Best Practice in Screen Use for Education

NSW GOVERNMENT

Proudly funded by the NSW Government

Survey Findings



Bower, M., Woo, K., Lee, J.,
Sepp, S., Adlington, R., Apps, T.,
Gill, L., Maher, D., Smith, J., Orlando, J.,
Zunica, B., Rowston, K., Waters, K.,
Beckman, K., Baroutsis, A., Warburton, W.

Suggested citation: Bower, M., Woo, K., Lee, J., Sepp, S., Adlington, R., Apps, T., Gill, L., Maher, D., Smith, J., Orlando, J., Zunica, B., Rowston, K., Waters, K., Beckman, K., Baroutsis, A., Warburton, W. (2026) *Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Survey Findings*. Macquarie University. https://doi.org/10.25949/Y9DT-3K44

Executive summary

This report details the results of a series of NSW statewide surveys to capture the perceptions and practices of key education stakeholders towards the use of screens by school students. It forms part of the project *Best Practice in Screen Use for Education*, sponsored by the NSW Government and administered by the NSW Department of Education through its Screen Use and Addiction Research Fund (2025–2026). The 16-member project team comprises academics specialising in educational technologies from all 11 NSW-based universities (Macquarie University, Western Sydney University, Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University, Southern Cross University, University of Newcastle, University of New England, University of New South Wales, University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney, University of Wollongong). By providing insights into school students' screen use patterns for both learning and leisure across school and home settings from a range of stakeholder perspectives, this report aims to provide a comprehensive account of current strengths, emerging challenges, and areas opportunity to optimise screens use by school students.

Consistent with the project's design, this report primarily contains descriptive analysis and reports survey findings only. In future, this report will be complemented by results from focus groups and classroom observations, which will later be synthesised and triangulated with these survey results to gain further insights. The final project outputs will include public reporting of project findings, a Quality Screen Use Toolkit and associated guidance resources for students, parents, school leaders, teachers, and pre-service teachers.

Key findings from the surveys

Across students, parents, teachers, school leaders and pre-service teachers, a number of key findings emerged.

- Students' screen use clearly shifts as they move through stages in school: device time increases and learning and leisure uses become progressively blurred.
- The commencement of secondary school emerges as a key pressure point, marked by sharp growth in screen time at home, increased leisure use at school, and higher rates of reported distraction and self-regulation difficulties.
- Stakeholders broadly support the use of digital technologies in education when it is purposeful and connected to learning.
- Confidence in the educational value of technology is consistently tempered by concerns about day-to-day implementation: student distraction, students' self-management of screen use, cybersafety and wellbeing risks, and equity challenges.
- While access to devices and internet is mostly sufficient, equity issues are more strongly linked to uneven technical support in low ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) and small schools.
- Parents in households that speak mainly languages other than English (LOTE) reported lower confidence in managing children's screen use, including cybersafety, and expressed a stronger desire for school-provided guidance.
- The use of monitoring software appears uneven, with families in higher-ICSEA contexts reporting their use, while schools rarely use monitoring software to support classroom management.

- Teachers often report using co-regulation strategies (clear limits, explicit conversations, and routines).
- Schools often rely on rules and restrictions to manage students' device use, yet a minority of school leaders reported the school-level implementations of embedded programs or professional learning focusing on responsible and healthy use of screens.
- School-home communication about expectations for learning-related device use is a persistent need, especially among parents in households that speak mainly LOTE.
- Pre-service teachers expressed high commitment to communicating with parents, although few practising teachers reported doing so frequently.

Implications for practice and policy

Overall, our survey data across various stakeholders suggest that the greatest area for improvement is the identification and strengthening of school and home conditions that support more effective and safer student screen use. Such conditions include:

- Clearer shared expectations across school and home
- Explicit teaching of self-regulation and digital self-management (especially to support transition into high school)
- More equitable and reliable technical support in schools
- Targeted supports for families (including accessible and multilingual resources), and
- Guidance on ethical, purposeful and effective use of AI Tools so students are equipped to learn well across both school and home settings.

What comes next

This report explores the data collected from the surveys only. Subsequent reporting will focus on findings from classroom observations and focus groups. Final reporting will present a synthesis of triangulated evidence across surveys, focus groups, and observation methods, to make rigorous data-based recommendations about students' screen use in school and at home. Furthermore, the project will deliver a suite of multimedia and accessible resources for all stakeholder groups—the Quality Screen Use Toolkit—alongside broad dissemination through professional learning, symposia and public channels.

Contents

Executive summary i
1. Introduction 1
2. Method 2
2.1 Participants 2
2.2 Survey instruments 3
2.3 Subgroup analysis 4
2.4 App categorisation 4
2.4 Limitations 5
2.5 Ethics 5
2.6 Reporting 6
3. Student Survey Findings 7
3.1 Student participants 7
3.2 Student self-report of current screen-use 8
3.3 Students' recommended time limits for screen use 10
3.4 What do students use? 11
3.4.1 Learning at school 11
3.4.2 Learning outside of school 14
3.4.3 Leisure at school 16
3.4.4 Leisure outside of school 18
3.4.5 Summative comments about student app use 19
3.5 Student screen use attitudes and habits 20
3.5.1 Learning 20
3.5.2 Wellbeing 20
3.5.3 Cybersafety, security and privacy 20
3.5.4 Equity 21
3.5.5 Self-regulation 22
3.5.6 Co-regulation at home and school 22
3.6 Conclusion: Student survey 23
4. Parent Survey Findings 24
4.1 Parent participants 24
4.2 Parents' recommended time limits for children's screen use 25
4.3 Parents' attitudes to children's screen use 26
4.3.1 Learning 26
4.3.2 Wellbeing 27
4.3.3 Cybersafety, privacy and security 27

4.3.4 Digital access – connectivity and device ownership 27
4.3.5 Home co-regulation 28
4.3.6 Digital equity for supporting parents in screen management 28
4.4 Conclusion: Parent survey 29
5. School Leader Survey Findings 30
5.1 School Leader Participants 30
5.2 School leaders' recommended limits for students' screen use 31
5.3 School leader perspectives 32
5.3.1 Screens-related policies 32
5.3.2 Support for technology integration 33
5.3.3 Students' screen use 33
5.3.4 Parent engagement 34
5.3.5 School leader perspectives on teacher engagement 34
5.4 Conclusion: School leader survey 35
6. Teacher Survey Findings 36
6.1 Teacher participants 36
6.2 Classroom use of digital devices for learning 38
6.3 Teachers' recommended limits for students' screen use 39
6.4 Teachers' attitudes to students' screen use 39
6.4.1 Learning 39
6.4.2 Wellbeing 39
6.4.3 Cybersafety 40
6.4.4 Equity and access 40
6.4.5 Student distraction and self-regulation 40
6.4.6 Teacher co-regulation strategies at school 40
6.4.7 Support for screen use 41
6.5 Conclusion: Teacher survey 41
7. Pre-Service Teacher Survey Findings 43
7.1 Pre-service teacher participants 43
7.2 Pre-service teachers' recommended limits for students' screen time 45
7.3 Pre-service teacher perspectives 45
7.3.1 Professional experience access and support 45
7.3.2 Preparedness to support educational screen use 45
7.3.3 Learning value and digital literacies 46
7.3.4 Wellbeing, cybersafety and equity 46
7.3.5 PST perception on student self-regulation 46

7.3.6 Anticipated co-regulation at school 46
7.4 Conclusion: Pre-service teacher 47
8. Concluding remarks 48
9. References 49



1. Introduction

Digital technologies refer to electronic systems and tools that process, store, create, and communicate information digitally, including computers, networks, software, mobile devices, and AI-enabled systems (Johnstone, Kervin & Wyeth, 2022). Information on devices such as desktop computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones is typically accessed via screens. We note that in education research and policy, the term 'digital technologies' is commonly used to describe digital devices, whereas in psychology and health literature similar topics are often discussed in terms of 'screens'. In this report, we have used these terms interchangeably.

Digital technologies and screens are often an embedded part of how students learn, communicate and complete schoolwork, both in classrooms and at home. When used well, screens can support access to information, practice, collaboration and creative production (Schleicher, 2023). When used poorly or excessively, they can contribute to distraction, problematic habits and inequitable learning opportunities (Graham and Sahlberg, 2021).

In response to the opportunities and risks related to students' screen use, the *Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Empowering Students, Teachers and School Communities for Digital Learning* project was designed to build a strong evidence base about educational screen use across NSW schools and use that evidence to inform practical guidance for schools and families. This report provides a 'state of play' snapshot drawn from survey feedback of key stakeholder groups – students, parents, school leaders, teachers and pre-service teachers. The surveys were designed to capture patterns of students' screen use in schools and homes, including

- the types of technologies and applications used,
- the amount of time spent on screens,
- the screen-based learning and leisure activities students engage in, and
- the perceptions and practices of key stakeholder groups

We collected the data across different ages, stages and contexts from key stakeholders, with the intention that findings can inform more targeted recommendations for effective, safe and developmentally appropriate screen use at different stages of schooling.

This report contains the descriptive findings based on the surveys only. Findings from focus group discussions and classroom observations will be reported separately as they are completed. Therefore, the broader scope of the project includes evidence-gathering and synthesis activities, i.e., (a) discussions from focus groups, which could deepen and contextualise survey findings, (b) classroom observations to understand real-world practices and impacts, and (c) a final data triangulation and synthesis, to inform the development of a Quality Screen Use Toolkit. Overall, the project intends to triangulate and extend the survey results, in conjunction with focus group discussion and classroom observations, to develop practical, evidence-informed recommendations for students, families, teachers and school leaders.

2. Method

The data in this report were gathered through five online surveys of students, parents, teachers, school leaders, and pre-service teachers, which were administered via Macquarie University's Qualtrics platform between 15 August and 23 November 2025.

2.1 Participants

The surveys were distributed across NSW and were open to respondents residing in NSW, with recruitment occurring through school and university channels:

- For school-based cohorts, principals were invited to participate first and, upon agreeing, were asked to (1) complete the principal survey, (2) distribute the teacher survey link to staff via internal email, and (3) include the parent survey invitation in the school newsletter.
- Parents accessed the survey through the school newsletter link, provided consent for their own participation, and then provided responses to the survey. They were also invited to provide consent for one of their children to participate in the student survey.
- For primary-aged students (Kindergarten to Year 6), consenting parents completed the student questions with their child before completing the parent survey. For secondary students (Years 7–12), parents were given an additional option to allow their child to complete the survey independently, where parents would be issued a survey URL and randomly generated code to share with their child to verify parental consent without providing student names or emails.
- Pre-service teachers were recruited through the project team members' universities in NSW, where the team member at each institution coordinated survey distribution (typically via student email lists).

An email invitation was sent to 2,860 NSW school principals (2,191 in public schools, 255 in Catholic schools[1], and 414 in independent schools). Printed flyers were also distributed to 300 remote and outer regional NSW schools to increase their participation. NSW Department of Education staff also posted an article encouraging participation via the Directors of Educational Leadership (DELs) newsletter, an internal staff newsletter, and the principals' Viva Engage channel. At the conclusion of the survey data collection period, 5,496 total responses were received across the five surveys, with 4,628 responses retained as valid after removing responses that contained only demographic information (responses were kept if they included at least one non-demographic item). Because the school leader survey focused on school related items, only the most senior school leader from each school was retained to avoid duplication. Table 1 shows the number of responses for each of the surveys.

[1] Permission was granted to distribute the survey in these Catholic dioceses: Bathurst, Broken Bay, Canberra & Goulburn, Parramatta, Sydney, Wagga Wagga, Wilcannia-Forbes, and Wollongong.

