See the Signs

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

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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 New Zealand 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 New Zealand schools and offers practical, time-conscious strategies grounded in global and grassroots research. It aligns with New Zealand 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 New Zealand 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
> New Zealand, Australia, the
> UK, and the US — the largest
> response ever for a report of
> this kind.**

New Zealand 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.

"
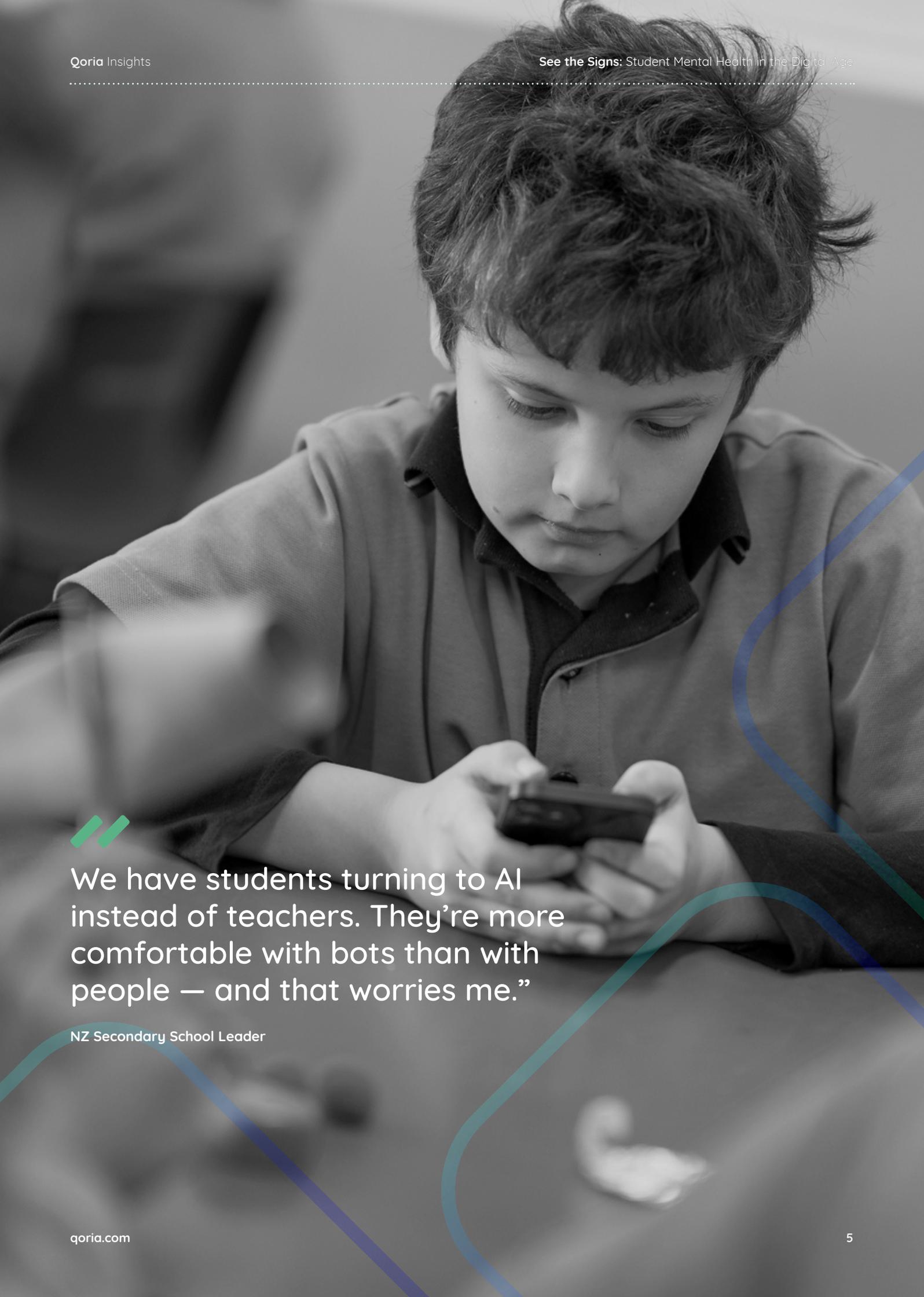
We have students turning to AI instead of teachers. They're more comfortable with bots than with people — and that worries me."

