See the Signs

A school's guide to strengthening
student mental health
& wellbeing in the digital age

Contents

Foreword

The digital world our students inhabit is evolving at a pace few could have imagined even five years ago. New platforms emerge overnight, online trends can reach millions before lunchtime, and the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence is transforming how young people communicate, learn, and socialise. For schools, this acceleration brings both exciting opportunities and serious safeguarding challenges.

The reality in Australian education today is that digital safety is no longer a side issue. It is woven into the heart of leadership, classroom practice, pastoral care and community trust. Yet we know the pressures are immense. Staff are expected to keep pace with shifting online risks, meet growing mental health needs, manage limited resources, and support students whose digital lives are deeply entwined with their emotional wellbeing.

At Qoria, we believe every child has the right to be safe, supported, and thriving in their digital life. For over two decades, Linewize — now part of Qoria — has worked alongside schools to meet these evolving challenges. We don't just provide technology; we listen closely to what school leaders, principals, IT leads, and counsellors tell us they face, day in and day out.

This report is born from those conversations. It reflects the lived reality in Australian schools and offers practical, time-conscious strategies grounded in global and grassroots research. It aligns with Australian education contexts and responsibilities — from state-level guidance to SEL and digital citizenship frameworks.

By sharing these insights, our aim is to help schools shift from reactive "firefighting" to proactive prevention. Together, we can build the capacity, confidence, and connections needed to strengthen digital wellbeing for every student — not just today, but for the constantly evolving digital world they will navigate tomorrow.

Tim Levy
Managing Director
Qoria

About the Survey

In July 2025, we asked schools across Australia and globally to share what they were seeing and how they were responding to the growing challenges of student digital safety and wellbeing.

Our goal was twofold:

1. To understand these challenges in detail, so we can provide targeted, meaningful support.

2. To foster a sense of shared experience, so that schools can support each other and no school feels isolated in facing these issues.

> We received responses from **almost 1,000 schools across Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the US — the largest response ever for a report of this kind.**

Australian participants included school principals, deputy principals, heads of year, heads of digital, school counsellors, and classroom teachers.

What we heard was clear: Schools are navigating a digital environment that is changing faster than they can keep up. Online risks are evolving daily. And by the time a pattern of harm becomes apparent to schools, students may already have been negatively affected. This makes the ability to notice signs of risk at the earliest opportunity more critical than ever.

They also shared that:

- Digital wellbeing concerns are now a weekly or daily reality in many schools.

- Mental health impacts are widespread and severe, affecting focus, attendance, and emotional regulation.

- Students are increasingly turning to new technologies like AI chatbots for emotional support — sometimes in risky or concerning ways.

- Parent engagement remains one of the most significant barriers to progress.

- For many, the speed of online trends is outpacing the school system's ability to respond.

These findings matter not just because they affect individual children, but because they connect directly to schools' responsibilities around safety, wellbeing, and equitable access to support.

This paper is designed to help schools act more quickly, effectively, and confidently, in partnership with students, families, and staff.
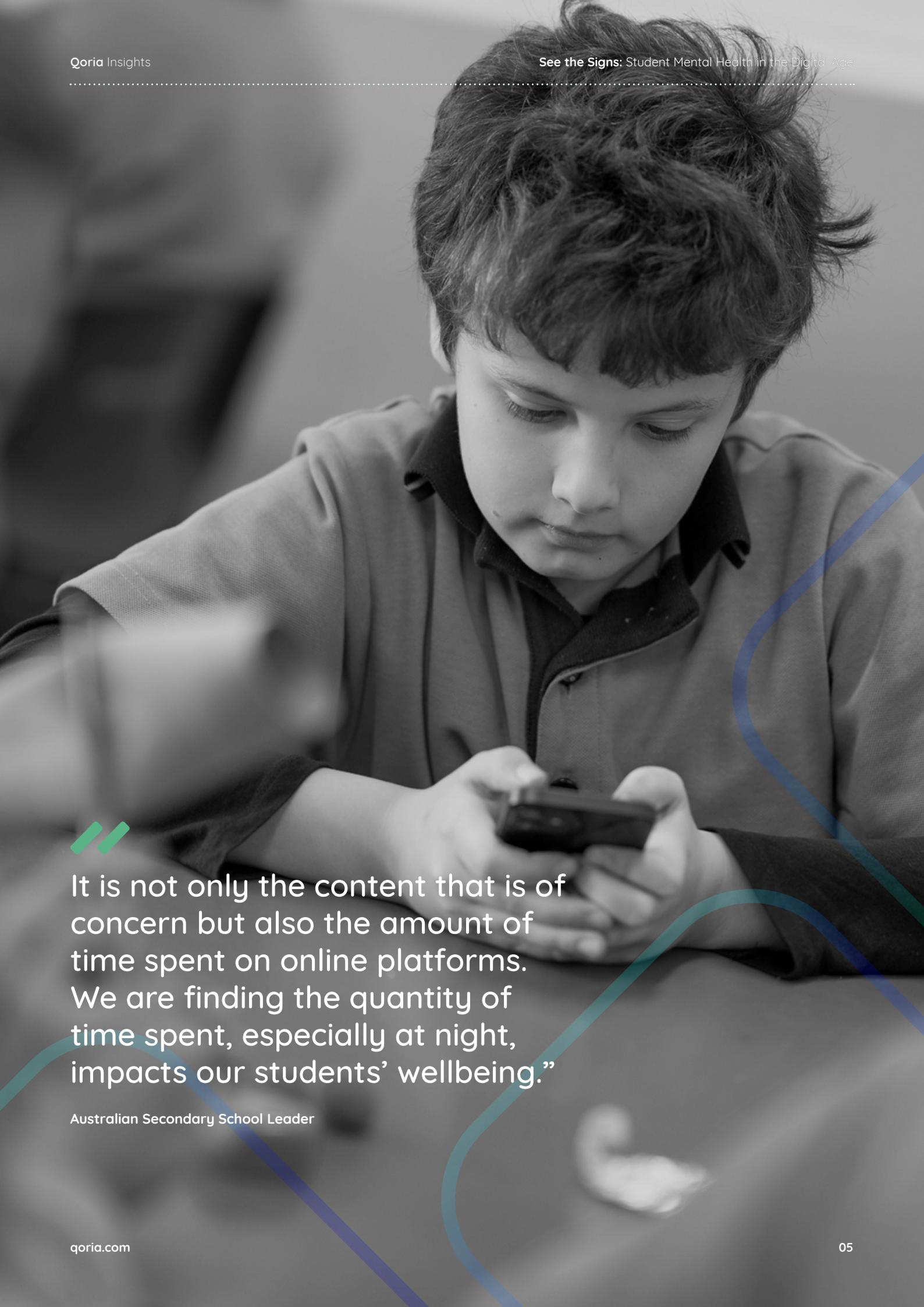
"It is not only the content that is of concern but also the amount of time spent on online platforms. We are finding the quantity of time spent, especially at night, impacts our students' wellbeing."

