines whether current school responses to AI are sufficient to prepare students for ethical and effective use. It argues that a more standardised and sustained model of AI education is needed, one that moves beyond simple prohibition and instead develops practical AI literacy, ethical reasoning, and clear boundaries around appro-

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[1] Clarke, M. (2025) *Australian framework for generative artificial intelligence (AI) in schools.* Australian Government Department of Education. Available at: `https://www.education.gov.au/schooling/resources/australian-framework-generative-artificial-intelligence-ai-schools` (Accessed: 1 September 2025).

[2] In this report, "generative AI" refers to AI systems capable of producing new text, images, or other content in response to user prompts.

[3] Academy (2025) *AI in schools.* Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership. Available at: `https://www.academy.vic.gov.au/resources/collections/ai-in-schools` (Accessed: 1 September 2025).

[4] Academic integrity refers to the expectation that students produce honest, original, and appropriately attributed work.

[5] Williamson, B., Molnar, A. and Boninger, F. (2024) *Time for a pause: Without effective public oversight, AI in schools will do more harm than good.* Commercialism in Education Research Unit, National Education Policy Center. Available at: `https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED653304` (Accessed: 1 September 2025).

priate academic use.

1.1 Research Question

To what extent do current school responses to artificial intelligence fail to prepare students for ethical and effective AI use, and why is a more standardised model of AI education needed?

1.2 Hypothesis

Current school measures are inadequate because they are either overly restrictive or too superficial to influence student behaviour in a lasting way. As a result, many students continue to use AI inappropriately, while also lacking the knowledge needed to use it responsibly. Therefore, a broader and more standardised model of AI education is needed.[6]

1.3 Context and Rationale

Schools are facing a genuine dilemma. On one hand, AI tools can support brainstorming, clarification, study planning, feedback, and independent learning. On the other hand, they can be misused to generate answers, complete assignments dishonestly, and weaken authentic skill development. Many schools have reacted quickly, but not always thoughtfully. Some have implemented near-total bans on AI in assessments[7]. Others have offered short awareness sessions, often lasting only a few lessons or a single week, before assuming students are prepared to navigate the issue independently.

The problem with both approaches is that they treat AI as a temporary disruption rather than a permanent shift in the learning environment. If AI is now part of students' everyday academic reality, then schools need a response that extends beyond prohibition and beyond token awareness campaigns[8].

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[6] In this investigation, the hypothesis functions as a provisional expectation to be tested against the survey and interview findings, rather than as a fixed conclusion.

[7] CBP Lawyers (2023) *AI in education: A guide to the safe and responsible use of AI in schools.* Available at: `https://www.cbp.com.au/insights/publications/ai-in-education-a-guide-to-the-safe-and-responsible-use-of-ai-in-schools` (Accessed: 25 August 2025).

[8] Here, "token awareness campaigns" refers to brief or superficial school responses that acknowledge AI as an issue without providing sustained, practical instruction on its ethical and effective use.

2 Methodology

This investigation employs a mixed-methods research design in order to examine the extent to which current school responses to artificial intelligence are effective in shaping student behaviour and understanding. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study is able to capture both broad behavioural patterns and the perspectives that underpin them. The methodology therefore consists of:

1. an anonymous student survey conducted across selected public and private secondary schools; and
2. short-response teacher interviews designed to gather insight into the implementation and effectiveness of current AI-related school policies.

2.1 Student Survey

An anonymous survey[9] was distributed to 250 high school students across a range of public secondary schools. The survey targeted students in Years 9–12[10], as these cohorts are more likely to encounter AI-related rules in formal assessment contexts. Responses were collected anonymously in order to reduce fear of punishment and encourage honesty when answering questions about rule-breaking and academic conduct.

The survey focused on three main areas:

1. student awareness of school AI policies,
2. student recall of any AI education provided by schools,
3. student behaviour and attitudes regarding AI use in assessments.

The proposed sample included students from a mixture of both government and non-government schools[11].

- North Sydney Boys High School
- North Sydney Girls High School

[9] Anonymity was used to reduce response inhibition and encourage more honest answers, particularly in relation to misconduct and rule-breaking.

[10] These year groups were selected because they are more likely to encounter formal assessment conditions, academic integrity expectations, and school guidance regarding AI use.

[11] Including both government and non-government schools was intended to capture a broader range of school policies, resources, and educational responses to AI use.