NZ Secondary School Leader

Section One

Key Findings for New Zealand Schools

1.1 Key findings at a glance

- 85% of schools that responded are at least moderately concerned about online mental health impacts, with 55% reporting being "very or extremely" concerned.

- Weekly or daily incidents of digital harm are reported by 42% of respondents.

- Online bullying/harassment and gaming addiction are each seen in nearly 7 in 10 schools that responded.

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

- AI-related risks are rising fast, with 64% most concerned about students being exposed to unregulated or misleading content, and 49% 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.

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.

New Zealand school leaders share these concerns. Schools responding to our survey reported 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 social media platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and Instagram across the globe, 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 New Zealand schools

Our New Zealand 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

66% of respondents reported being either very or extremely concerned about the mental health impact of students' online behaviour. The behaviours respondents believe may be increasing most due to online activity include anxiety (85%), negative self-image (81%), with further concerns around concentration (80%) and academic focus (69%) and withdrawal or social disconnection (59%).

> **"** Students aren't just distracted by devices. They're being shaped by them — mentally, emotionally, socially."
>
> **NZ Principal**

Behavioural trends driving risk

Schools identified several behaviours that are contributing to student distress:

- Online bullying and harassment
- Addiction to gaming
- Obsession with social media
- Harmful/toxic views and opinions
- Preoccupation with unrealistic standards set by influencers
- Unhealthy attachments 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 educators 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, Roblox and YouTube were the top platforms of
concern for New Zealand schools, followed by Instagram.

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.

Roblox presents a different but equally serious set of challenges. As an open-world gaming platform with integrated chat and user-generated content, Roblox enables highly immersive experiences that blur the line between gaming and social networking. Students can be exposed to inappropriate content, predatory behaviour, or peer pressure within virtual spaces that are difficult for adults to monitor. The platform's in-game purchases and reward systems also drive compulsive use, creating tension with family rules and school expectations.

What makes Roblox particularly concerning is its appeal to younger students — often before they have developed the critical thinking skills to navigate risk. For many schools, issues with Roblox extend beyond the game itself to wider impacts on sleep, mood, classroom behaviour, and peer dynamics.

Students are tired, aggressive and
mean-mouthed. They use sexualised
language and are very physical, which
appears to come from TikTok, gaming
and access to adult content sites."

NZ Principal

Emerging AI risks

Almost half of New Zealand schools who responded (49%) 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

Over a third of New Zealand schools who responded experience incidents of digital harm with their students at least weekly, with 29% seeing them monthly. This frequency suggests that harmful online experiences are part of the day-to-day school environment — and highlights the importance and potential of moving from purely reactive responses to a more proactive, preventative approach.

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've seen students talking to AI chatbots every day. Some of it seems harmless — until you realise they're avoiding human connection altogether."**
>
> **NZ Pastoral Care Leader**

1.3 Data deep dive

Level of concern about online mental health impacts

Response options	New Zealand %
Extremely concerned	**13%**
Very concerned	**42%**
Moderately concerned	**29%**
Slightly concerned	**14%**
Not at all concerned	**1%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for New Zealand schools

With 85% 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 school life. 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.

> The longer I teach the more issues we are facing with bullying, inappropriate content watching, fatshaming, self-esteem issues, etc.
>
> **NZ Classroom Teacher**

Key areas of behavioural concern

Response options	New Zealand %
Online bullying and harassment	**67%**
Addiction to gaming	**72%**
Harmful or toxic views	**48%**
Obsession with social media	**63%**
Preoccupation with unrealistic standards	**59%**
Unhealthy AI attachments	**14%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for New Zealand schools

The behaviours highlighted by educators — particularly addiction to gaming (72%), social media obsession (63%), and online bullying (67%) — are not only individual concerns, but collective ones. They shape classroom dynamics, peer relationships, and the overall learning environment.