Table 1. Number of responses received and retained for analysis

Stakeholder Group	Responses received (N; sample size)	Complete responses retained for analysis (N; sample size)
Parents	3350 (Note: The parent and student surveys were combined. Parents could choose to complete the survey and/or give the student survey to their children to complete)	1686
Primary school students		666
Secondary school students		391
Teachers	1100	914
School leaders	241	166
Pre-serviced teachers	805	805
Total	**5496**	**4628**

2.2 Survey instruments

The surveys asked all the stakeholder groups about their perceptions and practices relating to student screen use. Screens and digital devices were defined in the following way:

> In this survey, when we talk about screens or digital devices, we mean any kind of device with a screen that you can use—like computers, laptops, tablets (such as iPads), smartphones, or even smartwatches.

The survey instruments included Likert scale items, multiple choice items and open-ended questions. The survey instruments are available at: https://screensineducation.org/surveys/.

All instruments underwent small-scale pilot testing, to enable the research team to refine the usability and interpretability of the items. For Likert scale items, a 3-point scale was employed for primary students while a 5-point scale was employed for secondary students and all other stakeholder groups. The 3-point Likert scale provided younger respondents with a simpler vocabulary and survey structure that helped them interpret and engage with the survey. Where comparisons between secondary and primary school students are made, the 5-point secondary student scale responses were transformed into 3-point scale responses (Colvin & Gorgun, 2020). Specifically, the end points (*Never* and *Always*) of the 5-point scale (*Never-Rarely-Sometimes-Usually-Always*) were treated as corresponding distinct categories of the end points (*Never* and *Always*) in the 3-point scale, and *Rarely-Sometimes-Usually* in the five point scale were compressed to correspond to *Sometimes* in the 3-point scale (*Never-Sometimes-Always*).

Students were asked to estimate the time spent using screens for learning and leisure at school and at home using ranges, because pilot testing indicated that students struggled to estimate a precise number of minutes for these questions (particularly younger students). All averages for estimated time spent using screens for learning and leisure at school and at home have been calculated using the midpoint of ranges, so the averages can only be treated as estimates. Time spent on individual apps was collected using minutes rather than ranges, so the averages reported are calculated using continuous data rather than range midpoints.

2.3 Subgroup analysis

Subgroup analyses of all Likert scale items were conducted according to NSW Education Standards Authority's (NESA) stage, school ICSEA quartiles (low, low-mid, mid-high, high), school location (metropolitan, inner regional, outer regional), gender, special needs, language background other than English. NESA definition of stages is as follows:

- Stage 1 refers to Years 1 and Year 2. For this report, we also included Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten). (Approx. ages 5-7)
- Stage 2 refers Years 3 to 4 (Approx. ages 8-9)
- Stage 3 refers to Years 5 and 6 (Approx. ages 10-11)
- Stage 4 refers to Years 7 and 8 (Approx. ages 12-13)
- Stage 5 refers to Years 9 and 10 (Approx. ages 14-15)
- Stage 6 refers to Years 11 and 12 (Approx. ages 16-17)

Stages 1 to 3 are part of primary education, and Stages 4 to 6 are part of secondary education.

2.4 App categorisation

Students reported a wide range of apps and websites for learning and leisure. These were clustered into nine main categories:

1. **Educational Apps** – Apps and websites primarily used to support teaching and learning, including curriculum-aligned learning and skills practice (for example, mathematics, reading, languages, STEM activities, music and arts learning, quizzes, and learning management systems).
2. **Productivity Apps** – Digital tools used to create, organise, manage, or research (for example, document creation, note-taking, office software, and utilities).
3. **Games** – Interactive game experiences primarily intended for entertainment and gameplay, including game-capable devices and dedicated gaming platforms (noting that gamified learning apps are classified under Educational Apps).
4. **Streaming** – Services primarily used for media consumption (for example, television/video streaming, music, and podcasts).
5. **Communication** – Email, messaging, and collaboration platforms.
6. **News and Information** – News services and information sources, including reference and research resources (for example, science, history, and sports information services).
7. **AI Tools** – Artificial intelligence tools, including any explicit references to the use of AI.
8. **Social** – Social networking services and online communities.
9. **Other** – All remaining services not captured above, including web comics and tutoring companies.

No classification system can perfectly capture the increasingly overlapping functions of contemporary digital platforms. For this study, products were therefore classified according to their primary functionality, rather than according to a particular policy definition or type of use. For instance, YouTube was recently classified by the eSafety Commissioner (2025) as social media, but its primary function is for video streaming and is classified accordingly. Also, communication platforms like Discord and Whatsapp share some features with certain social networking services, but as their primary functions are messaging, we have classified them as Communication instead of Social.

Importantly, functionalities are deliberately separated from purpose in this classification. For example, YouTube as streaming media may be used for learning or leisure purposes. Similarly, the social media tool Pinterest could easily be used for education or recreation. Classifying apps and software according to their primary functionality allowed the features of the tools to be separated from how and where they were used. Types of uses (learning versus leisure) and location of use (at school versus outside of school) were captured as separate lines of questioning and reported in Section 3.4.

2.4 Limitations

While every effort was made to maximise sample size and include a diverse range of participants within each stakeholder group, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all students, parents/carers, teachers, school leaders or pre-service teachers across NSW. Participation was voluntary, and people who chose to complete a survey about screen use may differ systematically from those who did not participate. For example, respondents may have had particularly positive or negative experiences of digital technology, stronger concerns about screen use, or greater interest in the topic. Consequently, the prevalence of particular attitudes, experiences and practices reported in this study should be interpreted as descriptive of the study sample rather than estimates of prevalence across the NSW population.

The survey data are also based on participants' self-reported perceptions and practices. Responses may be influenced by recall, interpretation of survey questions, or social desirability, and may not always correspond directly with actual screen-use behaviours or classroom practices. Where possible, findings should therefore be considered alongside data from other sources.

These limitations are partly addressed by the broader mixed-methods design of the project. Survey findings will be considered alongside focus group and classroom observation data, allowing examination of the alignment between stakeholder reporting, what is observed and what is discussed.

2.5 Ethics

The project received human ethics approval from the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 18877) and the NSW Department of Education SERAP process (SERAP 3111). Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and all participant data were de-identified and aggregated for reporting. As incentives, parents and pre-service teachers were offered an opportunity to enter a lucky draw for a $100 gift card. No incentives were provided for school leaders, teachers and students. All adult participants were offered the opportunity to receive a summary report and best practice toolkit at the end of the study. At the end of the survey, parents, school leaders, teachers and pre-service teachers could also express interest in a follow-up focus group with others in their stakeholder group. Teachers and students were recruited for focus groups only from the project's focus schools.

2.6 Reporting

Reporting includes descriptive statistics of survey items. Summary statistics for each item are included, as well as results for demographic sub-groups where notable. Even though data is cross sectional rather than longitudinal, line graphs are used to support visual association across adjacent stages. Reporting begins with the Student stakeholder group, followed by Parents, School Leaders, Teachers and then Pre-Service Teachers.



3. Student Survey Findings

Across both primary and secondary cohorts, students reported that screens are embedded in learning and leisure, but they differed markedly in how much time they spend on screen, how much screen use restriction they support, and how adults were perceived to guide or regulate their screen use. Primary students were more likely to endorse screen use limits for both learning and leisure, and they also reported higher levels of parental involvement. In contrast, secondary students were less supportive of limits for learning, and they described lower parental engagement about their screen time.

3.1 Student participants

The student survey was completed by 666 primary school students (Early Stage 1 & Stage 1: 299, Stage 2: 184, Stage 3: 183) and 391 secondary school students (Stage 4: 183, Stage 5: 121, Stage 6: 87). See Table 2 for key demographic characteristics of the student sample. The majority of student participants (81%) were enrolled in public schools, followed by Catholic schools (13%) and independent schools (5%).

Table 2. Key Demographic Characteristics of Student Sample

Characteristics	Category	n (%)
Stage	Stage 1 (including Early Stage 1)	299 (28%)
	Stage 2	184 (17%)
	Stage 3	183 (17%)
	Stage 4	183 (17%)
	Stage 5	121 (11%)
	Stage 6	87 (8%)
Aboriginality	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	60 (6%)
Gender	Female	502 (47%)
School System	Public schools	859 (81%)
	Catholic schools	140 (13%)
	Independent schools	56 (5%)
Language	Speak English only	696 (66%)
	Speak mainly English	242 (23%)
	Speak mainly languages other than English (LOTE) at home	117 (11%)
Special needs	Identified as having a special need	356 (34%)

Other key student characteristics included: 6% of students identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (5% primary, 6% secondary), 11% of student respondents mainly speak languages other than English (LOTE) at home (11% primary, 12% secondary), and 34% of students identify as having a special need (32% primary, 36% secondary).

3.2 Student self-report of current screen-use

> ***Secondary students' screen time is substantially higher than primary students. Compared to Stage 3 students, Stage 4 students reported spending double the amount of screen time for learning at school (from 68 to 131 minutes), three times more for learning outside of school (from 28 to 101 minutes), and four times more for leisure at school (from 18 to 72 minutes).***

Students reported their screen use on the most recent school day. All averages for estimated time spent using screens for learning and leisure, at school and at home, were calculated using the midpoint of the response ranges (None, Up to 30 min, Up to 1hour, 1-3 hours, 3-5 hours, 5-7 hours, More than 7 hours), so should only be treated as estimates. On that day, average learning-related screen time was just under an hour in Stage 1 (49 minutes), rising to over four hours in Stage 6 (263 minutes). Leisure-related screen time was also under an hour in Stage 1 (55 minutes) and increased to just over four hours in Stage 5 (249 minutes), before falling to just under 3.5 hours in Stage 6 (207 minutes). Notably, as students moved into secondary school, they reported spending, on average, more than 3.5 hours per day on screens at home across learning and leisure on their most recent school day—more than double the time reported at the end of primary school. This increase may have surprised parents and suggested a need to adjust co-regulation strategies.

Table 3 shows the percentages of students who reported using screens at school or outside of school on their last school day. While screen use was common for students in all stages, there was significant variation by stage, purpose, and setting.

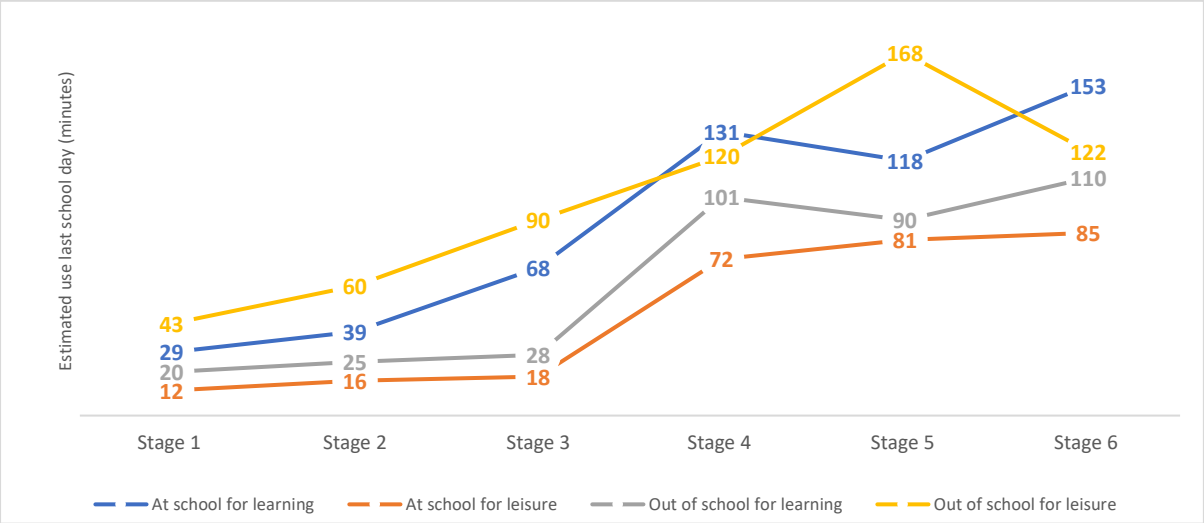
- For learning at school, screen use increased from Stage 1 (68%) and Stage 2 (76%) to near-universal levels in Stage 3 and 4 (94–96%) and remained high in Stages 5 and 6 (90–95%).
- Leisure screen use at school was lower overall, rising gradually from 41–45% in Stages 1–2 to 58–61% in Stages 4–6.
- For learning outside school, primary student use of screens was moderate (50–58% in Stages 1–3) before increasing sharply in secondary school (84–91% in Stages 5–6, and 90% in Stage 4).
- Out of school, screens were used more frequently for leisure than learning: 70–73% in Stages 1–2, climbing to 83% in Stage 3 and 92–94% from Stage 4 onwards.