- Killara High School
- Chatswood High School
- Sydney Girls High School
- Sydney Boys High School
- Shore School
- Wenona School

The survey included the following questions:

1. Does your school currently have rules or restrictions on using AI for assessment tasks?
    A. Yes
    B. No
    C. Not sure
2. Which best describes your school's current response to AI?
    A. A strict ban on AI in assessments
    B. A short course or one-off lesson on AI
    C. Ongoing guidance across subjects
    D. No clear response
    E. Not sure
3. Have you ever used AI in a way that went against your school's assessment rules?
    A. Yes
    B. No
    C. Prefer not to say
4. How clearly do you understand what counts as ethical AI use in schoolwork?
    A. Very clearly
    B. Somewhat clearly
    C. Slightly
    D. Not at all
5. Has your school provided any lessons or courses about AI use?
    A. Yes
    B. No
    C. Not sure
6. If yes, how much of that teaching can you still recall?

A. Most of it

B. Some of it

C. Very little

D. None of it

7. Would clearer teaching about ethical AI use make you less likely to misuse AI in assessment tasks?

   A. Yes

   B. No

   C. Maybe

2.2 Teacher Interviews

To complement the survey data, short interviews were conducted with teachers to gather qualitative insight into how AI is affecting school assessment practices. Teachers were asked about the effectiveness of current AI policies, the challenges of enforcement, and whether they believed students were receiving adequate guidance on ethical AI use.

The general teacher interview questions were as follows:

1. How would you describe your school's current approach to AI use in student assessments?
2. How effective do you think this approach has been?
3. What challenges do teachers face in enforcing AI-related rules?
4. Have concerns about AI changed the way assessments are designed at your school?
5. Do you believe students are being taught enough about ethical and appropriate AI use?

2.3 Procedural Detail and Data Handling

To strengthen the methodological transparency of this investigation, the following procedural considerations were addressed.

2.3.1 Participant Selection

Participants were selected from a small cross-section of metropolitan secondary schools in order to obtain responses from students exposed to differing school environments and AI policies. The sample focused on students in Years 9–12, as these year groups are more likely to encounter formal assessment conditions and school guidance relating to AI use.

2.3.2 Sampling Method

The student sample was convenience-based[12], as participants were recruited through existing school networks and voluntary response. As a result, the sample was not randomised and may not be fully representative of all Australian secondary students. However, it was sufficient for identifying broad patterns relevant to the investigation.

2.3.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity was preserved by ensuring that no identifying information, such as student names, email addresses, or school IDs, was collected through the survey. Responses were submitted anonymously, and teacher interview comments were anonymised before being incorporated into the report. This was intended to reduce response inhibition and encourage greater honesty, particularly in relation to questions about misconduct.

2.3.4 Recording of Teacher Responses

Teacher responses were collected through short written or verbal interviews and recorded in summary form[13] at the time of response. Where direct quotations were used, they were either transcribed from written responses or carefully paraphrased and then presented in anonymised form to preserve confidentiality.

2.3.5 Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis was conducted by examining relationships between different categories of school responses[14] and the corresponding student outcomes reflected in the survey data. In particular, responses to Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 were compared in order to identify links between policy type, student misuse of AI, student recall of AI education, and attitudes towards clearer ethical guidance. These quantitative patterns were then compared with recurring themes from teacher interviews, including enforcement difficulty, assessment redesign, and concern about insufficient student guidance.

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[12] A convenience sample is one drawn from participants who are readily accessible, rather than selected randomly from the broader population.

[13] Where paraphrasing was used, the intention was to preserve the meaning of the response while presenting it in a concise and anonymised form.

[14] These categories included restriction-based responses, brief instructional responses, and more sustained forms of guidance across subjects or over time.