Nearly half of schools also reported encountering harmful or toxic views (48%) and a preoccupation with unrealistic standards (59%), underscoring how digital influence is shaping student identity, self-worth, and social norms. While only a small percentage flagged unhealthy attachments to AI (14%), this remains a growing area to monitor.

The findings point to a crucial opportunity: New Zealand 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.

> Media consumption, effects on their attention span, interactions online — all contributing to mental health (readiness, mood, self-confidence)."
>
> **New Zealand High School Leader**
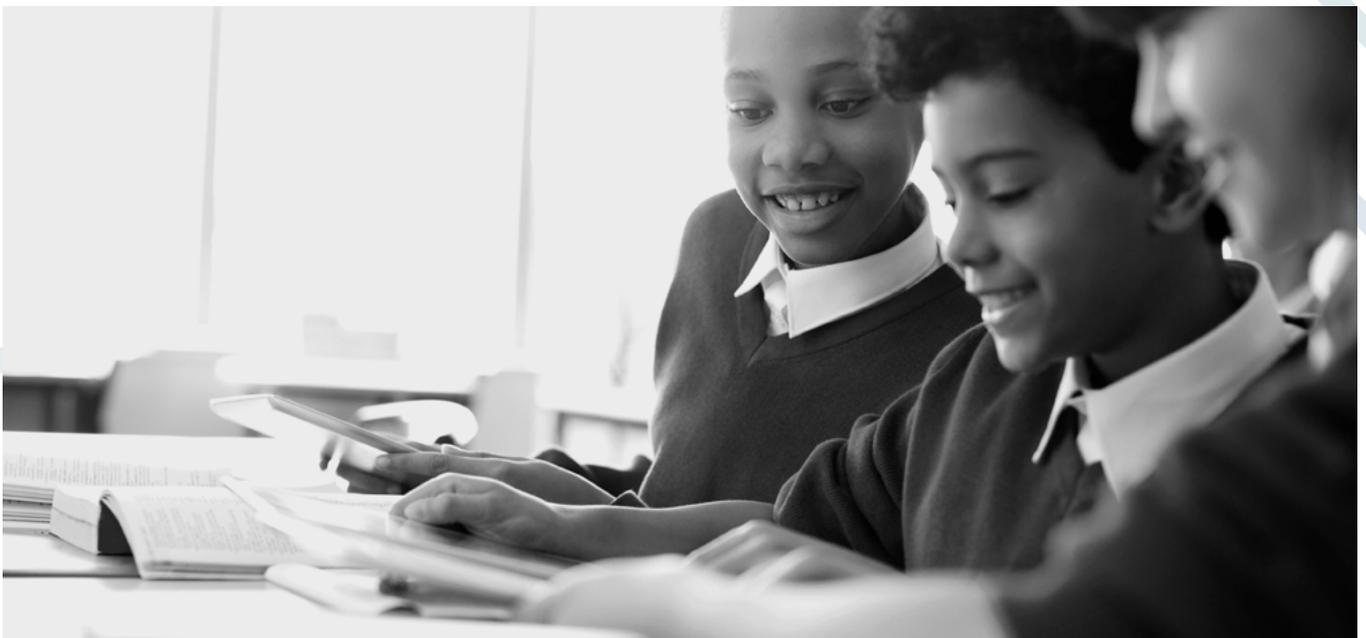
Platforms of most concern

Platform	New Zealand %
TikTok	**85%**
Snapchat	**55%**
Roblox	**55%**
YouTube	**54%**
Instagram	**51%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for New Zealand schools

With TikTok, Snapchat, Roblox, YouTube, and Instagram ranking as platforms of most concern, it's clear these digital spaces are shaping much more than entertainment — they influence identity, behaviour, and peer dynamics.