Most students reported using screens for learning and leisure, both at school and at home, with a general increase in the amount of time in later stages of schooling. Figure 1 shows the average minutes students spent on screen in the last school day when midpoints of usage response ranges were used to calculate averages.

Table 3. Percentage of students who used screens in the last school day

	Stage 1 (N = 299)	Stage 2 (N = 184)	Stage 3 (N = 183)	Stage 4 (N = 183)	Stage 5 (N = 121)	Stage 6 (N = 87)
At school for learning	68%	76%	94%	96%	90%	95%
At school for leisure	41%	45%	50%	61%	58%	61%
Out of school for learning	50%	58%	57%	90%	84%	91%
Out of school for leisure	70%	73%	83%	92%	94%	94%

Figure 1. Average minutes students report spending on screens in the last school day



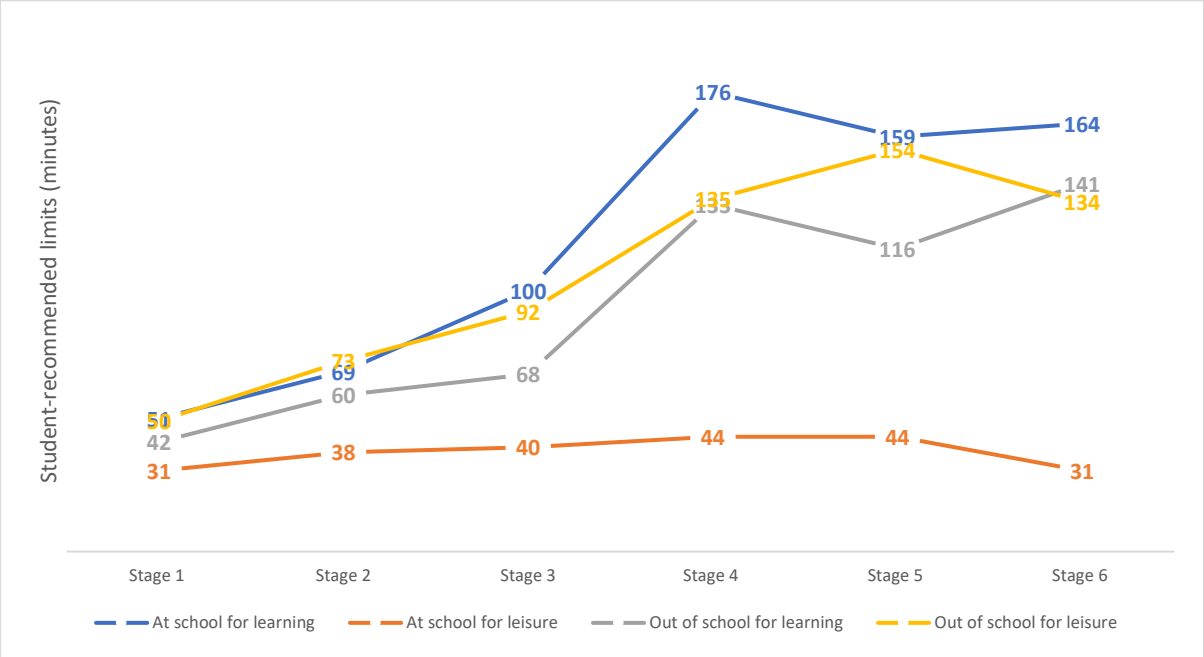
- The average amount of time students reported using screens *at school for learning* (blue line) gradually increases from approximately 29 minutes in Stage 1 to 68 minutes in Stage 3. The amount then doubles to approximately 131 minutes in Stage 4 and increases to 153 minutes in Stage 6.
- The amount of time students spend *at school for leisure* (orange line) increases four-fold from approximately 18 minutes in Stage 3 to 72 minutes in Stage 4, and continues to increase in senior years.
- The average amount of time students spend on screens for *learning outside of school* (grey line) more than triples across the transition from primary school to secondary school, i.e., from approximately 28 minutes in Stage 3 to 101 minutes in Stage 4.
- Out of all categories, students spend the most time on their screens *outside of school for leisure* (yellow line), with a gradual increase in average time spent from approximately 43 minutes in Stage 1 to over 2 hours in Stage 6. It is noteworthy that Stage 5 students appear to replace some of their learning time with leisure activities on screen; Stage 5 students spend less time learning on screen across both settings than Stage 4 students do, and spend approximately 48 minutes more time on screens *out of school for leisure*.

3.3 Students' recommended time limits for screen use

Students support limits for screen use; 75% of primary students and 43% of secondary students think there should be a limit on screen use for leisure out of school.

For those students who recommended limits for screen use for learning at home and at school, as well as leisure at home, limits generally increased across stages. On the other hand, recommended limits for leisure-based screen use at school remained reasonably constant across stages (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Student-recommended limits for screen use among those who recommend a limit



- For screen use *at school for learning* (blue line), 52% of primary students and 24% of secondary students thought there should be a limit. Among those who recommended a limit, average suggested limits increase by stage in primary school: 51 minutes in Stage 1, 69 minutes in Stage 2, 100 minutes in Stage 3. A sharp increase occurred in secondary school, where students recommended an average of 176 minutes in Stage 4, then expectations tapered to 159 minutes in Stage 5, and increased slightly to 164 minutes in Stage 6.
- For screen use *at school for leisure* (orange line), 72% of primary students and 53% of secondary students thought there should be a limit. Among those who recommended a limit, the average suggested time was 36 minutes in primary school and 41 minutes in secondary school with an increase by stage: 31 minutes in Stage 1, 38 minutes in Stage 2, 40 minutes in Stage 3, and 44 minutes in Stages 4 and 5, followed by a decrease to 31 minutes in Stage 6.

- For screen use *outside of school for learning (e.g., homework)* (grey line), 51% of primary students and 28% of secondary students thought there should be a limit. Among those who recommended a limit, suggested limits increased gradually by stage across primary school, averaging approximately one hour a day (42 minutes in Stage 1, 60 minutes in Stage 2, 68 minutes in Stage 3). Student recommendations doubled in Stage 4, with all secondary student cohorts recommending approximately two hours a day (133 minutes in Stage 4, 116 minutes in Stage 5, 141 minutes in Stage 6).
- For screen use *outside of school for leisure* (yellow line), 75% of primary students and 43% of secondary students thought there should be a limit. Among those who recommended a limit, the average suggested time is 70 minutes in primary school and 139 minutes in secondary school, increasing gradually from 50 minutes in Stage 1 to 73 minutes in Stage 2 and 92 minutes in Stage 3, then 135 minutes in Stage 4 and 154 minutes in Stage 5, before slightly lowering again to 134 minutes in Stage 6.
- Overall, students recommended *higher limits than their reported current use* for learning and leisure in both primary and secondary school, except that secondary students recommend *less time for leisure at school* than the amount they currently use. This may indicate a level of readiness for secondary students to reduce the amount of screentime they spend on leisure at school.

3.4 What do students use?

> ***The dominant way in which screens are used for learning in primary school is to support students' literacy and numeracy development, while using screens for productivity dominates in secondary schools. For leisure, almost all students use streaming videos, but typically move from gaming in primary school to engaging with social media in secondary school.***

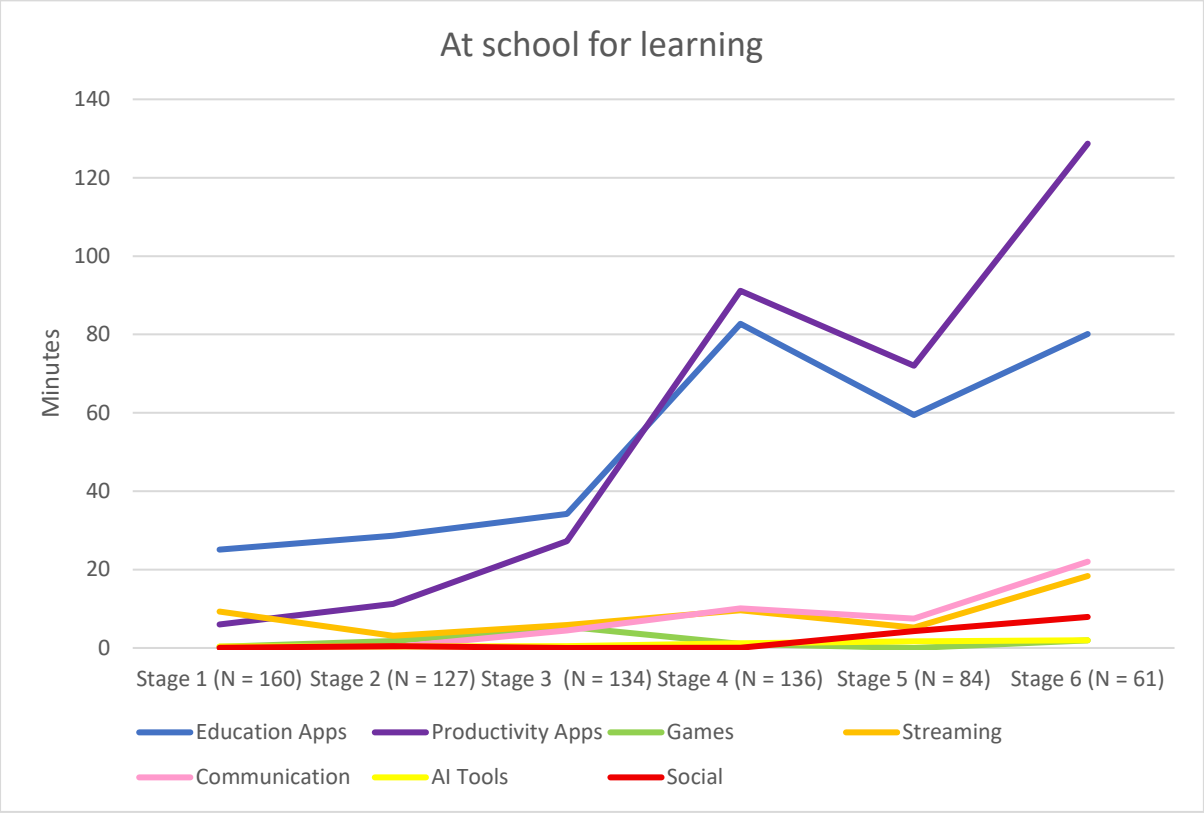
Across all settings and purposes, students reported using 5200 apps and websites, from which 699 distinct products were identified.