Australian Secondary School Leader

Section One
Key Findings for Australian Schools

1.1 Key findings at a glance

- 100% of schools that responded are at least moderately concerned about online mental health impacts, with 78% reporting being "very or extremely" concerned.

- Weekly or daily incidents of digital harm are reported by 46% of respondents.

- Online bullying/harassment and gaming addiction are each seen in around 8 in 10 schools that responded.

- TikTok and Snapchat dominate the platforms of concern, followed by Instagram and Discord.

- AI-related risks are rising fast, with 83% most concerned about students being exposed to unregulated or misleading content, and 50% concerned about students confiding in AI instead of trusted adults.

These figures reflect a clear and growing reality: digital wellbeing is now a daily safeguarding concern — not a future risk or fringe issue. For many schools, this is no longer about raising awareness — it's about building systems, culture, and confidence to act.

The most common issues, like online bullying and constant social comparison, aren't separate from the school experience; they influence relationships, concentration, and students' sense of identity. If left unchecked, they shape school culture in ways that normalise harm and silence help-seeking.

Meanwhile, the platforms causing the most concern are those most ingrained in students' everyday lives. While there is global regulatory pressure to ban them outright, we must remember that bans do not always address the root of the problem. What schools need is a clear understanding of how these apps work, why students use them, and where the risks lie — so they see the signs and guide young people with credibility and impact.

The Australian social media ban (delay)

In response to growing concerns, the Australian Government has introduced the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024. At the time of writing, the Bill applies to major platforms including TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. It proposes a waterfall approach to enforcement, requiring platforms to implement a combination of:

- Age verification (document-based checks),

- Age estimation technologies (such as biometric analysis), and

- Age inference (age-related behavioural and engagement signals within apps).

The responsibility of compliance — and any financial penalties for non-compliance — sits with the platforms, not with students, parents, or schools. However, schools should remain alert to the reality that many young people may attempt to bypass safeguards using workarounds such as VPNs or alternative accounts.

There has been widespread debate about the legislation. Some argue it will protect younger children and provide a welcome lever of relief for parents struggling to manage their children's digital lives. Others caution it may push young people towards darker, less regulated corners of the internet, reduce help-seeking behaviours for fear of consequences, and increase pressure on parents to police access on an app-by-app basis as requirements evolve.

Regardless of perspective, the ban — or "delay" — on under-16 access will come into effect on 10th December, 2025. For schools, this makes ongoing digital education and awareness more important than ever, ensuring students understand the risks and develop safe online habits alongside any regulatory measures.

As of now, the social media ban does not extend to AI chatbots and companion tools, although Australia's eSafety Commissioner is implementing online safety and industry codes to address these risks. Increasingly, students are turning to AI for answers, advice, or even emotional support. While these technologies can appear helpful, the line between support and harm is often blurred. Unlike regulated education tools, consumer-facing AI platforms are not designed with child safety in mind. Without safeguards, they can:

- Provide unverified or inaccurate advice, which may be taken at face value by younger users.

- Reinforce stereotypes, misinformation and biases built into their training data.

- Generate or expose students to harmful or dangerous content, including sexualised or violent material.

Australian school leaders share these concerns. Schools responding to our survey reported that the two most pressing risks identified were students being exposed to unregulated or misleading content and confiding in AI chatbots rather than trusted adults.

Both trends highlight the risk that young people may replace human guidance with automated tools that lack accountability or context. For schools, the implication is clear: education and vigilance remain essential. Even as legislation reshapes access to platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and Instagram, AI literacy and digital resilience must form part of the curriculum. Students need to understand how these systems work, where their limitations lie, and how to seek safe, credible sources of support when they feel vulnerable.

3 key actions schools can take now:

1. Address AI use directly through student education, staff guidance and technological interventions.

2. Tailor family engagement to overcome barriers and meet parents where they are.

3. Strengthen early detection systems by combining staff insight with intelligent tools.

With incidents happening at least weekly in most schools, proactive strategies and the ability to identify issues early are no longer optional — they are essential.

1.2 Context & challenge — the reality for Australian schools

Our Australian survey findings highlight a growing reality: safeguarding now depends on the ability to see what is often hidden in students' digital lives.

The risks themselves are well known, but the earliest signs — inappropriate conversations online, harmful content shared, changes in mood, sleep, focus, or social connection — can be subtle and easy to miss.

What matters most is visibility.

When schools can recognise patterns of behaviour as they form, rather than after they escalate, they are far better placed to respond early, protect wellbeing, and maintain the trust of their communities.

Scale of concern

100% of Australian respondents reported being at least moderately concerned about the mental health impacts of online behaviour. The behaviours respondents believe may be increasing most due to online activity include anxiety (88%), sleep loss (88%), and negative self-image (88%), with further concerns around concentration (85%), academic focus (83%) and withdrawal or social disconnection (73%).

> We see students who are exhausted from gaming or distressed after being excluded online. These things aren't rare — they're part of school life now.
>
> **Australian Wellbeing Leader**

Behavioural trends driving risk

Schools also identified several behaviours that are contributing to student distress:

- Online bullying and harassment
- Addiction to gaming
- Social media obsession
- Harmful/toxic views and opinions
- Preoccupation with unrealistic influencer standards
- Unhealthy attachment to AI chatbots

These issues rarely appear in isolation. A child who seems tired or disengaged may also be struggling with social media pressure or online exclusion. Yet these early signs often present subtly — masked as normal adolescent behaviour or missed entirely in busy school environments.

The challenge for education providers is not just recognising harm, but recognising and seeing the signs early. That requires new visibility, new conversations, and tools that help staff detect what may otherwise go unseen.

Key platform risks

TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram were the top three platforms of concern for Australian schools, followed by Discord.

What should schools be watching for in the way these platforms operate?

TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram share persuasive design features that increase engagement and risk:

1. **Infinite scroll** — removing natural stopping cues.

2. **Algorithmic recommendations** — creating echo chambers and exposure to extreme content.

3. **Ephemeral content** — creating urgency to check content frequently (FOMO).