AI and student behaviour

Behaviours of concern	New Zealand %
Students confiding in AI instead of adults	**49%**
Exposure to unregulated or misleading content	**64%**
Emotional attachment to AI	**29%**
Students using AI for risky role-play	**35%**

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

Each platform presents unique challenges. TikTok's algorithm can amplify extreme or unrealistic content. Snapchat's disappearing messages reduce accountability. Roblox — especially popular with younger students — blurs the lines between gaming, chat, and user-generated content, raising concerns about exposure to unsafe interactions.

For schools, the response isn't about banning — it's about building digital discernment. This means empowering students to navigate these environments with awareness, while also ensuring staff and families are informed and supported.

Digital fluency is fast becoming a core wellbeing skill — and schools are ideally placed to lead that charge.

> Students still try to access sites that they should not be on during class time. It seems to be the constant need to access their games that is of concern. It is a distraction."
>
> **NZ Classroom Teacher**

What this means for New Zealand schools

With 49% of schools reporting that students are turning to AI instead of trusted adults, and 64% concerned about exposure to unregulated or misleading content, the emergence of AI companions adds a new layer of complexity in student digital wellbeing.

Tools like Character.ai and Replika can feel safe or comforting to students — but they lack the guidance, nuance, and accountability of human relationships. When nearly a third of schools report emotional dependence on AI and over a third note risky role-play, it's clear that these tools are filling emotional gaps in ways that can undermine help-seeking and increase vulnerability.

The solution isn't fear — it's education. Schools have a vital role in normalising conversations about AI, helping students understand its limits, and reinforcing the value of real-world connection and support. With the right strategies, we can ensure students use these tools safely, without replacing the people who know and care for them.

Frequency of online safety incidents

Frequency	New Zealand %
Daily	7%
Weekly	35%
Monthly	29%
Rarely	15%
Never	0%
Unsure	13%

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for New Zealand schools

With 42% of schools reporting incidents that affect student mental health on a weekly or daily basis, and a further 29% seeing them monthly, it's clear that digital harm is no longer the exception — it's becoming routine.

Whether it's online exclusion, social media conflict, or late-night gaming impacting focus and engagement, these challenges are showing up regularly across all year levels. The good news is that schools are well-placed to interrupt this pattern.

By implementing early identification systems, creating clear reporting pathways, and equipping staff with the confidence to respond, schools can move from reactive to proactive. This shift doesn't just reduce harm — it creates a culture where students feel seen, supported, and safe to speak up.

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

For New Zealand schools, the strongest message was the need to bring parents into the picture. More than eight in ten said better parental engagement and support resources would make the greatest difference, highlighting the central role of families in noticing and responding to early digital distress.

Improved student awareness and peer-led campaigns were also a clear priority, reflecting the importance of equipping young people to support each other and make sense of their online worlds. Real-world examples that students can relate to and access to enhanced monitoring and wellbeing tools followed closely — showing that schools want both practical education and visibility into the signs they may otherwise miss.

Staff training (51%) remained important, but schools also emphasised the need for balance. Many pointed to time-saving workflows and multi-agency support as ways to lighten the load while making interventions more effective.

Overall, New Zealand schools are asking for approaches that make early intervention easier and more practical: strong parental involvement, relatable student education, and technology that helps staff see the signs sooner and act before harm escalates.

1.4 Global comparison — New Zealand vs. Australia, the UK & the US

Global comparison

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

Values are rounded to the nearest integer.

What this means for New Zealand Schools

For New Zealand schools, the data shows a mix of emerging risks and opportunities for early intervention. Nearly two-thirds of educators report being very or extremely concerned about the mental health impacts of online behaviour. This reflects growing recognition that digital pressures are deeply entwined with student wellbeing, learning, and daily school life.

While reported rates of online bullying and social media obsession are lower than in Australia, the UK, or the US, they remain significant. Weekly or daily incidents are also somewhat less frequent, but the trend is upward, suggesting that New Zealand schools have a critical window to act before harmful behaviours become further entrenched.

Of particular note, nearly half of respondents expressed concern about students confiding in AI chatbots rather than trusted adults. This indicates rising awareness of the new wellbeing challenges posed by emerging technologies. Embedding AI literacy and safe digital habits into school culture could help ensure students continue to turn to teachers, counsellors, and families for trusted support.