3.4.1 Learning at school

Across all stages, students reported using 307 different apps or websites for learning at school. For primary students, Educational Apps was the most frequently reported category for learning at school, with Productivity Apps consistently second. For secondary students, the pattern shifted: Productivity Apps became the leading category, while Educational Apps remained strongly represented as the second-ranked category. Streaming appeared among the top three categories of apps for learning at school in Stage 1 and 2, with YouTube being the primary app, presumably to deliver multimedia content. From Stage 3 onwards, Communication joined the top three app categories, replacing Streaming, and became more prominent in Stages 4 to 6, highlighting the increased prevalence of communication and collaboration for higher levels of learning. Overall, the trend indicated a transition from curriculum practice apps in early years to tool-based production and management (documents, slides, design tools) in secondary years, with communication platforms increasingly present in older cohorts. Figure 3 shows the time students reported spending on different app categories for learning at school, by stage, among

those who provided time estimates. Table 4 summarises reported time and popular apps within the three most frequently used categories at each stage.

Figure 3. Average time students spent on apps at school for learning by app categories and stage for those students who report time spent on apps for learning at school



* Too few responses were received for *News & Information* and *Other* so they are omitted from this and the following graphs.



Table 4. Top 3 app categories used for learning at school by stage in descending order of popularity. Average minutes is for the students who reported app usage in the last school day and provided time-based data.

At school for learning	Top app examples	Average Min.
Stage 1		
1. Educational Apps	Reading Eggs, Mathletics, Essential Assessment	25 min
2. Streaming	YouTube	9 min
3. Productivity Apps	Google, Canva	6 min
Stage 2		
1. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Mathletics, Reading Eggs	29 min
2. Productivity Apps	Google, Canva	11 min
3. Streaming	YouTube	3 min
Stage 3		
1. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Mathletics, Essential Assessment	34 min
2. Productivity Apps	Canva, Google Docs, Google	27 min
3. Communication	MS Teams, Gmail	6 min
Stage 4		
1. Productivity Apps	Canva, Google Docs, Google Slides	91 min
2. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Education Perfect, Stile	83 min
3. Communication	MS Teams, Gmail	10 min
Stage 5		
1. Productivity Apps	Google Docs, Canva, PowerPoint	72 min
2. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Stile, Canvas	59 min
3. Communication	MS Teams, Gmail	7 min
Stage 6		
1. Productivity Apps	Google docs, Canva, Google Slides	129 min
2. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Atomi	80 min
3. Communication	MS Teams, Gmail	22 min

Note that students who did not report using apps or did not provide time data for the apps that they used are not included in the time averages. Thus, average times spent are best interpreted comparatively as indications of relative frequency of app use rather than an actual average app use for students at each stage.

3.4.2 Learning outside of school

Students reported using 251 different apps or websites for learning outside of school. For primary students, Educational Apps was the leading category for learning outside school, with Productivity Apps, Streaming (YouTube) and Games appearing in the top three at relatively low average minutes (see Table 5). For secondary students, the pattern shifted: Productivity Apps became increasingly prominent and, by Stage 6, is the leading category, while Educational Apps remained strongly represented as the second most used app category. Streaming continued to feature in the top three app categories through Stage 4 and 5 but did not feature in Stages 6. AI Tools began to feature in Stages 4 and 5 and became markedly more prominent in Stage 6, suggesting that older students increasingly used them to support learning outside school. Overall, the trend reflects a move from education practice apps in the primary years to heavier use of productivity tools in senior secondary, with AI emerging as an additional support in the later stages. Figure 4 presents the time students reported spending on each app category for learning outside school, by stage, based on responses that included a time estimate. Table 5 provides the reported time and examples of popular apps in the three most frequently used categories at each stage.

Figure 4. Average minutes students spent on apps outside of school for learning by app categories and stage for those students who report time spent on apps for learning outside of school

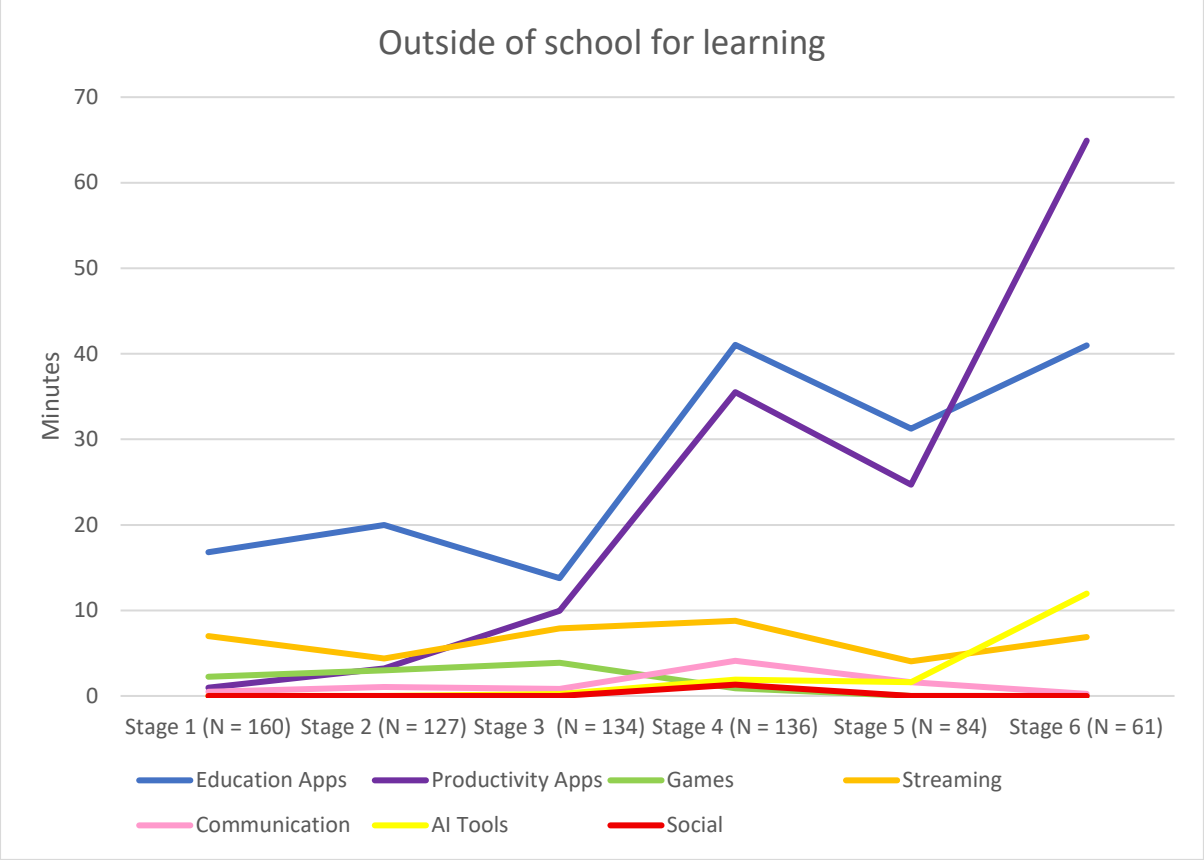


Table 5. Top 3 app categories used for learning outside of school by stage. Average minutes is for the students who reported app usage in the last school day and provided time-based data.

Out of school for learning	Top app examples	Average Min.
Stage 1		
1. Educational Apps	Reading Eggs, Mathletics	17 min
2. Streaming	YouTube	7 min
3. Games	Minecraft, Roblox	2 min
Stage 2		
1. Educational Apps	Mathletics, Mathspace, Reading Eggs	20 min
2. Streaming	YouTube	4 min
3. Productivity Apps	Canva, Google	3 min
Stage 3		
1. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Mathletics	14 min
2. Productivity Apps	Canva, Google Docs	10 min
3. Streaming	YouTube	8 min
Stage 4		
1. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Stile	41 min
2. Productivity Apps	Google Docs, Canva, Google	36 min
3. Streaming	YouTube	9 min
Stage 5		
1. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Maths Online	31 min
2. Productivity Apps	Google Docs, Canva	25 min
3. Streaming	YouTube	4 min
Stage 6		
1. Productivity Apps	Google Docs, Google	65 min
2. Educational Apps	Google Classroom, Atomi	41 min
3. AI Tools	ChatGPT	12 min

Note once again that averages are only for students who report using apps and provided time-based data, so average time spent is best interpreted comparatively rather than as average app use for students at each stage.

3.4.3 Leisure at school

Students reported using 215 different apps or websites for leisure at school. For primary students, use of apps for leisure at school was relatively low and spread across Educational Apps, Streaming and Games. Stage 1 students reported spending the most time for leisure at school on Streaming Apps, with YouTube being the main app they reported (see Table 6). In Stages 2 and 3, the most leisure time at school was spent on Games, Educational Apps and Streaming, with the use of Educational Apps such as Minecraft Education, Blooket and Scratch, suggesting that play and learning activities overlap in these years. Secondary students reported more leisure time at school and a different mix of apps. In Stage 4, Games and Streaming accounted for the most time. Educational Apps remained among the top three categories, although students spent less time on them than in Stage 3. Social apps became more prominent in Stage 4, then far exceeded Games and Streaming in Stage 5, with the gap widening further in Stage 6. Overall, reported leisure use at school increased across the stages and shifted from a mix of educational, gaming and streaming apps in primary school towards social apps in the later secondary years. Figure 5 shows the time students reported spending on different app categories for leisure at school across stages, using responses that included a time estimate. Table 6 shows the reported time and examples of popular apps in the three most frequently used categories at each stage.

Figure 5. Average time students spent on apps at school for leisure by app categories and stage for those students who report time spent on apps for leisure at school

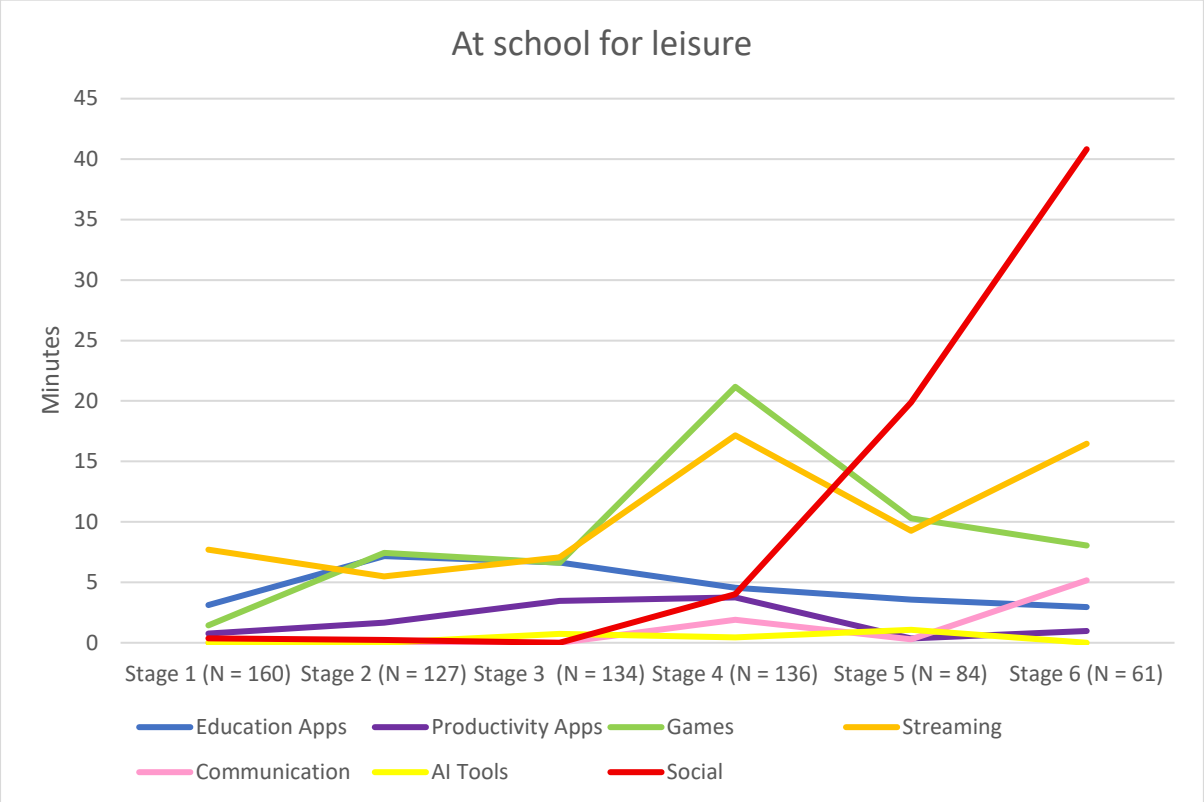


Table 6. Top 3 app categories used for leisure at school by stage. Average minutes is for the students who reported app usage in the last school day and provided time-based data.