3 Findings and Analysis

3.1 Student Survey Results

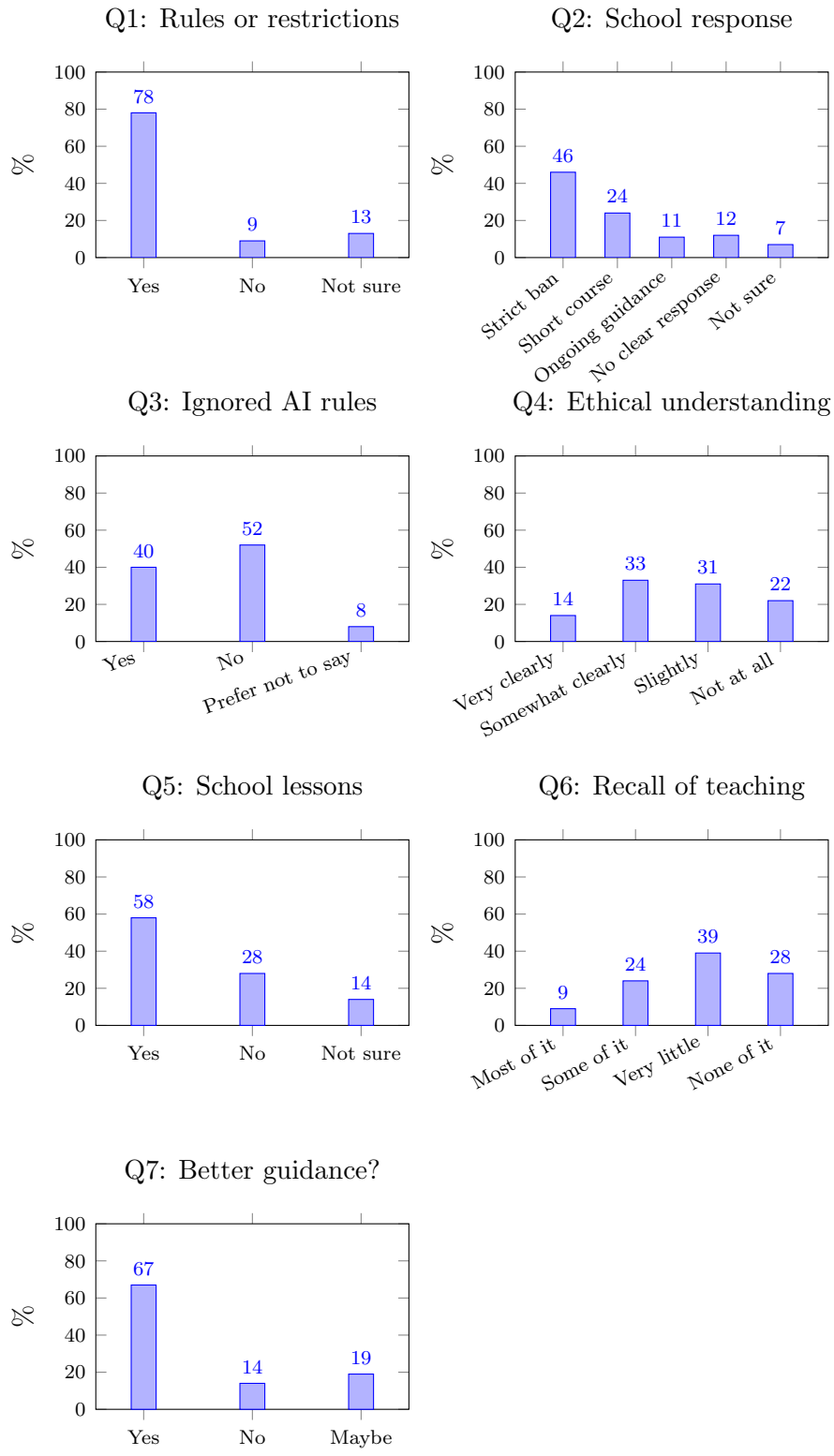

Figure 1: Column graphs of student survey responses across all 7 survey questions.

3.2 Student Survey Analysis

As shown in Question 3 of Figure 1, 40% of the 250 surveyed students reported having used AI in ways that contravened their school's assessment restrictions. To account for sampling uncertainty, a confidence interval was calculated to better estimate the true proportion of students who ignore AI bans on assessments.

Let the sample proportion be

$$\hat{p} = 0.40, \quad n = 250.$$

A 95% confidence interval[15] for the true population proportion was calculated using

$$\hat{p} \pm 1.96\sqrt{\frac{\hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{n}}.$$

Substituting the values gives

$$0.40 \pm 1.96\sqrt{\frac{0.40(0.60)}{250}} = 0.40 \pm 1.96\sqrt{0.00096} = 0.40 \pm 1.96(0.03098) = 0.40 \pm 0.0607.$$

Therefore, the 95% confidence interval is

$$(0.339,\ 0.461),$$

or approximately

$$33.9\% \text{ to } 46.1\%.$$

This suggests that the true proportion of students ignoring AI bans on assessments is likely to lie between 33.9% and 46.1%. However, because this result is based on self-reported behaviour, it is possible that the true proportion is higher due to underreporting[16]. Additionally, this is also seen in Question 3 of Figure 1, as 8% of students selected "Prefer not to say", which further suggests that the reported 40% may underestimate the true extent of AI misuse, since some respondents may have been unwilling to disclose behaviour that contravened school rules even in an anonymous survey.