Viewed globally, these findings reinforce that while cultural contexts vary, the emotional, behavioural, and academic impacts of digital life are shared across borders. By engaging in knowledge exchange and adopting best practices from international peers, New Zealand schools can strengthen their ability to safeguard students in an increasingly hyper-connected world.

"

I am a library manager, I hear what they talk about at lunchtime. So many children have unmonitored screen time at home, it is frightening what they are exposed to."

NZ School Leader

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 New Zealand 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.

> I am sure there are incidents that we are not aware of. Platforms appear and students are using them well before we know about them."
>
> **NZ School Leader**

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 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 well-being 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.
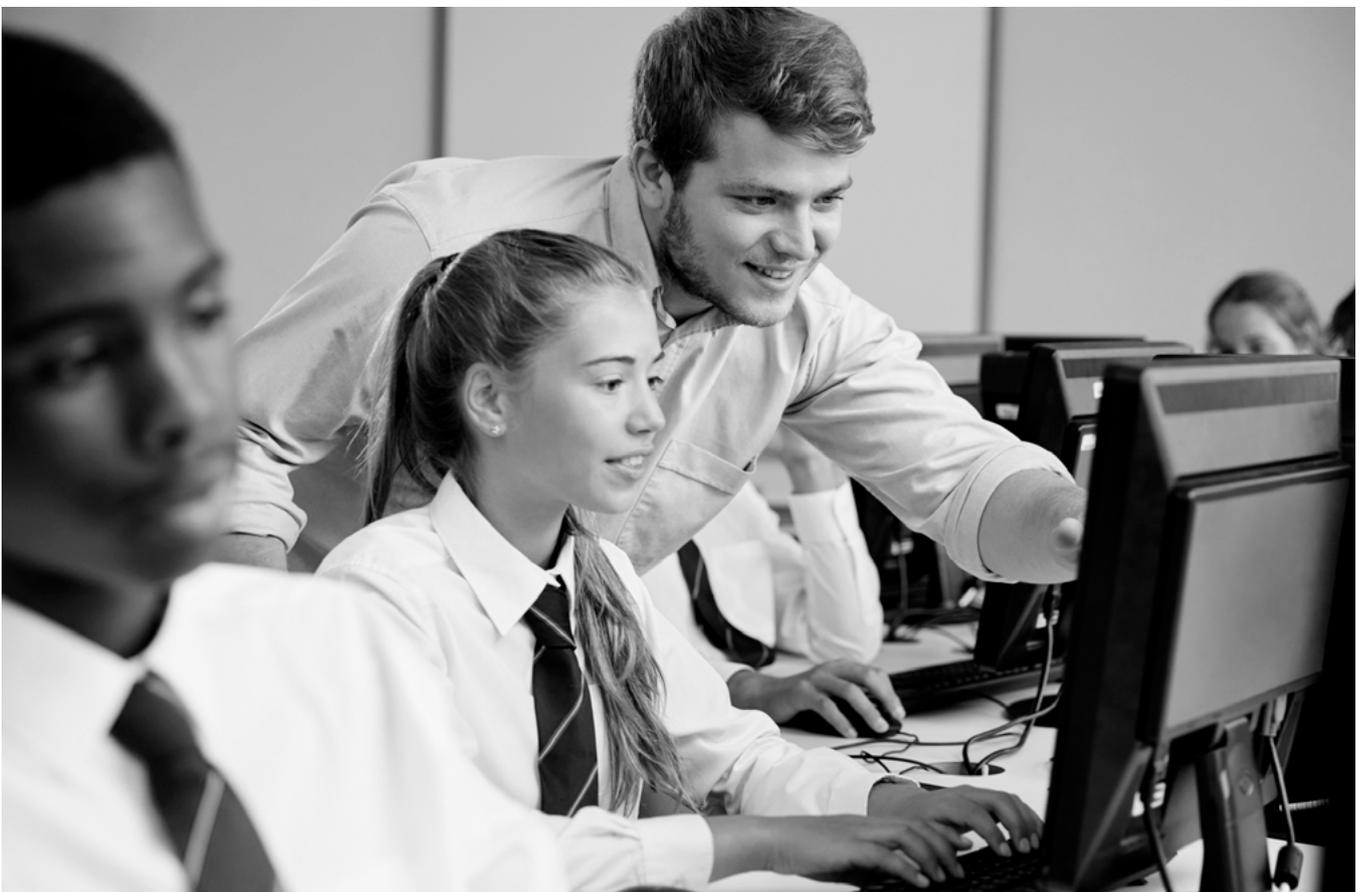
2.5 Addressing AI risks proactively