At school for leisure	Top app examples	Average Min.
Stage 1		
Streaming	YouTube	8 min
Educational Apps	Minecraft Education, ABCya, Reading Eggs, Class Dojo	3 min
Games	Minecraft, Geometry Dash	1 min
Stage 2		
Games	Wordle, Roblox, Minecraft	7 min
Educational Apps	Minecraft Education	7 min
Streaming	YouTube	5 min
Stage 3		
Streaming	YouTube	7 min
Games	Minecraft, Unblocked Games, Cool Math Games	7 min
Educational Apps	Minecraft Education, Blooket, Scratch, Maths Playground	7 min
Stage 4		
Games	Roblox, Minecraft	21 min
Streaming	YouTube, Spotify	17 min
Educational Apps	Minecraft Education, Blooket, Scratch	5 min
Stage 5		
Social	TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat	20 min
Games	Roblox, Wordle	10 min
Streaming	YouTube, Spotify, Netflix	9 min
Stage 6		
Social	Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat	41 min
Streaming	YouTube, Spotify	16 min
Games	Block Blast, Roblox, New York Times Games	8 min

Noting once again that averages are only for students who reported using apps and provided time-based data.

3.4.4 Leisure outside of school

Students reported using 263 different apps and websites for leisure outside of school. Among primary students, out-of-school leisure screen time was dominated by use of Streaming and Games, with use of Communication and Productivity apps accounted for relatively little use (see Table 7). Social apps were much more prominent among secondary students. In Stage 4, time spent on Streaming and Games remained high, but Social apps accounted for a larger share than in the primary years. Stage 5 students reported high use across all categories, with Games accounting for the most time, followed by Streaming and Social apps. By Stage 6, Social apps were the leading category, followed by Streaming and Games. Overall, the cross-sectional pattern shows a shift from Streaming and Games dominating primary students' out-of-school leisure use towards greater use of Social apps in the later secondary years. Streaming remained a major category at every stage. Figure 6 illustrates the time students reported spending on different app categories for leisure outside of school across stages, using responses that included a time estimate. Table 7 shows the reported time and examples of popular apps for leisure outside of school in the three most frequently used categories at each stage.

Figure 6. Average time students spent on apps outside of school for leisure by app categories and stage

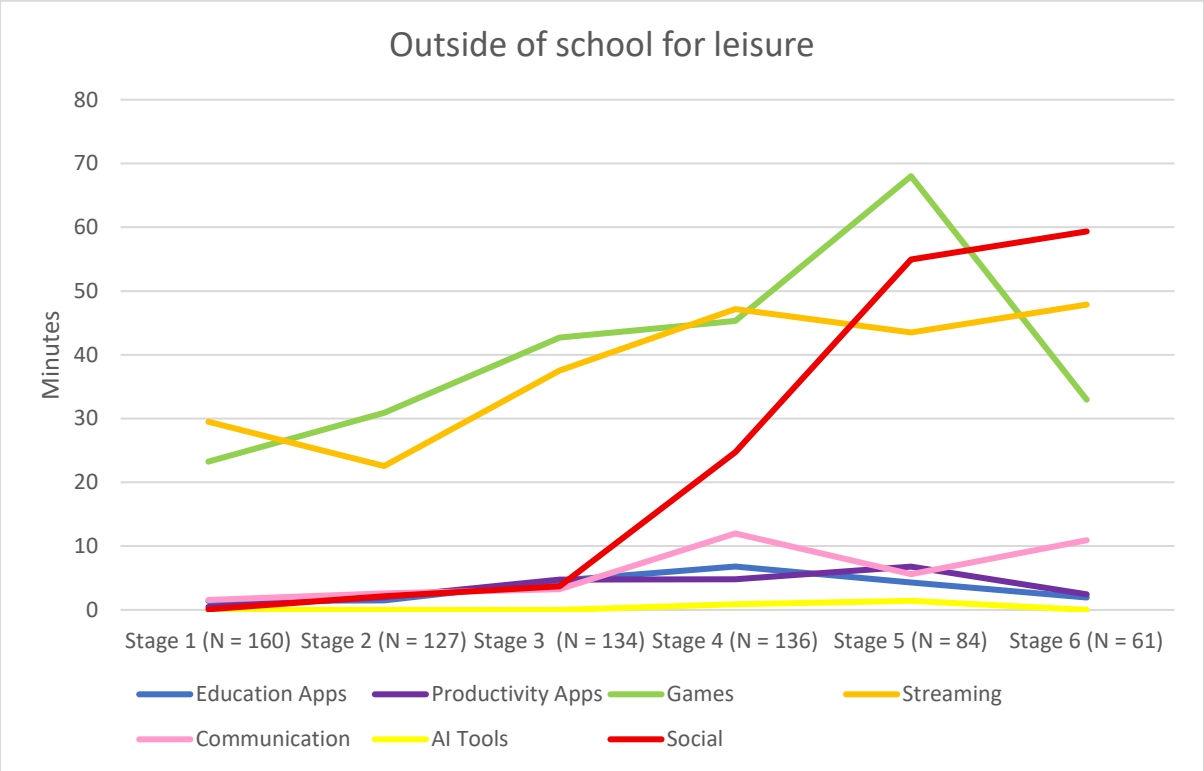


Table 7. Top 3 app categories used for leisure outside of school by stage. Average minutes is for the students who reported app usage in the last school day and provided time-based data.

Out of school for leisure	Top app examples	Average Min.
Stage 1		
1. Streaming	YouTube, YouTube Kids, Netflix	30 min
2. Games	Roblox, Minecraft	23 min
3. Communication	Discord	2 min
Stage 2		
1. Games	Roblox, Minecraft, Crazy Games	31 min
2. Streaming	YouTube, Netflix, YouTube Kids	23 min
3. Communication	Messenger Kids, Discord	3 min
Stage 3		
1. Games	Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite, Poki Games	43 min
2. Streaming	YouTube, Netflix	38 min
3. Productivity Apps	Canva, Google Docs, CapCut, Google	5 min
Stage 4		
1. Streaming	YouTube, Netflix, Spotify	47 min
2. Games	Roblox, Minecraft, Clash Royale, Fortnite	45 min
3. Social	TikTok, Discord, Snapchat, Instagram	25 min
Stage 5		
1. Games	Roblox, Clash Royale	68 min
2. Social	Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat	55 min
3. Streaming	YouTube, Netflix, Spotify	44 min
Stage 6		
1. Social	Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat	59 min
2. Streaming	YouTube, Netflix, Spotify	48 min
3. Games	Roblox, Steam, Clash Royale	33 min

As before, averages include only students who reported app use and provided a time estimate.

3.4.5 Summative comments about student app use

Taken together, the data show a consistent progression by stage: learning use shifts from Educational Apps in early stages toward Productivity Apps in later stages, while leisure shifts from Games and Streaming in primary years toward Social in secondary years. AI Tools appear as a distinct learning-related category in older cohorts outside school, suggesting emerging adoption in upper stages.

Moreover, while it may appear that some categories dominate learning use (e.g., Educational and Productivity Apps), and others dominate leisure use (e.g., Gaming, Streaming, and Social), there is substantial overlap between these categories. For example, YouTube features prominently both at school and at home, for both learning and leisure. Also, Minecraft and Minecraft Education are nominated for both learning and leisure. Popular Educational Apps like Reading Eggs and Class Dojo come with game components, which some students report using

for leisure. Similarly, although social media platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat are primarily used for leisure purposes, students also listed them for learning in many cases. Overall, these findings suggest that leisure and learning are closely intertwined in students' screen use, even at an app level.

3.5 Student screen use attitudes and habits

3.5.1 Learning

> ***Students demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the benefits of using screens for learning.***

Most students (84% of primary and 71% of secondary students) indicated that screens *sometimes*[2] help them learn better, which may suggest that they view the benefits as dependent on the task, use or context. At the same time, 28% of secondary students reported that screens *always* help them learn better compared with only 14% of primary students, indicating stronger perceived utility of screens for learning in high school.

3.5.2 Wellbeing

> ***Students are aware of the impact of screens on their health. Screens are also increasingly important for students' friendship as they grow up but most students also admit spending too much time on it.***

Students demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the impact of screens on their health, with majority of them (77% primary, 85% secondary) responding screens are bad for their health *sometimes*. Only 11% of primary students and 10% of secondary students reported screens are *never* bad for their health.

Students also reported that screen use was increasingly important for friendship across stages. The percentage of students reporting using screens is good for their friendships increased with age and peaked at Stage 5 (Stage 1: 61%, Stage 2: 72%, Stage 3: 79%, Stage 4: 96%, Stage 5: 98%, Stage 6: 95%). At the same time, students frequently reported they spend too much time playing and chatting on screens, and this trend increases across the stages (48% in Stage 1; 55% in Stage 2; 60% in Stage 3; 88% in Stage 4; 86% in Stage 5; 97% in Stage 6).

3.5.3 Cybersafety, security and privacy

> ***Primary students feel safer with screens than secondary students, and students feel safer at school than outside of school.***

[2] As explained in the Methods section, where comparisons between secondary and primary school students are made, the 5-point secondary student scale responses were transformed into 3-point scale responses. Specifically, the end points (*Never* and *Always*) of the 5-point scale (*Never-Rarely-Sometimes-Usually-Always*) were treated as corresponding distinct categories of the end points (*Never* and *Always*) in the 3-point scale, and *Rarely-Sometimes-Usually* in the 5-point scale were compressed to correspond to *Sometimes* in the 3-point scale (*Never-Sometimes-Always*).

Most students (84% primary, 66% secondary) reported *never* seeing inappropriate content on their screen *at school* and *always* feel safe when using screens at school (76% primary, 60% secondary). Nonetheless, some students as young as Stage 1 reported seeing "bad stuff" (16%), and the proportion was similar across all the stages in primary school. Importantly, the percentage of students reporting exposure to inappropriate content more than doubles as they enter secondary school (14% in Stage 3; 32% in Stage 4). Almost half of the students in Stage 5 (42%) reported being exposed to inappropriate content at school, but that reduced to a quarter of students in Stage 6 (25%).

Students are more likely to be exposed to inappropriate content outside of school than at school. The percentages of students reporting *never* seeing inappropriate content *outside of school* (60% primary, 41% secondary) were lower than those reported *at school* (84% primary, 66% secondary). Similarly, the percentages of students *always* feeling safe using screens *outside of school* (59% primary, 54% secondary) were lower than those reported at school (76% primary, 60% secondary). This signals that the importance of supporting and managing students' use of screens outside of school is at least as pressing as it is at school. Alongside greater exposure and lower feelings of safety outside school, privacy concerns also risen with age: 77% of secondary students reported worrying about how screen use affects their privacy, compared with 67% of primary students.

3.5.4 Equity

> ***Access-related inequities are more evident in secondary cohorts, with low-mid ICSEA secondary students reporting the most device shortages.***

When asked about their screen access at school, 19% of primary students indicated that they missed out on learning because they could not use screens at school. In secondary school, 32% of students reported missing out on learning because there are not enough devices at school, with clearer differences by ICSEA: 31% low ICSEA, 66% low-mid ICSEA, 31% mid-high ICSEA, and 19% high ICSEA. This may point to uneven resourcing, where the lowest-ICSEA schools receive extra targeted support, but low-mid ICSEA schools may miss out.