These findings suggest that prohibition alone has not been effective in preventing student misuse of AI. Although 78% of respondents indicated that their school had rules or restrictions governing AI use in assessment tasks, Question 3 showed that a substantial proportion of students still reported acting in breach of those rules. This contrast is significant, as it

[15] A 95% confidence interval gives a plausible range for the true population proportion based on the sample data and sampling variability.

[16] Underreporting may occur when respondents choose not to disclose behaviour they perceive as dishonest, inappropriate, or rule-breaking.

implies that the mere existence of policy does not guarantee compliance. Rather, it suggests that current restrictions may lack either enforceability or sufficient student understanding to shape behaviour in a meaningful and lasting way.

The results from Question 2 further reinforce this conclusion. Nearly half of respondents, 46%, described their school's response as a strict ban on AI in assessments, while only 11% reported receiving ongoing guidance across subjects. This indicates that many schools remain more focused on restricting AI than on teaching students how to engage with it responsibly. Such an approach may create a rule-based framework, but it does little to develop the ethical judgement required for students to use AI appropriately in unsupervised contexts.

Question 4 also reveals an important weakness in current school responses. Only 14% of students reported that they understood ethical AI use very clearly, while the majority selected either "somewhat clearly", "slightly", or "not at all". This suggests that many students lack confidence in distinguishing between acceptable assistance and academic dishonesty. As a result, misuse may not arise solely from deliberate cheating, but also from uncertainty caused by vague or insufficient guidance.

The survey results concerning school-based AI education also support this interpretation. In Question 5, 58% of students indicated that their school had provided some form of lesson or course about AI use. However, Question 6 shows that this instruction may have had limited lasting impact: only 9% of students reported recalling most of that teaching, while 39% recalled very little and 28% recalled none of it at all. This suggests that current educational responses are often too brief or superficial to meaningfully influence behaviour. In other words, schools may be addressing AI in principle, but not in a way that students retain or apply.

Finally, Question 7 provides perhaps the strongest support for the need for greater AI education. A clear majority of respondents, 67%, stated that clearer teaching about ethical AI use would make them less likely to misuse AI in assessment tasks. This is a significant finding because it implies that many students do not reject ethical guidance; rather, they may be actively lacking it. The result strengthens the argument that the current problem is not simply one of student dishonesty, but also one of educational insufficiency.

These findings underscore the educational significance of clearer and more sustained AI instruction. If students report that explicit ethical guidance would make them less likely to misuse AI, then AI education should be understood not as an optional addition, but as a key strategy for reducing academic dishonesty. At the same time, stronger guidance can improve the quality of student engagement with AI by clarifying how it may be used to support revision, feedback, clarification, and idea development without displacing independent thought. Accordingly, greater AI education has the potential both to reduce misuse and to promote more ethical, purposeful, and educationally meaningful forms of AI use.

3.3 Teacher Interview Findings

Teacher responses revealed several recurring concerns about the effectiveness of current school approaches to AI. Each interview question highlighted a different dimension of the issue, ranging from policy design to classroom enforcement and long-term assessment sustainability.

Question 1: How would you describe your school's current approach to AI use in student assessments? Responses to this question suggested that many schools currently adopt a primarily restrictive approach to AI. Teachers commonly described their school policies as reactive[17], with an emphasis on limiting misuse rather than developing student understanding. This indicates that AI is often being treated as a disciplinary problem before it is treated as an educational one.

> *"At the moment, our approach is mostly preventative. The focus is on restricting inappropriate use, rather than teaching students in a detailed way how AI can be used responsibly."*

This is significant because it suggests that current school responses may be focused more on immediate control than on building long-term student capability.

Question 2: How effective do you think this approach has been? Teacher responses indicated that the effectiveness of current AI policies is limited. While some teachers acknowledged that stricter supervision can reduce misuse in the short term, many also suggested that these measures do not address the underlying issue. In particular, they do not ensure that students understand what ethical AI use actually looks like.