4. **Social validation loops** — likes, views, and reactions shaping self-esteem.

5. **Push notifications** — engineered to draw users back in.

6. **Influencer amplification** — promoting narrow ideals and social comparison.

7. **Private messaging** — connecting young people with known and unknown contacts, enabling private conversations that can go undetected.

Discord presents a different but equally serious set of challenges. With its combination of private messaging, voice channels, and topic-based communities, Discord enables both tight-knit peer groups and anonymous public servers.

Its perceived sense of community and low visibility to adults can make it difficult for schools or parents to monitor harmful conversations, exclusion, or inappropriate content. This can encourage online disinhibition, where students engage in behaviours — such as sharing explicit material, targeting others, or self-disclosure — they would likely avoid offline, increasing the severity and emotional impact of incidents.

Emerging AI risks

Half of Australian schools who responded are concerned about students turning to AI chatbots instead of trusted adults.

Additional issues include:

- Exposure to unregulated or misleading advice

- Students using AI for role-play or risky conversations

- Students developing emotional attachments to AI

AI companions are already reshaping how some students manage stress, relationships, and challenges. AI systems can appear supportive but may offer advice that is inaccurate, unverified, or even dangerous when taken out of context. Role-play functions, particularly in unmoderated AI platforms, can blur the lines between safe exploration and the normalisation of harmful behaviour. Over time, relying on AI "companions" instead of speaking to real people can also reduce students' willingness to seek help from teachers, pastoral care leads, or parents — cutting schools off from early warning signs.

What makes AI-related risks challenging is how quietly they can emerge. Students may not openly share that they're turning to AI for support — but there are signs if we know where to look. A shift in mood, withdrawal from peers, or changes in classroom focus can be early cues. Alongside staff awareness, technology can also play a critical role, helping schools identify when a child may be engaging with a chatbot and providing the visibility needed to connect these patterns before they escalate.

On their own, these signs can appear insignificant — a tired student, a distracted moment, a change in tone. But when viewed together, they form a pattern that tells a different story. The shift we need is not more workload, but sharper visibility: the ability to connect the dots early and respond with confidence.

Frequency of digital harm incidents

Nearly half of Australian schools that responded experience digital harm-related incidents that affect student mental health at least weekly (46%), with 12% reporting them daily. This frequency reinforces the need for schools to move from reacting to harm to proactively identifying and addressing it early.

This is the driving principle behind our See the Signs framework, explored later in this paper: equipping schools with the insight, tools, and confidence to intervene early and help every student feel safe, supported, and able to thrive.

> We had a student confide in an AI app every day. It wasn't always harmful, but it replaced human support and made it harder for us to help."

Australian School Wellbeing Leader

1.3 Data deep dive

Level of concern about online mental health impacts

Response options	Australia %
Extremely concerned	**20%**
Very concerned	**58%**
Moderately concerned	**22%**
Slightly concerned	**0%**
Not at all concerned	**0%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for Australian schools

With 100% of schools reporting moderate to extreme concern, educators no longer view the mental health impacts of online behaviour as rare; they recognise them as part of everyday safeguarding. Schools are already seeing the signs: anxiety, disrupted sleep, negative self-image, and the resulting effects on focus, attendance, and learning. The challenge now is to move from recognising these issues to acting earlier, using prevention and early identification to reduce their long-term impact on student wellbeing.

We have a significant number of students needing additional support related to their mental health — some of which is exacerbated by negative online activity."

Australian School Leader

Key areas of behavioural concern

Response options	Australia %
Online bullying and harassment	**83%**
Addiction to gaming	**79%**
Obsession with social media	**76%**
Harmful or toxic views	**74%**
Preoccupation with unrealistic standards	**57%**
Unhealthy AI attachments	**33%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for Australian schools

These behaviours often intersect, creating complex wellbeing challenges. For instance, a student obsessed with social media may also be experiencing negative self-image, while another may be withdrawing due to toxic online group dynamics. Addressing these behaviours in isolation is less effective than adopting a holistic strategy that targets underlying causes.

> I deal with many instances of students experiencing online bullying and then not wanting to come to school because they will come face to face with the bully. There have also been instances of sexting, etc., which then seems to spread throughout the school community, impacting upon the students' reputation and causing social unrest. Students just don't realise that what they post is there forever."

Australian High School Leader

Platforms of most concern

Platform	Australia %
TikTok	**95%**
Snapchat	**88%**
Instagram	**66%**
Discord	**56%**
YouTube	**44%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for Australian schools

These platforms dominate student attention, often through addictive design. TikTok's algorithm-driven video feed, Snapchat's disappearing messages, and Instagram's visual curation all reinforce comparison, validation seeking, and peer influence.

The findings point to a crucial opportunity: Australian schools are not only identifying these risks — they are well placed to lead a shift towards positive digital cultures. By recognising overlaps, schools can design strategies that don't just reduce harm but actively empower students to thrive in their digital lives.

AI and student behaviour

Behaviours of concern	Australia %
Exposure to unregulated or misleading content	**83%**
Students confiding in AI instead of adults	**50%**
Students using AI for risky role-play	**40%**
Emotional attachment to AI	**28%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for Australian schools

As students turn to AI tools like Character.ai, Replika, or ChatGPT for advice, connection, or emotional support, the risk of bypassing trusted human relationships grows.

While these platforms may appear safe or helpful, they lack the moderation, context, and accountability of school-based wellbeing supports, opening the door to misinformation presented as fact, inappropriate interactions including sexualised or unsafe content, and growing dependency where students confide in AI rather than parents, teachers, or peers — reducing help-seeking behaviours at times when human support is most needed.

Frequency of online safety incidents

Frequency	Australia %
Daily	12%
Weekly	34%
Monthly	32%
Rarely	5%
Never	0%
Unsure	17%

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for Australian schools

Nearly half of the schools that responded stated they experience weekly or daily digital wellbeing incidents. This shows the urgency of proactive strategies — from monitoring tools to peer-led support. The more visible the signs become, the better chance schools have of responding before issues escalate.

We struggle to get parents to the programs we run. Those that come tend to be the engaged ones who have good skills and understanding anyway. The disengaged parents are those who also have no device oversight, controls or little understanding of what their kids are doing online and with whom."

Deputy Principal

What do schools believe would most improve their ability to support students' digital wellbeing

In Australia, schools put parents at the centre of the solution. Nine in ten said better parental engagement and resources would have the biggest impact, underlining the importance of helping families recognise early signs of distress and respond with confidence.