When asked about their screen access at home, 20% of primary students indicated that they missed out on learning because they cannot use screens at home, with higher rates for students who speak mainly LOTE at home (38%) and students with special needs (26%). In secondary school, 34% reported missing out because they cannot access devices at home at least *sometimes*, with higher levels in outer regional areas (44%) than major cities (35%) and inner regional areas (12%). By ICSEA, student responses on missing out on learning at home due to screen access issues were highest among mid-high ICSEA students (51%), compared with low (26%), low-mid (27%) and high ICSEA students (24%). Note however, this item captures students' ability to access or use devices at home and may reflect factors beyond material disadvantage – such as parental restrictions, shared-device arrangements, or household routines – so these differences should be interpreted cautiously and warrant further investigation.

3.5.5 Self-regulation

> ***Secondary students reported being less able to self-regulate and more prone to distraction than primary students; 28% of primary students indicated that they would always check the time when they use screens compared with just 8% of secondary students. In class, 84% of secondary students and 57% of primary students say they were distracted when using screens.***

Students reported that they do not always use technology in purposeful ways. Only 20% of primary students and 12% of secondary students indicated that they *always* use screens only when needed.

Secondary students reported lower compliance with, or self-regulation of, their technology use at school than primary students. Only 59% of secondary students agreed that at school they would *always* stop using screens immediately when asked, compared with 81% of primary students. Similarly, only 21% of secondary students indicated they would *always* spend less time on devices when they have other responsibilities, compared with 48% of primary students. This may reflect not only inhibitory control but also a reduced willingness to follow teacher directions.

More primary than secondary students indicated that they self-monitor their screen use, with 28% of primary students indicating that they *always* check the time when they use screens compared to just 8% of secondary students.

Distraction affects most students, particularly in secondary school. In class, 84% of secondary students and 57% of primary students indicated they were distracted when using screens. Many (76% of secondary and 65% of primary students) also reported being distracted by other students' screen use at school. Distraction extends to homework as well, with 83% of secondary students and 50% of primary students reporting being distracted while doing homework using screens.

3.5.6 Co-regulation at home and school

> ***Primary students reported much higher parental involvement and limit-setting than secondary students; 70% of primary students reported that their parents/carers are interested in how they use screens, in stark contrast to only 28% of secondary students.***

The majority of primary students (70%) reported that their parents/carers were *always* interested in how they use screens, in stark contrast to only 28% of secondary students. A greater proportion of primary students (88%) than secondary students (79%) reported that their parents/carers use screens with them.

The majority of primary (80%) and secondary students (82%) reported that parents/carers are on screens when they are trying to talk to their parents.

According to students, parents differ significantly in setting screen time limits for their children, with 93% of primary students but only 77% of secondary students reporting that their parents set screen time limits for them.

Parents also seem to communicate more about screen use with their primary school-aged children than secondary children, with 94% of primary students and 87% of secondary students reporting their parents speak with them about screen time and digital device use.

On the other hand, secondary students reported their teachers would talk to them about screen use more often than primary students: 75% of secondary and 66% of primary students indicated that their teachers talk to them about screen time and device use.

3.6 Conclusion: Student survey

Overall, the findings point to a clear shift in students' screen use as they move through their schooling: time on devices increases, the mix of activities becomes more complex, and the boundaries between learning, leisure and social connection become harder to distinguish and manage. The transition into secondary school is a particularly important pressure point, with sharp growth in home screen time and rising leisure use at school, alongside higher rates of distraction and self-regulation challenges.

The findings also point to key practical opportunities for support. Because many apps serve both educational and recreational purposes, effective responses are unlikely to rely on simple restrictions alone. Instead, schools and families may benefit from shared expectations, co-regulation and explicit teaching of self-management skills, especially to prepare students entering high school as many of them are given more autonomy in managing their own device. Finally, the growing use of AI Tools outside school reinforces the need for schools to guide students in ethical, purposeful and effective use so they are better equipped to learn well in both school and home settings.



4. Parent Survey Findings

Our findings show that most parents support purposeful and moderate use of digital devices for their child's learning and leisure, both at school and at home. This reflects parents' recognition of the importance of digital devices for students' learning, especially in secondary schools, balanced with their awareness of the possible impacts on wellbeing as well as safety and privacy issues. Most parents report that they discuss screen use with their child, indicating a high level of interest among parents across the state in actively managing their children's screen use. Many parents employ monitoring software on their children's devices (particularly among high ICSEA parents). Parents in households that speak mainly LOTE expressed higher levels of concerns around cybersafety than other parents, and a desire for more school guidance to support their children's screen use.

4.1 Parent participants

The parent survey was completed by 1686 NSW parents with school-aged children. The majority of parents indicated that their child is enrolled in a NSW public school (80%), with a smaller proportion of responses collected from Catholic school parents (12%) or independent school parents (8%). There was representation of parents with children from every stage, with Stage 4 being most prominently represented (n = 453, 27%). More than two-thirds (70%) of the respondents had more than one child in their household, although they were asked to choose one child to focus on when they answered the survey. Table 8 summarises key demographic attributes of the parent sample.



Table 8. Key Demographic Characteristics of Parent Sample

Characteristics	Category	n (%)
Child's Stage	Stage 1 (including Early Stage 1)	339 (20%)
	Stage 2	208 (12%)
	Stage 3	250 (15%)
	Stage 4	453 (27%)
	Stage 5	285 (17%)
	Stage 6	151 (9%)
Special Needs	Identify child as having a special need	551 (33%)
School System	Public schools	1343 (80%)
	Catholic schools	208 (12%)
	Independent schools	134 (8%)
Language	Child speaks English only at home	1155 (69%)
	Child speaks mainly English at home	377 (22%)
	Child speaks mainly languages other than English (LOTE) at home	149 (9%)
Aboriginality	Identify child as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	66 (6%)
Parent's Gender	Female	1133 (67%)

4.2 Parents' recommended time limits for children's screen use

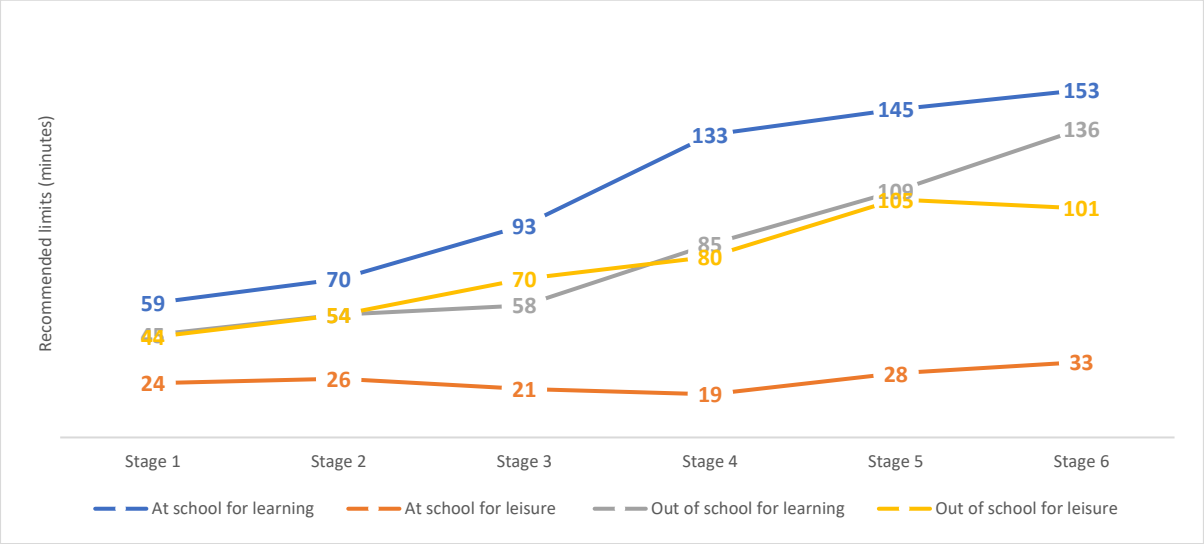
> ***Parents generally favour screen-time limits in all contexts but are much stricter for leisure than learning and allow more time for secondary than primary students.***

Parents' recommended screen-time limits differ by the contexts of purpose and location, with broad support for having limits in all contexts. Overall, parents reported stricter limits on students' leisure screen use and were more lenient on students' use of screens for learning. Figure 7 presents the average number of minutes parents recommended as limits for their children's screen use for learning and leisure, at school and out of school, across students from Stages 1 to 6.

- For screen use *at school for learning* (blue line), roughly two-thirds of parents (74% primary, 53% secondary) thought there should be a recommended limit. Among those who recommended a limit, the average suggested time was 73 minutes for primary and 140 minutes for secondary.

- For screen use *at school for leisure* (orange line), 84% of parents (85% primary, 83% secondary) thought there should be a limit. Among those who recommended a limit the average suggested time was 24 minutes (by both primary and secondary).
- For screen use *outside of school for learning* (grey line), 66% of parents (78% primary, 55% secondary) thought there should be a limit. Among those recommending a limit, the average suggested time was 52 minutes for primary and 100 minutes for secondary.
- For screen use *outside of school for leisure* (yellow line), 86% of parents (90% primary, 83% secondary) thought there should be a limit. Among those recommending a limit the average suggested time was 74 minutes overall, with 55 minutes suggested by primary parents and 91 minutes by secondary parents.

Figure 7. Parents' recommended limits for screen use among those who recommend a limit



4.3 Parents' attitudes to children's screen use

4.3.1 Learning

> ***Around 54% of parents are happy about technology use in schools, while more high school parents tend to agree that using digital devices is important for their child's learning (71% among parents of secondary students; 55% among parents of primary school students). Only 45% of secondary parents and 32% of primary parents indicated that the benefits of using technologies outweigh the disadvantages.***

Responses show a learning-oriented rationale for device use alongside some concern about the amount of learning-related screen time. About 64% of parents *agreed or strongly agreed* that using digital devices is important for their child's learning, with agreement higher among secondary parents (71%) than primary parents (55%). At the same time, 30% of parents felt

their child spends too much time using screens for learning, (23% in primary, 37% in secondary). This concern about spending too much time using screens for learning is more pronounced among high-ICSEA parents (35%) than the three lower ICSEA bands (21-24%). Approximately 54% of parents *agreed or strongly agreed* that they are happy with how technology is used for learning at their child's school, with 29% *neutral*, and 18% *disagreeing or strongly disagreeing*. There was little difference by stage. About half of the parents indicated they would like to receive more guidance from their child's school about screen use, particularly parents from households that speak LOTE at home. Overall, only 39% of parents indicated that the benefits of using technologies outweigh the disadvantages, with secondary parents (45%) more likely to agree or strongly agree than primary parents (32%).

4.3.2 Wellbeing

> ***Parents are divided on their level of concern for screen-related wellbeing impacts on students, and only some recognise the importance of screens for children's socialising and fun.***

Half of the parent respondents *agreed or strongly agreed* about negative health consequences of screen use for their child, with similar levels among primary (48%) and secondary parents (54%). Concerns about recreational and social screen use appeared substantial, with 52% of parents reporting that their child spends too much time playing or socialising on screens, (35% in primary, 68% in secondary). A minority of parents saw devices as important for socialising and fun, with 36% agreeing overall. There was a strong stage difference, with parents appearing more willing to accept the role screens play in maintaining friendships during secondary school years (23% primary vs 48% secondary).