> *"It has probably reduced some misuse in formal settings, but I do not think it has solved the bigger problem. Students still need clearer guidance on where the line is."*

This implies that existing responses may succeed in constraining student behaviour temporarily, but not in shaping responsible and independent judgement.

Question 3: What challenges do teachers face in enforcing AI-related rules? This question revealed one of the most consistent themes across the interviews: enforcement is difficult in practice. Teachers reported that it is often challenging to determine whether

[17]Here, "reactive" refers to policies designed primarily to respond to misuse after it becomes a concern, rather than to build long-term student understanding in advance.

submitted work reflects genuine student understanding or AI-assisted production. This uncertainty places teachers in a difficult position, particularly when they suspect misuse but cannot prove it conclusively.

> *"The hardest part is that you can often suspect AI use, but suspicion is not evidence. It is becoming more difficult to distinguish polished student work from AI-supported responses."*

Such responses reinforce the idea that prohibition alone is not sufficient, as rules become harder to enforce when the technology is widely accessible and increasingly difficult to identify.

Question 4: Have concerns about AI changed the way assessments are designed at your school? Teacher responses to this question suggested that AI has already begun to reshape assessment practices. Several responses indicated a greater reliance on in-class writing, oral tasks, checkpoints, and supervised assessment formats in order to preserve authenticity. While these changes may reduce misuse in the short term, they also reflect a defensive shift in educational practice.

> *"We have definitely moved towards more in-class and closely supervised tasks. It gives us more confidence that the work is genuine, but it is not something we can depend on forever."*

This is important because it shows that current responses may be placing schools in a reactive cycle, redesigning tasks around the problem rather than resolving its educational cause.

Question 5: Do you believe students are being taught enough about ethical and appropriate AI use? Responses to the final question generally suggested that current AI education is insufficient. Teachers expressed concern that students are often given rules about what not to do, but are not taught clearly enough how AI may be used appropriately, critically, and ethically. This reflects a broader gap between policy and education.

> *"I do not think students are being taught enough about ethical use. Many of them know that there are rules, but they do not really understand what responsible use would look like in practice."*

This finding is particularly significant because it aligns with the student survey results, in which many respondents indicated that clearer teaching would make them less likely to misuse AI. Together, these responses support the argument that the current issue is not simply one of misconduct, but also one of educational insufficiency.

3.3.1 Overall Significance

Several teacher responses suggested that current AI policies are difficult to enforce consistently in practice. One teacher noted that "it is often hard to determine whether a student's work reflects genuine understanding or carefully edited AI output." Another explained that concerns about AI misuse had led to a greater reliance on in-class writing and oral tasks. These responses suggest that current school approaches are increasingly reactive, focusing on limiting misconduct rather than building student understanding.

A further concern raised in teacher interviews was the extent to which suspected AI misuse has already altered assessment practice. For example, teachers at North Sydney Boys High School reported that AI-related misuse among approximately 110 Year 10 students had contributed to a greater reliance on in-person assessment formats. This reflects a broader defensive shift in school practice: when trust in unsupervised work declines, schools respond by moving assessment into supervised environments. While this may preserve authenticity in the short term, it is unlikely to remain a sustainable long-term solution. As learning environments become increasingly digital, schools will eventually need to conduct at least some assessments online. For this reason, assessment redesign alone cannot solve the problem. Without stronger and more standardised AI education, schools may continue responding reactively rather than equipping students to use AI ethically and responsibly.

The teacher interviews suggest that current school responses to AI are largely reactive, difficult to enforce, and limited in long-term effectiveness. Teachers appear to be managing the immediate consequences of AI misuse, often through increased supervision and assessment redesign, while also recognising that students are not yet receiving enough explicit guidance about ethical AI use. These findings strengthen the overall contention of this report that a more standardised and sustained model of AI education is needed.

3.4 Comparative Analysis

Ultimately, the student survey and teacher interview findings point to the same conclusion: current school responses to AI are more reactive than educational. Students reported widespread awareness of school rules, yet a substantial minority still admitted to contravening them. Teachers, meanwhile, described growing difficulty in enforcement and an increasing reliance on in-person assessment formats to preserve authenticity.