Improved student awareness was the next strongest priority (68%), followed by the call for real-world examples students can relate to (63%). Together, these show schools want young people to better understand what the risks look like in practice — and how to support each other when they notice something isn't right.

Staff training was also seen as important (59%), but schools emphasised the need for approaches that don't add to workload. Many pointed to multi-agency support and access to enhanced monitoring and wellbeing tools (both 41%) as ways to share responsibility and increase visibility. Increased budgets and time-saving workflows also featured, reflecting the pressure schools are under to do more with limited resources.

The message is consistent: Australian schools are asking for practical support that makes early intervention achievable. Stronger parental engagement, student-led awareness, and tools that reveal the subtle signs of distress are seen as the key to protecting wellbeing and preventing escalation.

1.4 Global comparison — Australia vs. NZ, UK, US

Global comparison

Key area of concern	Aus %	NZ %	UK %	US %
Very or extremely concerned about mental health impacts	78%	66%	68%	63%
Bullying/harassment	83%	67%	79%	72%
Social media obsession	76%	63%	79%	83%
Students confiding in AI	50%	49%	55%	60%
Incidents at least weekly	46%	42%	68%	47%

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for Australian schools

For Australian schools, the data reveals both urgency and opportunity. Concerns about mental health impacts are higher than in the UK, NZ, or the US, with nearly eight in ten educators reporting they are at least "very concerned." This signals a pressing need to strengthen whole-school wellbeing strategies that integrate digital behaviours into broader mental health support.

Online bullying and harassment (83%) and social media obsession (76%) stand out as entrenched challenges. These are not isolated issues but everyday realities, demanding system-wide approaches that combine student education, staff training, and active parent engagement.

The findings also point to a distinctive Australian digital culture: strong concern around AI use (50% worried about students confiding in chatbots) and gaming aligns with high device utilisation and likely intensive online engagement in many homes. Schools should not be expected to tackle this alone — support from families and technology partners will be critical.

At the same time, the cross-country comparison underscores that these challenges are global in nature. Whether in Australia, the UK, New Zealand, or the US, schools are grappling with similar patterns of online harm and disruption. By sharing strategies and learning across systems, Australian schools can gain confidence in their approach and avoid feeling isolated in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

"It is so unfiltered and too many families are letting their kids do whatever they want online without any screening or consequences."

Head of Wellbeing, Australian Primary School

Section Two
Strategies and Solutions

The sooner risks are identified, the greater the opportunity to prevent harm and build a stronger digital culture. Yet in many schools, the earliest signs of distress are subtle and easily missed — changes in sleep, behaviour, or classroom focus that may not seem connected to a student's online life.

"See the Signs" is Qoria's call to action: to give educators, parents, and school leaders the tools, insight, and confidence to detect risk early — before support becomes a crisis response.

This is also a chance to think creatively. Whether it's reimagining how parents engage with digital safety themes at school, amplifying student-led initiatives, or getting more value from existing tools, the solutions don't have to be complex to be effective.

The following framework outlines five practical, high-impact areas where schools can adapt, innovate, and strengthen their approach, directly addressing the needs identified in the survey while building capacity for long-term change.

Framework for change

1. **Better engage parents and students**

2. **Peer-led student awareness campaigns**

3. **Building staff capability without overloading**

4. **Technology as an enabler and time-saver**

5. **Addressing AI risks proactively**

2.1 Creative, high-impact parental engagement

Parents play a crucial role in shaping students' digital habits, but busy schedules and competing priorities mean many may struggle to engage with traditional school communications. By making engagement interactive, relevant, and easy to fit into family life, schools can help parents not only hear the message but actively practice and reinforce it at home.

How schools can help parents "See the Signs"

A

Reverse Mentoring Evenings:

A window into children's digital worlds

Invite students to become the experts — hosting short sessions where they show parents the apps, games, and platforms they use. This includes walking through privacy settings, trending features, and how to spot red flags. It builds mutual respect and gives adults a rare window into their child's digital world.

B

Family Scenario Sheets:

Dinner table dilemmas — turning tough topics into conversations

Distribute monthly one-page printouts or digital handouts featuring realistic, age-appropriate digital dilemmas (e.g. receiving a nude, peer pressure or upstanding in group chats). Include guiding questions like behaviours that would make them feel proud of themselves, with space for families to write or discuss their responses. This encourages healthy conversation and strengths-based, shared decision-making.

C

Parent–Student Challenges:

Micro-moments that matter

Use simple challenges like "no devices at dinner for a week" or "talk to your child every night for 1 week about their favourite apps (App Chats)" to prompt low-pressure, daily dialogue. Small shifts like these help normalise conversations about online life.

D

Phone-Light Learning Days:

The power of pause

Encourage a school-wide screen-light or screen-free day, then ask students to reflect on the experience at home. Provide parents with a brief conversation guide to explore how their child felt, what they noticed, and what they missed (or didn't).

E

Use Existing Events as Everyday Anchors:

Integrate for ease

Incorporate 2–3 minute digital wellbeing insights into school events where parents are already present — such as sports days, parent-teacher interviews, or newsletters. Keep it practical and aligned to what's happening now in students' digital lives. This helps create digital integration into multiple facets of school and home life.

F

Digital Time Capsule:

A year in screens

Have students and parents capture a snapshot of their current online habits — favourite apps, screen time, online friends, and worries. Revisit the capsule 6 months or a year later to discuss what's changed, what's improved, and what new risks have emerged.

G

Spot the Signs Family Game Night:

Signs, signals and safety

Create and distribute a simple quiz or printable card game where families match digital behaviours to warning signs (e.g. secrecy, changes in mood, unusual gifts). This playful format helps build awareness without fear or judgement.

H

Digital Wellbeing Bingo:

Keeping learning fun

Provide families with a fortnightly or monthly "bingo card" of small, positive online habits — such as "learn how to check app privacy settings", "talk about one good and one bad thing that happened online this week", or "spend an hour of power offline together". It's light-hearted, but impactful.

Scenario example

A secondary school ran "Screen-Free Sunday" challenges with family activity photo submissions. Over 60% of families took part, with reported improvements in sleep and family interaction.

Another quick win for schools

Share micro-webinars (live or pre-recorded) — 15-minute sessions with practical tips, offered live and recorded.

2.2 Peer-led student awareness campaigns

Students often respond more positively to messages that come from their peers. A peer-led approach can make digital safety and wellbeing education more relatable, reduce resistance, and build a culture where safe, respectful online behaviour is the norm.

Peer advocates can also act as early "sensors" — spotting emerging trends or issues before staff are aware, allowing schools to intervene sooner.