As previously mentioned, half of the New Zealand 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 HPE, English or Technology curriculums 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 the New Zealand Curriculum and Netsafe 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.
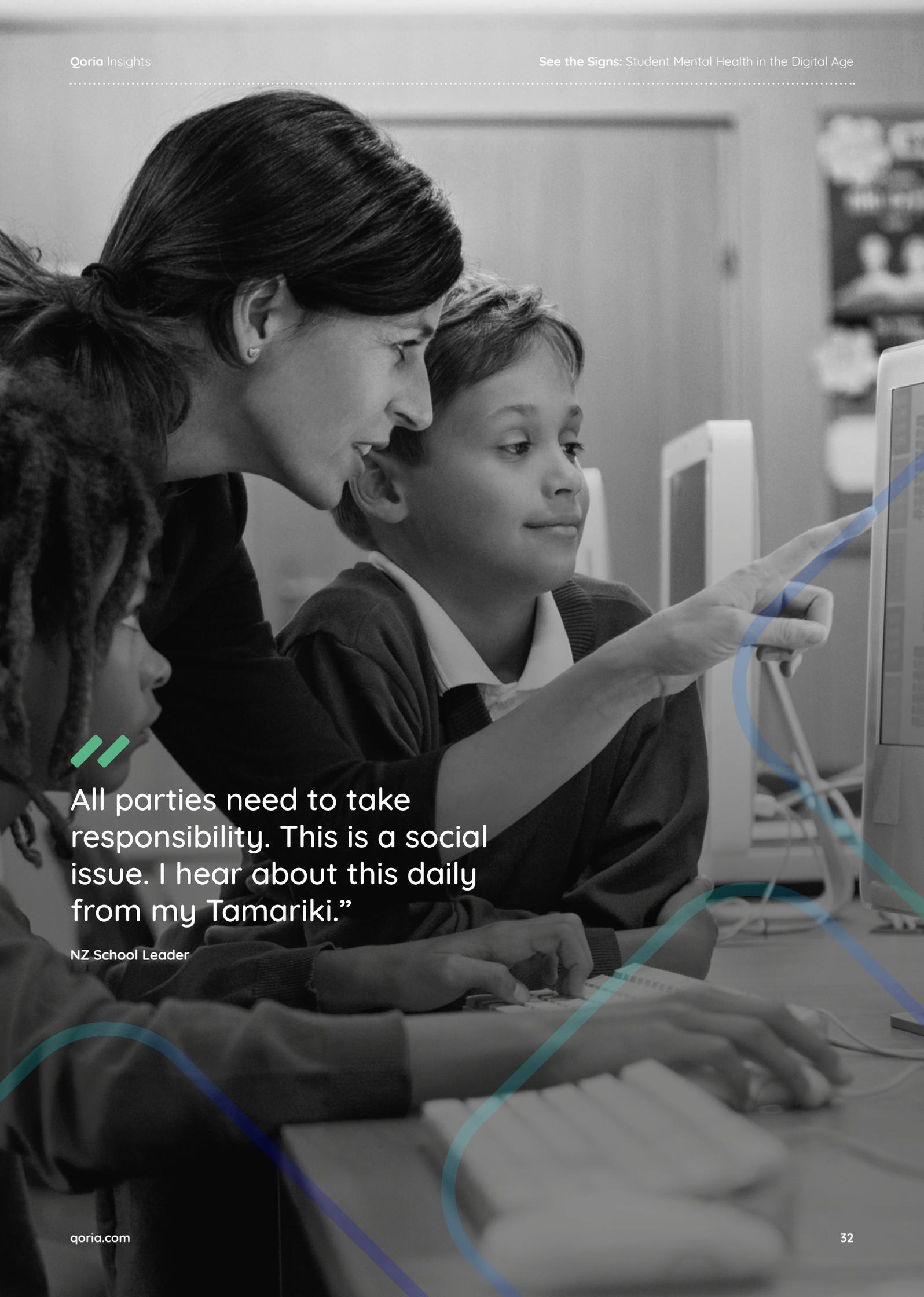
"All parties need to take responsibility. This is a social issue. I hear about this daily from my Tamariki."