4.3.3 Cybersafety, privacy and security

> ***Only 36% of primary parents and 38% of parents from households that mainly speak LOTE believe that their children know how to stay safe online.***

Just over half of parents (55%) *agreed or strongly agreed* that they were concerned that their child is exposed to inappropriate content or people online, with slightly higher agreement among secondary parents (58%) than primary parents (51%). Parents in major cities (57%) also appeared more concerned than those in inner (48%) and outer regional areas (41%). Sixty percent (60%) of parents were concerned about how their child's screen use might affect their child's privacy, with 55% of primary parents and 64% of secondary parents agreeing that they are concerned. Only 36% of parents of primary school-aged children, compared with 65% of secondary school parents indicated that their child knows how to be safe online. Parents *from households that mainly speak LOTE* (38%) were less inclined than parents in English-speaking households (54%) to indicate that their child knows how to be safe online.

4.3.4 Digital access – connectivity and device ownership

> ***Overall, parents report a sufficient level of internet connectivity and device access outside of school. Parents reported that 83% of secondary students and 17% of primary students have their own***

laptop. About 87% of high school students are reported to have their own smartphone.

In terms of internet access outside school, 95% of parents reported access as *good* or *excellent* overall, and it is worth noting that even for outer regional areas, 90% of parents reported *good* or *excellent* connectivity. Parents reported that only about 20% of students have their own desktop computer at home, and that laptops are more common: 83% of secondary students and 17% of primary students have their own laptop. Around 40% of students have their own iPad or tablet. Smartphone ownership differs substantially by stage: according to parents,15% of primary students and 87% of high school students reported to have their own smartphone.

4.3.5 Home co-regulation

Primary parents (82%) and secondary parents (70%) actively manage their children's screen use by telling their child what they are allowed to do.

Parents reported substantial co-regulation efforts at home, especially for primary-aged children, alongside varied use of technical controls. Most parents (83%) said they *place restrictions on the amount of time their child can spend on screens on school days*, with higher use of restrictions in primary (93%) than secondary (74%). Three-quarters of parents (76%) reported *managing screen use by telling their child what they are allowed to do*, again more frequently reported by primary (82%) than secondary parents (70%). Just over one in three parents (38%) reported *using iPhone/Android or other OS-native screentime controls*, which was more prevalent among high-ICSEA parents (46%). Use of *school-provided filtering apps* was low at around 7%. It appears that there is no single dominant source of guidance for parents, with the most commonly reported sources being official websites (37%), schools (37%), searching online (37%), word of mouth from other parents (34%), media and news outlets (30%), social media (22%), and books (15%).

4.3.6 Digital equity for supporting parents in screen management

There was a stronger desire for more school guidance on screen use from parents in households that mainly speak LOTE.

The findings suggest that while internet and device access are generally equitable across the state, there may be other equity concerns for various aspects of managing screen use for different households. As noted in the last section, parents *from households that mainly speak LOTE* (38%) were less likely to indicate that their child knows how to be safe online compared to parents from households that only speak English (54%). These parents were also less likely to access official websites (such as the eSafety Commissioner website), less likely to hear from other parents and rely more heavily on social media for guidance around screen use than parents in English-speaking households. Relatedly, the expressed desire for more school guidance was also particularly strong among parents from households that mainly speak LOTE (72%, compared to 43% for parents from households that speak English only), pointing to the value of accessible and multilingual resources. Moreover, uptake of screen time controls and filtering apps also varied: only 8% of parents from households that mainly speak LOTE adopt commercial filtering apps, compared with 15% for parents from household that speak English, which may reflect barriers in knowledge and/or affordability.

4.4 Conclusion: Parent survey

Overall, parents endorse a balanced approach to children's screen use: they recognise that devices are increasingly essential for learning and for children's social life – particularly in secondary school – while also expressing concerns about wellbeing, privacy and online safety. Many parents report active management of screen time at home, but this management appears to become harder as children get older and leisure and social use expands. Although most families report good access to the internet and devices, the more pressing equity issue is uneven access to guidance and tools to support safe and effective use, with parents from households that mainly speak LOTE, in particular, reporting lower confidence in children's cybersafety knowledge and a stronger need for school-provided support. These findings suggest value in school-home aligned expectations and practical guidance for families, including accessible and multilingual cybersafety and screen-management resources.

5. School Leader Survey Findings



Overall, school leaders report strong support for integrating digital technologies into learning and teaching, alongside high confidence to lead that integration and strong perceived support from their leadership teams. At the same time, leaders express more mixed views about the wider external policy environment, and they identify student self-regulation as a major concern. To mitigate this, restrictions and rules are widespread, but fewer schools report having dedicated programs for responsible screen use or professional learning about healthy technology use. In terms of access and equity, majority of leaders reported good access to devices and connectivity; however, the availability of technical support was less equitable, with clear differences across ICSEA levels. In stark contrast to parents' views, three quarters of leaders indicated that, on balance, the benefits of using technologies for learning outweigh disadvantages.

5.1 School Leader Participants

An email invitation was sent to 2,860 NSW school principals asking them to complete the School Leader survey or nominate a delegate to do so. In total, 241 School Leader survey responses were collected.

Data cleaning involved ensuring that only one response was received per school, to avoid duplicate responses to questions about school policies and operations. If there were more than one response received from school leaders in a school, then only the response from the most senior respondent was retained (Principal > Deputy Principal > Assistant Principal > Other). At the end of the cleaning process, 166 responses were used for analysis. This included school leaders from NSW public schools (73%), Catholic schools (19%) and independent schools (8%).

Respondents reported a wide range of professional experience, ranging from 1 to 51 years working in schools (mean = 25 years). Most respondents indicated that they were principals (76%). The sample was mostly from primary settings (65%), with smaller representation from secondary (20%), combined (10%), and other schools (5%). Table 9 summarises key demographic attributes of the school leader sample.

Table 9. Key Demographic Characteristics of School Leader Sample

Characteristics	Category	n (%)
School Type	Primary	108 (65%)
	Secondary	34 (21%)
	Combined	16 (10%)
Current Position	Principal	126 (76%)
	Deputy Principal	11 (7%)
	Assistant Principal	11 (7%)
	Other	18 (11%)
School Geolocation	Major Cities	97 (59%)
	Inner Regional	36 (22%)
	Outer Regional/Remote/Very Remote	27 (16%)
School System	Public schools	121 (73%)
	Catholic schools	31 (19%)
	Independent schools	14 (8%)
School ICSEA	Low ICSEA (Up to 25%)	44 (27%)
	Low-Mid ICSEA (26-50%)	26 (16%)
	Mid-High ICSEA (51-75%)	40 (24%)
	High ICSEA (76% or higher)	49 (30%)
School Total Enrolment	Low enrolment ≤ 288	80 (50%)
	High enrolment ≥ 289	79 (50%)
Gender	Female	118 (71%)

5.2 School leaders' recommended limits for students' screen use

Most school leaders endorse limiting screen use for learning, with higher limits recommended for secondary than primary students. For screen use outside school for leisure, 94% of leaders endorse having limits, and a similar percentage of school leaders (91%) endorse having limits for screen use at school for leisure.

- Almost two-thirds of school leaders (64% primary, 72% secondary) recommended daily screen-time limits *at school for learning*. For those recommending a limit, the average

recommended limit was 110 minutes by primary school leaders and 153 minutes and secondary school leaders.

- The large majority of school leaders (90% primary, 91% secondary) endorsed having limits for screen use *at school for leisure*, recommending an average limit of 19 minutes per school day in primary and 18 minutes per day in secondary.
- For screen use *outside of school for learning*, 75% of leaders endorsed a recommended limit overall, with secondary leaders (83%) more likely than primary leaders (74%) to recommend limits. Primary school leaders recommended an average limit of 72 minutes per school day, whilst secondary school leader recommended an average limit of 140 minutes.
- For screen use *outside school for leisure*, a vast majority of leaders endorsed having limits (93% primary, 90% secondary). Primary leaders recommended an average limit of 57 minutes, whilst secondary leaders recommended an average limit of 92 minutes.

5.3 School leader perspectives

5.3.1 Screens-related policies

Leaders report high support for technology integration in their school and strong internal policy alignment but also express weaker perceptions that the external policy environment has been supportive.

Leaders' responses indicated a strongly supportive internal school climate for technology integration. The vast majority (95%) of leaders *agreed* or *strongly agreed* they support integrating technology into classes at their school, and 85% indicated they feel confident to lead that integration. Perceived leadership-team support was similarly high, with 94% agreeing. Leaders also reported prioritising provision of technology for students (75%) and prioritising staff professional learning relating to technology use (68%). Internal policy alignment is reported as strong, with 86% agreeing that internal school policies support integration for learning and teaching, while views of the supportiveness of the external policy environment were notably lower at 66% overall, especially among high-ICSEA leaders (57%).

Most schools have formalised expectations for screen use at school. In particular, 77% of leaders reported their school has a written statement about general digital device use on school premises. Just under half of the leaders (44%) reported formal subject-specific guidelines, with a higher percentage reported in secondary (63%) than in primary (36%).

Inner regional school leaders were the most positive across all the items related to their policy environment. This is most pronounced in their prioritisation of professional learning, with 82% of inner regional leaders *agreeing or strongly agreeing* that they *prioritise professional learning of staff relating to technology use,* compared to 62% of their counterparts in major cities and 73% in outer regional schools.

5.3.2 Support for technology integration

> ***Leaders generally rate infrastructure positively, but technical support stands out as a pronounced equity issue by ICSEA and location.***

Leaders' ratings of practical support and infrastructure were generally positive but uneven, especially for technical support. Most school leaders (63%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their school has good technical support, with much higher agreement in high-ICSEA schools (84%) compared with low-ICSEA schools (45%), signalling a potential equity concern. Almost two-thirds of leaders (64%) agreed that they have high-quality technological devices was 64% overall, with higher levels reported in secondary and combined contexts than in primary settings. Almost three-quarters (74%) of leaders also reported that students can access devices for learning whenever they need them. Network and internet access was rated positively overall (81%), but this was more positive for high ICSEA schools (94%) than low ICSEA schools (72%), and less positive in inner regional schools (68%) than other regions (84% major cities, 85% outer regional).

The majority of leaders (76%) reported adequate digital devices to support student learning. Only 36% reported a BYOD (bring your own device) policy, with a large difference between secondary (83%) and primary schools (20%). Only 27% reported providing device monitoring software to staff, and this was particularly low in secondary schools (13%).

5.3.3 Students' screen use

> ***Many school leaders (72%) are confident in students' responsible and effective technology use, but not in student ability to self-regulate nor their levels of digital literacy. Only 10% of secondary school leaders and 31% of primary school leaders report that their students can self-regulate their use of technology when learning.***

Most school leaders (72%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their students can use technology responsibly for learning. Primary leaders were more positive than secondary leaders (79% vs 60%). A similar pattern appears for 'effective' use of technology for learning: 66% of leaders agreed overall, with more primary (70%) than secondary leaders (50%) agreeing.

Just over half (57%) of the school leaders agreed that students have high levels of digital literacy, again with primary leaders more positive than secondary leaders (63% vs 52%). Equity concerns emerge on this point – leaders in high-ICSEA schools (72%) were more likely to agree their students have high digital literacy than leaders in other ICSEA quartiles (50–51%). This is particularly concerning given digital literacy is a general capability in the Australian Curriculum.

By contrast, leaders reported low confidence in students' ability to self-regulate their technology use. Only 25% of school leaders agreed that students can self-regulate their use of technology when learning, including 31% of primary leaders and just 10% of secondary leaders.

Overall, these results suggest that while many students can use technology responsibly and effectively, targeted support is needed to build digital literacy, especially in lower-ICSEA contexts, and – most urgently – strengthen self-regulation, particularly in secondary schools.