Creative peer-to-peer initiatives

When students lead the conversation, change often follows. These peer-led initiatives support authentic engagement, strengthen student voice, and promote positive digital cultures across year groups.

A

Student Digital Wellbeing Ambassadors

Train a select group of students to act as champions for online safety and wellbeing. Ambassadors can:

- Lead assemblies and classroom discussions.

- Mentor younger students.

- Co-design posters, newsletters, or awareness campaigns.

- Introduce in-person initiatives such as Talk Tokens: an easy, preformatted conversation starter or prompt for students designed to break down social barriers and start meaningful conversations between students across the school.

- Act as go-to peers for digital concerns, in partnership with staff.

B

Themed Awareness Weeks

Align with global movements like Safer Internet Day or Anti-Bullying Week, or establish your own "See the Signs" Week led by the student council or wellbeing teams. Focus on current and relevant challenges — like AI companions or screen time struggles — with themed activities and daily spotlights.

C

Student-Produced School Content

Let students take the lead on creative outputs that speak their language. Short videos, reels, infographics, or podcasts made by students, for students often have more credibility and cut-through than adult-led messages.

D

Specific Inter-Year Mentoring

Older students can play a powerful role in guiding younger ones. Establish structured mentoring sessions where older pupils share their own learning and offer advice on:

- Navigating social media safely.

- Managing time online.

- Dealing with peer pressure and misinformation.

E

Digital Detective Challenges

In these team-based activities, students analyse fictional scenarios (e.g. a group chat gone wrong or a suspicious new "friend" online), look for clues and present their risk assessments and solutions to staff or peers during classroom or pastoral care lessons. It's a fun, active way to build digital critical thinking through teamwork.

F

Wellbeing Wall or Feed

Give students ownership of a physical or digital space, like a bulletin board or Teams/Google Classroom feed, where they can share:

- Positive online stories — celebrating examples of young people using technology or useful strategies to safeguard, connect, create, or contribute to their community.

- Helpful tips or app reviews — giving students the chance to share what they've discovered about staying safe, managing screen time, or using apps for learning and wellbeing.

- Quotes, shout-outs, and kindness campaigns — reinforcing peer-to-peer encouragement and highlighting the values of respect and empathy.

G

Peer-Led "Myth vs. Fact" Campaigns

Students research and debunk common digital myths, such as "Snapchat messages can't be saved" or "Only unknown strangers are risky online." Their findings can be shared through posters, presentations, or social media takeovers.

H

Challenge Chain Events

Create a fun, school-wide challenge where one year group sets a digital wellbeing task — like "no devices after 8 pm" — and challenges another year to top their participation rate. This builds positive peer pressure and healthy habits.

I

Student-Led Parent Briefings

Flip the dynamic and invite trained ambassadors to host short briefings or Q&A sessions for parents. Cover topics like trending platforms, online slang, or where students think adults should pay more attention. It fosters mutual respect and opens up the conversation at home.

Scenario example

A secondary school created a Year 10 "Digital Leaders" group who ran a "Don't Scroll Past" campaign on how to report harmful content. The campaign had multiple touchpoints and visible reminders shared on posters throughout the school, as well as weekly reminders in school assemblies.

Reports to the pastoral care team rose by 40% in the following term, with several incidents addressed before escalation.

Another quick win for schools

Ask form groups to create a one-minute "top tip" video for staying safe with AI, or social media like TikTok or Snapchat. Share via the school's internal platforms or assemblies.

2.3 Building staff capability without overloading

Supporting digital safety doesn't have to mean adding hours to a teacher's day. These short, high-impact strategies help staff stay informed, engaged, and equipped — without overwhelming already full schedules.

How leaders can help staff "See the Signs" with staff capability initiatives

A

Micro-Learning Modules

Work with experts to deliver regular 10–15 minute online refreshers covering new apps, slang, and emerging risks. Modules can be completed flexibly and repeated across terms. Focus on what staff really need to know — how the platform works, what risks to watch for, and how to start conversations with students.

B

App of the Month Briefings

Incorporate a 5-minute update into regular staff meetings. The IT lead or digital wellbeing ambassador highlights one trending platform — outlining its purpose, features, risks, and how students are using it. Keep it punchy and practical.

C

Scenario-Based Training

Use anonymised, real incidents from your own (or another school) to guide the discussion. Walking staff through the early warning signs, how it was handled, and what might have helped earlier builds real-world understanding and reinforces the relevance of local policies.

D

Shared Resource Bank

Create a centralised, staff-only hub (on your intranet or drive) containing:

- FAQs on popular apps

- Guidance on managing disclosures

- Reporting procedures

- Quick-reference guides for signs of harm

Keep it updated and easy to navigate — make it the first place staff turn to, not the last.

E

"A Day in The Life" Workshops

Run occasional PD sessions where staff simulate a student's online journey — navigating platforms, seeing algorithmic content, handling peer messages, or facing risky prompts. It's an eye-opening way to build empathy and awareness.

F

Spot the Signs Storyboard

Each term, create a visual flowchart of a real (but anonymised) safeguarding journey around a key digital harm. Allocate responsibility to a different department each term.

Highlight:

- The initial red flags.

- What action was taken.

- The outcome for the student.

Display in staff areas or briefings to reinforce the power of early intervention.

G

5-Minute "Hot Topic" Pods

Record short audio or voice memo briefings on current issues — like deepfake images, AI chatbots, or online challenges — that staff can listen to on the go. Leaders, IT leaders or student digital ambassadors can batch-record a term's worth for flexible access.

Scenario example

A primary school adopted quarterly cluster "digital drop-ins" — optional 20-minute briefings over coffee, covering trending platforms and how to respond to related safeguarding concerns. Attendance averaged 65% of staff without mandatory scheduling.

Another quick win for schools

Use PD days to run a "myth-busting" speed session: 10 myths about online safety in 10 minutes.

2.4 Technology as an enabler and time-saver

With incidents occurring weekly or even daily in most Australian schools, staff cannot rely on reactive case-by-case responses without becoming overwhelmed.

The right technology — used strategically — can transform safeguarding from firefighting to foresight. It can surface risks earlier, give staff more confidence in their decisions, and reduce the time spent on long, complex interventions by stopping issues before they escalate.

Technology is no longer a "nice to have" in safeguarding; it's an essential partner.

Schools that combine human vigilance with intelligent filtering, monitoring, and classroom tools have a far clearer picture of digital risk than those relying on eyes and ears alone, or filtering alone. And when those tools are up to date and configured for education settings, they can detect the slang, code words, and hidden behaviours that basic systems routinely miss.