A comparison of the data suggests that prohibition-based responses are less effective than educational ones in shaping responsible student behaviour. While 46% of students identified their school's response as a strict ban, 40% still reported using AI against school rules. By contrast, 67% of students indicated that clearer ethical guidance would make them less likely to misuse AI. This suggests that educational clarity may have greater potential to influence

behaviour than restriction alone.

Similarly, although 58% of students reported that their school had provided some form of lesson or course about AI, only 9% stated that they recalled most of that teaching. This indicates that brief or isolated instruction is insufficient, particularly when compared with the small proportion of students, 11%, who reported receiving ongoing guidance[18] across subjects. These patterns suggest that the most effective response is unlikely to be either blanket prohibition or token instruction, but rather a more sustained and standardised model of AI education.

4 Limitations and Future Improvements

This investigation is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the sample size, while sufficient to identify broad patterns, remains relatively limited. As a result, the findings cannot be assumed to represent all Australian secondary students with complete accuracy. The use of a convenience-based sample also reduces the generalisability of the results, as participants were drawn from a specific cross-section of schools rather than selected through random sampling.

A further limitation arises from the self-reported nature of the student survey. Responses relating to misconduct, including the misuse of AI in assessment tasks, may have been affected by fear, embarrassment, memory errors, or social desirability bias, even though the survey was anonymous. Consequently, the reported proportion of students who admitted to contravening school AI rules may underestimate the true extent of the issue. Similarly, teacher interview responses may reflect the particular conditions, policies, and concerns of individual schools rather than the broader educational landscape.

In addition, the investigation focuses primarily on student perceptions and teacher observations, rather than on independently verified records of AI misuse or formal policy outcomes. This means that the report is best understood as an analysis of patterns in reported behaviour and attitudes, rather than as a definitive measure of the full scale of AI misuse across schools.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not invalidate the investigation. Rather, they help frame its conclusions more responsibly and highlight the need for further research. Future studies could strengthen this area of inquiry by drawing on larger and more diverse samples, incorporating a wider range of school types and geographical contexts, and collecting longitudinal data to examine how student attitudes and behaviours change over time. It would also be valuable for future research to compare schools with different AI policies more systematically, in

[18] Ongoing guidance refers to repeated and sustained instruction about appropriate AI use across subjects or over time, rather than a single introductory lesson.

order to identify which approaches are most effective in promoting ethical and educationally meaningful AI use.

Further work could also examine what a standardised model of AI education should practically include. For instance, future research might investigate how schools can teach students to use AI for revision, feedback, clarification, and idea generation without allowing it to replace genuine thinking. In this way, future research would not only clarify the scale of the problem, but also contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable educational responses.

5 Conclusion

This investigation has demonstrated that current school responses to artificial intelligence are often insufficient to prepare students for ethical and effective AI use. The findings suggest that prohibition-based approaches, while appearing decisive, do not reliably prevent misuse, particularly when AI remains easily accessible beyond supervised assessment settings. At the same time, brief or isolated educational interventions appear to have limited long-term impact, as many students report low recall of school-based AI instruction and continued uncertainty about what constitutes responsible use.

The survey and interview findings indicate that the central weakness of current responses lies not simply in enforcement, but in the absence of a coherent educational framework. Schools are often responding to AI as a disciplinary problem to be controlled, rather than as an enduring educational reality that students must learn to navigate critically and ethically. This has, in some cases, contributed to a more reactive reliance on in-person and highly supervised assessment formats, which may protect authenticity in the short term but are unlikely to remain sustainable in increasingly digital learning environments.

For this reason, a more standardised and sustained model of AI education is needed. Such a model should move beyond fear-based restriction and toward explicit ethical guidance, practical AI literacy, and clear boundaries around appropriate academic use[19]. Rather than asking only how AI can be prevented, schools must also consider how students can be taught to use it responsibly without allowing it to replace genuine thinking. AI is not a temporary disruption in education, but a structural change. Consequently, schools must respond with an approach that is equally serious, coherent, and future-oriented.

[19]NSW Department of Education (2025) *Guidelines regarding the use of generative AI.* Available at: `https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/education-for-a-changing-world/guidelines-regarding-use-of-generative-ai` (Accessed: 4 September 2025); TEQSA (2024) *Artificial intelligence: Advice for students.* Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. Available at: `https://www.teqsa.gov.au/students/artificial-intelligence-advice-students` (Accessed: 1 September 2025).

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