NZ School Leader

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 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.

The Big, Beautiful Ban: Why This Expert Says Blocking Tech Isn't the Silver Bullet

In this thought-provoking episode, Yasmin London sits down with edtech veteran Julian Ridden to unpack one of education's most controversial tactics: tech bans. From mobile phones to social media to AI tools, they explore why banning is often a reflex response, and why it rarely works on its own. Julian challenges black-and-white thinking, models vulnerable leadership, and shares practical, community-first strategies that go far beyond "block it and forget it," giving you the language, perspective, and tools to lead better conversations, whether you're pro-ban, anti-ban, or stuck on the fence.

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 New Zealand 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.co.nz** 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 New Zealand Schools

Statutory & Government Guidance

Education and Training Act 2020
https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/latest/lms170676.html

This Act requires schools to provide students with a physically and emotionally safe learning environment, which explicitly extends to the online and digital context. It obliges schools to implement clear policies and procedures for the use of digital devices and networks, and to address issues such as online bullying, online conduct, and data protection.

Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015
https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0063/latest/whole.html

This legislation establishes a legal framework for addressing harmful digital communications, including online bullying, harassment, and abuse. It enables schools to refer incidents to Netsafe on behalf of students, providing an avenue for independent investigation, complaint resolution, and, where necessary, escalation through formal enforcement mechanisms.

Privacy Act 2020
https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0031/latest/LMS23223.html

This Act sets out how schools must collect, store, use, and share personal information about students. Schools are required to maintain robust data governance frameworks, including policies that clearly explain how information is managed, who has access to it, and how students and parents are informed of, and can exercise, their privacy rights.

Health and Safety at Work Act 2015
https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0070/latest/DLM5976660.html

This Act applies to all work-related activities in schools, including staff and student use of digital technologies. It places a duty on schools to identify, assess, and manage health and safety risks associated with digital device use and online activity, and to ensure that digital environments support, rather than undermine, the wellbeing of students and staff.

Appendix 2 (continued)
Further Reading for New Zealand Schools

Sector and NGO Resources

Netsafe

A New Zealand-based independent non-profit, Netsafe provides expert support, education, and tools to help people stay safe online. It partners with schools, families, and government to address issues such as cyberbullying, image-based abuse, and online scams. Netsafe also operates New Zealand's official helpline for online safety concerns.

Keep It Real Online

A government-backed initiative in New Zealand, Keep It Real Online equips parents, educators, and young people with practical resources to navigate online risks. The campaign focuses on topics like pornography, grooming, harmful content, and misinformation — helping families have open, informed conversations about digital safety.

Safeguarding Children

A New Zealand-based charitable trust, Safeguarding Children provides training, consultancy, and resources to schools, health providers, and community organisations. It focuses on equipping adults to recognise, prevent, and respond effectively to child abuse and neglect — online and offline — through evidence-based safeguarding frameworks.

KidsHealth.org

Developed by the Paediatric Society of New Zealand in partnership with the Starship Foundation, KidsHealth.org provides reliable, accessible health information for parents, caregivers, and young people. Its online safety section includes guidance on healthy screen use, managing social media, and supporting children's digital wellbeing as part of a holistic approach to health.

Technology & Wellbeing Tools

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

Qustodio for families and schools
www.qustodio.com

Appendix 3
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