> While we are across a lot, this space evolves rapidly. Terminology changes, platform changes — it's a lot."
>
> **Principal, Australian High School**

How schools can "See the Signs" with technology

- **Integrate monitoring and wellbeing tools** — Choose solutions that link alerts directly to pastoral workflows so nothing is missed. Human-moderated, real-time monitoring can flag concerning activity — from harmful content searches to risky conversations — within minutes, allowing staff to act swiftly.

- **Custom keyword and risk profiles** — Tailor detection to include Australian slang, current local trends, and context-based triggers so early warnings are accurate and relevant.

- **Dashboard-driven decision-making** — Use aggregated trend data to guide targeted and thematic interventions, such as assemblies (announcements or safety messaging reinforcement), parent updates, or peer-led campaigns, rather than generic or blanket messaging.

- **Parental control apps** — Provide parents with tools that go beyond screen-time limits to include content filtering, app blocking, and activity reporting at home, enabling consistent protection, alerts and information sharing across school and home environments.

- **Granular, real-time filtering** — Ensure filters can block harmful or illegal content instantly while allowing access to valuable learning resources. The ability to adjust rules for age, context, and curriculum needs is critical.

- **Classroom management tools** — Give teachers the ability to see and guide what students are doing online in real time, adapt internet access to the lesson, and support individuals who need extra help staying on task.

- **Student wellbeing check-ins** — Adopt regular, proactive digital check-in tools that give students a safe way to share how they're feeling, with options for anonymity. AI-powered analysis can highlight concerning patterns early and prompt timely pastoral support.

Scenario example

A secondary school used its digital monitoring platform to detect a sudden spike in harmful language on a gaming platform. Within 48 hours, staff ran a targeted Year 8 session on online bullying and exclusion in online games during the pastoral care period, supported by digital leaders, reducing incidents by 30% in the following fortnight.

Another quick win for schools

Audit your existing tech stack before buying new tools — many schools already have powerful, underused capabilities in their current systems. A simple configuration change or training session can unlock features that save staff hours and improve student safety.

Questions schools can ask themselves when reviewing their tech stack:

- Would we know if a student shared something on their school device that indicates they are in danger, and could we respond within minutes?

- Can our digital monitoring detect coded language, slang, or risky AI role-play scenarios?

- Are our filters able to detect harm in real time, and do they avoid over-blocking valuable resources?

- Do our classroom tools give teachers the flexibility to adapt online access instantly?

- Are we offering parents practical, flexible safeguarding options that fit their child's age and maturity?

The bottom line

Modern safeguarding requires modern tools. When deployed well, technology does more than save time — it increases visibility, sharpens decision-making, and gives schools the confidence to act before harm occurs.
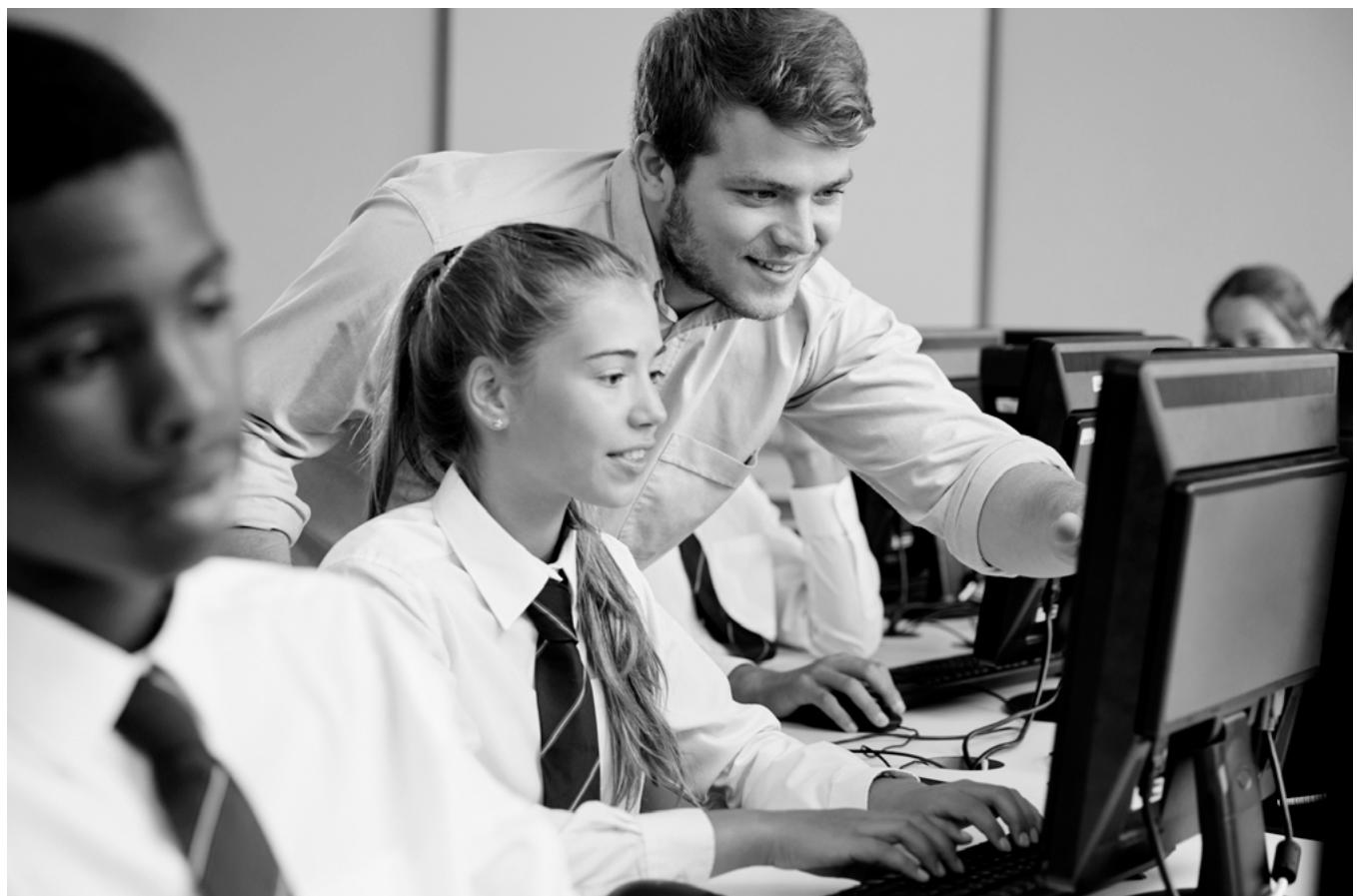
2.5 Addressing AI risks proactively

As previously mentioned, half of the Australian school respondents shared that they are experiencing students confiding in AI chatbots instead of trusted adults.

Without proactive education, these habits can normalise unsafe or isolating behaviour and reduce opportunities for staff to spot early warning signs. AI is here to stay — the challenge is ensuring it supports, rather than replaces, healthy, human-centred help-seeking.

How schools can "See the Signs" with AI

- **AI literacy lessons** — Build into computing or PDHPE, English or Technology curricula to teach safe use, limits of AI advice, and bias awareness.

- **Role-play the risks** — Safely simulate risky AI interactions and discuss how to recognise when something doesn't seem right, and how to respond.

- **Clear AI use policy** — Align with statutory guidance and legislation recommendations, specifying permitted educational uses and prohibited scenarios.

- **Staff-parent alignment** — Share the same guidance with families so messaging is consistent.

- **"Ask an adult first" pledge** — Students sign a simple agreement that they will check with a trusted adult before acting on AI-generated advice in sensitive situations.

- **Decode the bot workshop** — Students bring anonymised AI responses to class, and together the group fact-checks, identifies bias, and rewrites them with safer, more accurate information.

- **AI companions reality check** — A short, discussion-led session unpacking the limits of "AI friends" and how they differ from human relationships, followed by a "real connection" activity in pairs or groups.

Scenario example

A secondary school introduced a "3 checks" framework: Before acting on AI advice, check with a trusted adult, check a reliable source, and check your instincts. Student surveys showed a 20% increase in those saying they'd approach staff first.

Another quick win for schools

Include an "AI Tip of the Month" update in newsletters, flagging risks and safe uses.

" Most parents are aware that there is a risk when their children access social media, but there seems to be a complacency around how they police and guide their children or they do not know how to approach the matter."

Director of Wellbeing, Australian School

Section Three
See the Signs — Free Resources

School resource companion

At Qoria, we know schools are under immense pressure and that safeguarding can feel overwhelming. That's why we've created a set of simple, ready-to-use resources to help get you started.

These practical supports are designed to make it easier to See the Signs early, open up conversations, and strengthen digital wellbeing, without adding to staff workload. They're not complex systems, but small steps that can make a meaningful difference.

These resources are flexible, classroom-tested, and ideal for staff briefings, parent engagement, pastoral planning, and student-led initiatives. They're structured to work with what schools already have in place — no new systems or training required.

To download these resources, visit **www.qoria.com/see-the-signs**

1. At a glance: Staff slide decks — Top signs and quick wins

What it is

A three-slide briefing resource to use in staff meetings or planning sessions.

Slide 1: Top 5 signs to watch for

Slide 2: Student behaviours to monitor

Slide 3: 3 quick wins for schools: Immediate actions

Why it helps: Schools can raise staff awareness fast, align their team around the signs that matter, and create momentum for proactive action.

2. Parental engagement: Parent-child Q&A guide — Let's Talk Tech

What it is

A conversation guide for schools to share with parents to open up real, non-judgemental conversations at home.

Includes 10 questions designed to explore digital habits, pressure, online identity, AI companions, and family boundaries.

Also includes a film recommendation (*Childhood 2.0*) to co-watch and spark discussion.

Why it helps: Schools can equip families with a simple, no-expertise-needed tool to strengthen digital dialogue and early risk recognition at home.

3. Building staff capability without overloading: Mythbuster cards for staff briefings

What it is

A set of 10 double-sided cards for use in staff rooms, PD sessions, or digital citizenship planning.

Each card presents a common myth and an evidence-based fact that challenges assumptions.

Why it helps: These cards support staff reflection and shared understanding of complex online risks, without requiring formal training or deep tech knowledge.

4. Staff Meeting Scenario Pack

What it is

A printable or digital resource for staff training or wellbeing team planning.

Includes 6 detailed, real-world scenarios covering:

- AI confidants
- Gaming fatigue
- TikTok trends
- Group chat harms
- Hidden struggles in high-achievers
- Early signs of online radicalisation

Each scenario includes: context, digital signals, why it matters, discussion prompts, and key insight.

Why it helps: Offers low-burden, high-impact professional learning that builds confidence and enables earlier interventions.

5. Technology as an enabler & time-saver: 10-Point Tech Audit Checklist

What it is

A reflective tool for IT, wellbeing, and leadership teams.

Covers key questions such as:

- Are systems picking up context, not just content?
- Are alerts routed to those who can act?
- Is student digital behaviour integrated into support planning?

Why it helps: Helps schools understand where their current infrastructure supports early intervention — and where simple changes can make a big difference.

6. Addressing AI risks proactively: "3 Checks for AI" poster

What it is

A bulletin board poster encouraging students to pause and question AI-generated content.

The checks:

1. Check with a human
2. Check the motive
3. Check for context

Why it helps: Builds critical thinking and promotes healthier relationships with AI tools. Ideal for classrooms, digital literacy lessons, or wellbeing walls.

Together, these resources help schools take meaningful steps toward safer, more connected digital environments for students, without creating more work.

7. Continuing the conversation — Spotlight on Student Digital Safety — The Qoria Podcast

Qoria's **Spotlight on Student Digital Safety** podcast gives school leaders a space to hear directly from peers and experts who understand the pressures they face. It provides timely insights on emerging digital risks, shares practical strategies that have worked in other schools, and offers reassurance that they are not navigating these challenges alone.

For leaders who are short on time, the podcast distils complex issues into actionable takeaways that can inform decision-making, strengthen safeguarding practices, and build staff confidence.

Recent episodes featuring Australian guests include:

Porn In Schools: How to Talk, Teach, and Take Action

Colm Gannon, CEO of ICMEC Australia, shares how porn is subtly reshaping student wellbeing and peer relationships, particularly around consent, respect, and gender expectations. It's a complex issue, but Colm offers clear, practical strategies schools can start using right away.

Cracking the AI Code — One School Leader's Critical Learnings for AI Success

In this episode, we sit down with Anthony England, a visionary leader in education technology from Pymble Ladies College, to uncover the two key strategies his school has developed to unlock AI's potential for good.

The full Spotlight on Student Digital Safety — The Qoria Podcast episode list can be found here.

Episodes are free and available on YouTube and Spotify.

Encourage school leaders, pastoral teams, and IT leads to use these tools and resources as discussion starters in staff meetings or PD sessions.

Final Thoughts — A Shared Mission

Every school leader, IT director, and pastoral worker in Australia knows the reality: online risks are constant, fast-moving, and often deeply personal for the students in their care. But within that reality is also a truth worth holding onto: schools are already doing extraordinary work.

Across the country, in classrooms, corridors, and staff meetings, you are not just responding to incidents; you are shaping a generation's relationship with technology. Every proactive conversation, every moment you listen without judgement, every time you connect a student with the right support, you are building digital resilience that can last a lifetime.

The challenges can feel relentless, and we know the pace of digital change will not slow down. But with the right systems, education, and partnerships, schools can stay ahead of harm — not just respond after it. The signs are there — sometimes quiet, sometimes disguised — but they always have meaning.

When we help schools see them, we don't just reduce harm — we increase connection, care, and the chance for every student to thrive. When we get it right, the impact is transformative. Students feel safer speaking up, parents feel better equipped to guide their children and staff feel supported, not isolated, in the safeguarding role they carry.

Linewize's mission is to stand alongside you in that work, not as an observer but as an active partner. Our belief is simple: no child should fall through the cracks of the digital world. And together, we can work to ensure that doesn't happen.

We are excited to set the standard for what safe, supported, and thriving looks like in 2025 and beyond. And to ensure the online spaces our students inhabit every day are places of positive learning, curiosity, and respect — because they deserve nothing less.

The tools are here. The knowledge is here. Most importantly, the will is here. The rest is what we build together.

Contact Us

If you need any help reviewing your safeguarding technology,
want to find out about technologies you are yet to adopt such
as digital monitoring, classroom technologies or parental apps,
or if you want assistance working with staff, parents or students,
Linewize can help.

Please email **enquiries@linewize.io** in the first instance, tell us
what you're interested in and we'll connect you to the right person.

None of us is as powerful as all of us.

Appendix 1

About Linewize & Qoria

We see ourselves not just as a vendor, but as a trusted partner to schools and districts.

Linewize is designed to evolve alongside your needs — starting with best-in-class filtering and expanding into a connected ecosystem that supports IT teams, educators, student wellbeing staff, families, and students alike.

Our solutions are built to work together, helping you create a sustainable digital wellbeing framework that grows over time and responds to the real challenges facing your community.

Appendix 2:
Further Reading for Australian Schools

Statutory & Government Guidance

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (with particular relevance to Principle 8)
https://www.childsafety.gov.au/resources/national-principles-child-safe-organisations

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations provide a national framework for creating child safe cultures in organisations that work with children, including schools. Principle 8 is particularly relevant to student digital safety, requiring schools to ensure that online environments promote safety and wellbeing, and that risks associated with digital platforms, devices, and online interactions are identified, managed, and balanced with students' rights to privacy, connection, and learning.

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs)
https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/australian-privacy-principles

The Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles set out how organisations within scope of the Act, including many non-government schools, must collect, use, store, and disclose students' personal information. OAIC guidance for children and young people explains how these principles apply in education settings, including requirements for clear privacy notices, secure handling of digital records and platform data, and appropriate consent, access, and complaint pathways for students and parents.

State and territory privacy and information laws for government schools
https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-legislation/state-and-territory-privacy-legislation

Government schools are primarily regulated by state and territory privacy and information laws, which govern how student information, including digital records and online activity data, is collected, stored, used, and disclosed. While the detail varies by jurisdiction, these laws generally require schools to minimise unnecessary collection, protect information against misuse or unauthorised access, and provide transparent avenues for students and parents to understand and challenge how their data is used in digital systems.

Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)
https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2021A00076/latest

The Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth) establishes Australia's national framework for online safety, expanding the powers of the eSafety Commissioner to investigate complaints, require removal of cyberbullying material targeting children, address image-based abuse, and tackle other seriously harmful online content across most major services. For schools, it provides clear external escalation pathways for serious online harm affecting students, and sets baseline expectations that platforms, app providers, and digital services used in education take active responsibility for managing online risks to children.

Appendix 2 (continued)
Further Reading for Australian Schools

Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 (Cth)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r7284

The Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 (Cth) amends the Online Safety Act 2021 to introduce a national minimum age of 16 for designated age-restricted social media platforms, backed by substantial civil penalties where providers fail to take "reasonable steps" to prevent under-age use. For schools, it strengthens the policy environment around age-appropriate access to social media, age assurance technologies, and partnership with families to manage the risks and unintended consequences of under-age social media use.

Sector and NGO Resources

eSafety Commissioner

An independent government regulator, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner is the world's first national online safety watchdog. It leads initiatives to protect Australians from online harm, provides reporting pathways for image-based abuse and online bullying, and offers resources to schools, families, and communities.

ySafe

An Australian cyber safety education provider, ySafe partners with schools, parents, and organisations to deliver workshops, policy guidance, and student programmes. Its evidence-based approach helps communities address challenges such as gaming, social media, and online safety through relatable, practical strategies.

Orygen

An Australian research and clinical organisation dedicated to youth mental health, Orygen develops evidence-based programmes and digital tools. It provides resources to schools and communities on issues such as online engagement, early intervention, and resilience building.

ReachOut

Australia's leading online mental health service for young people, ReachOut, provides free, accessible support through digital self-help tools, forums, and resources. It focuses on reducing stigma, improving resilience, and addressing digital drivers of mental health challenges such as online bullying and social media pressure.

Headspace

Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation, Headspace provides early intervention mental health services for young people aged 12–25. With centres across the country and a robust online platform, it offers counselling, peer support, and resources on managing stress, anxiety, and digital pressures.

Appendix 2 (continued)

Further Reading for Australian Schools

Kids Helpline

A 24/7 free and confidential counselling service for children and young people aged 5–25, Kids Helpline supports issues ranging from online bullying to mental health and family conflict. Its trained counsellors connect via phone, webchat, and email, making support accessible in real time.

ThinkUKnow Australia

A law enforcement-led education programme delivered by the Australian Federal Police in partnership with industry, ThinkUKnow, provides schools, parents, and carers with practical advice on preventing online child exploitation. Its sessions cover topics such as grooming, image sharing, and digital resilience.

ACCCE (Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation)

A national initiative led by the Australian Federal Police, ACCCE brings together agencies, NGOs, and industry to combat online child exploitation. It coordinates investigations, provides training, and raises awareness among schools and communities, aiming to prevent harm before it occurs.

Technology & Wellbeing Tools

Linewize Online Safety Hub for schools and parents
www.linewize.io/solutions/online-safety-hub

Qustodio for families and schools
www.qustodio.com

Appendix 3
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