5.3.4 Parent engagement

> ***Around 70% of school leaders perceive parents as supportive of school policies and positive about school technology use, but fewer than half provide guidance for parents about screen use at home.***

Leaders' perceptions of parents were broadly positive but not uniform across contexts. Overall, 70% of leaders *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that parents are supportive of school policies regarding the use of technology for learning. Similarly, 69% of leaders agreed that parents are positive about the way technology is used for learning and teaching at their school. Leaders from low enrolment schools tended to find their parents more positive about school technology policies than those in high enrolment schools (76% vs 62%).

Fewer than half (47%) of leaders reported that their school provides guidelines to parents and carers about screen use at home. This is an important comparison point with the parent survey, as parents, especially those in households that speak LOTE, often desire more guidance from schools.

5.3.5 School leader perspectives on teacher engagement

> ***Most school leaders (75%) express that the benefits of using technologies for learning in their school outweigh the disadvantages. About three-quarters (74%) of school leaders agree that their teachers play an active role in helping students regulate device use during class time but only 36% report providing teachers with professional learning about healthy technology use.***

Most leaders *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that teachers are innovative (60%) and enthusiastic (66%) about using technology for learning and teaching. Most (71%) also reported a positive culture among staff about technology use. Just over half (57%) of the leaders indicated that teachers at their school actively develop students' digital literacies.

Almost all leaders (96%) reported that teachers establish rules for when students may use devices during lessons. Almost three-quarters of leaders (74%) indicated that teachers at their school play an active role in helping students regulate device use during class time, and the same percentage indicated that technologies are used effectively for learning and teaching at their school.

While most school leaders (60%) reported that their school offers professional development on integrating digital technologies into the curriculum and professional development on how to address individual student needs using technologies (64%), far fewer schools (36%) reported providing teachers with professional learning about healthy technology use. This may reflect schools' use of external cybersafety and wellbeing programs, highlighting the importance of ensuring that such programs complement and are integrated into ongoing classroom teaching and whole-school practice (eSafety Commissioner, 2026; Laurens et al., 2022).

Overall, 75% of leaders *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the benefits of using technologies for learning in their school outweigh the disadvantages, with similar proportions for primary and secondary.

5.4 Conclusion: School leader survey

Most school leaders describe their school system as strongly committed to using digital technologies to support learning, with high confidence to do so and clear internal policy alignment to undertake that work. However, this confidence is tempered by mixed views of the broader policy context and a persistent concern that students — particularly in secondary settings — need stronger support to manage distraction and self-regulate their device use. While most leaders report that infrastructure and access are generally sufficient, uneven technical support stands out as a practical equity challenge, raising questions about how reliably schools can sustain effective day-to-day technology use. In practice, schools most often manage screen use through rules and restrictions, while fewer use screen-monitoring software for classroom management or embed school-based programs and professional learning focused on responsible, healthy use. Taken together, the findings suggest that the challenge is not simply whether technology should be used, but *when, where and how it adds value to learning, and what conditions are required for its effective use*. These include:

- Consistent guidance between home and school,
- Equitable technical support across all schools,
- Introduction of screen-monitoring software for classroom management, and
- A more explicit focus on self-regulation and wellbeing alongside digital learning in the classroom.

6. Teacher Survey Findings

Teacher survey results indicate that digital devices are used regularly for core learning activities, particularly in secondary classrooms, and that teachers generally support purposeful screen use alongside clear limits. Teachers report concerns about cybersafety, wellbeing and equity impacts in class, and they also highlight student distraction and self-regulation as ongoing challenges. Co-regulation strategies are common (especially limiting use and talking with students), while the use of monitoring software and communication with parents about home learning use is comparatively rare.

6.1 Teacher participants

Overall, 914 teachers responded to the teacher survey. Most of the respondents were female (73%) secondary teachers (56%) teaching in major cities (77%). The majority of the teacher respondents were employed in NSW public schools (76%), with relatively less in Catholic schools (15%) and independent schools (9%). Just under half of the respondents were from High ICSEA schools (46%). The average years of teaching experience is 15.4 years. Table 10 summarises key demographic attributes of the teacher sample.



Table 10. Key Demographic Characteristics of Teacher Sample

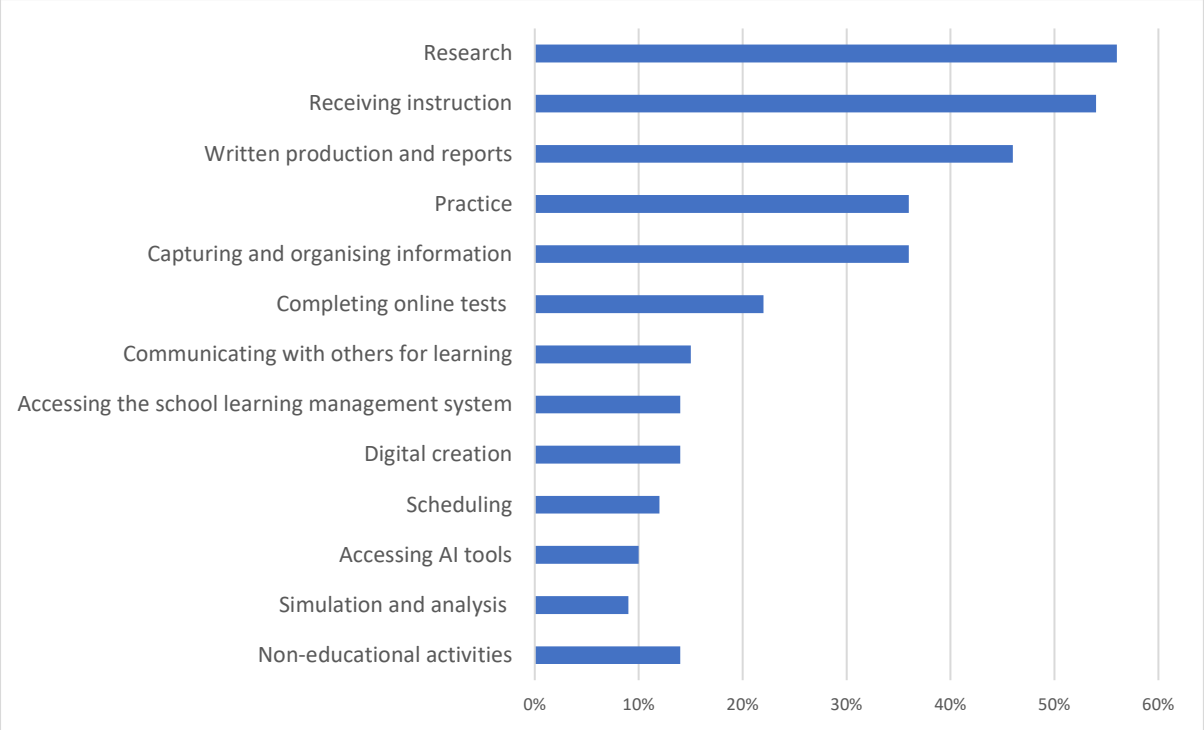
Characteristics	Category	n (%)
School System	Public schools	691 (76%)
	Catholic schools	137 (15%)
	Independent schools	86 (9%)
School Geolocation	Major Cities	703 (77%)
	Inner Regional	120 (13%)
	Outer Regional/Remote/Very Remote	74 (8%)
Current teaching level	Primary	409 (45%)
	Secondary	511 (56%)
School ICSEA	Low ICSEA (Up to 25%)	177 (20%)
	Low-Mid ICSEA (26-50%)	70 (8%)
	Mid-High ICSEA (51-75%)	219 (24%)
	High ICSEA (76% or higher)	421 (46%)
KLA	English	447 (49%)
	Mathematics	407 (45%)
	HSIE	370 (40%)
	Science	337 (37%)
	Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE)	329 (36%)
	Creative Arts	306 (33%)
	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)	135 (15%)
	Languages	35 (4%)
	Vocational Education and Training (VET)	25 (3%)
	Other	116 (13%)
Gender	Female	670 (73%)

6.2 Classroom use of digital devices for learning

The most commonly reported purpose for technology use in class is students conducting research (56%), followed by using technology to receive instruction (54%), while accessing AI Tools (10%) and using technology for simulation and analysis (9%) are least frequent.

On teachers' last full day of teaching, the most commonly reported uses of student devices were for *research* (56%), *receiving instruction* (54%), *written production and reports* (46%), *capturing and organising information* (36%), and *practice* activities (36%). Less commonly, teachers reported students *communicating with others* for learning (15%), *completing online tests* (22%), *accessing the school learning management system* (14%), *digital creation* (14%), and *scheduling* (12%). A small but notable proportion of teachers reported students *accessing AI Tools* in class (10%) and the least reported use was *simulation and analysis* (9%). Additionally, 14% of teachers reported screens were used for *non-educational activities*. This is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. How students use screens in classes according to teachers



Compared to primary teachers, secondary teachers were more likely to report students using screens for *accessing the school learning management system* (59% vs 18%), *capturing and organising information* (51% vs 18%), *scheduling* (19% vs 3%), using *AI Tools* (17% vs 3%), and s*imulation and analysis* (13% vs 3%). Secondary students were more frequently reported to engage in *non-educational activities than primary students* (21% vs 4%).

Notably, *communicating with others for learning* was most frequently reported by outer regional teachers (22%), compared with their counterparts in major cities (16%) and inner regional schools (4%).

6.3 Teachers' recommended limits for students' screen use

Teachers favour screen time limits in all contexts, with the strongest support for leisure time limits, and suggest more time for secondary students' school learning and homework.

- For use *at school for learning*, 54% of teachers supported a limit (63% primary vs 46% secondary), and among those recommending a limit the averaged suggested time was 126 minutes (98 minutes primary vs 158 minutes secondary).
- For use *at school for leisure*, 86% supported a limit (88% primary vs 85% secondary), and among those recommending a limit the average suggested time was 27 minutes (21 minutes primary vs 31 minutes secondary.
- For use *outside school for learning*, 63% supported a limit (73% primary vs 55% secondary), and among those recommending a limit the average suggested time was 94 minutes (68 minutes primary vs 119 minutes secondary).
- For use *outside school for leisure*, 82% supported a limit (86% primary vs 79% secondary), and among those recommending a limit the average suggested time was 83 minutes (64 minutes primary vs 101 minutes secondary).

6.4 Teachers' attitudes to students' screen use

6.4.1 Learning

About half of the teachers agree devices help learning, and 82% agree that devices are important for building digital literacies. Only 52% agree that the benefits of having students use technologies in class outweigh the disadvantages.

The majority of teachers *agreed or strongly agreed* that using digital devices is important to develop students' digital literacies (82%). Teachers were more divided as to whether using digital devices help their students learn, with just over half of the teachers (53%) indicating agreement (27% neutral, 20% disagreeing). Overall, just over half of the teachers (52%) agreed that the benefits of having students use technologies in class outweighed the disadvantages (26% neutral, 21% disagreeing).

6.4.2 Wellbeing

About 40% of teachers report that student wellbeing issues are associated with technology use in class and this concern is stronger in secondary and larger schools.

About 40% of teachers *agreed or strongly agreed* that there are wellbeing issues when students use technologies in their classes. Reported concern was also higher among secondary (47%) than primary teachers (33%).

6.4.3 Cybersafety

> ***Approximately two in five teachers (41%) report cybersafety issues arising when students use technologies in class, with more concern in secondary schools.***

Overall, 41% of teachers *agreed or strongly agreed* that there are cybersafety issues when students use technologies in their classes, and secondary teachers (46%) were more concerned than primary teachers (34%).

6.4.4 Equity and access

> ***While most teachers indicated that students have good access to devices and internet, one-third of teachers report equity issues, alongside uneven infrastructure supports that may amplify digital inequities across schools.***

Most teachers *agreed or strongly agreed* that students have good access to devices for learning in class (82% overall; 74% primary vs 89% secondary). A similar proportion (82%) reported good school internet access across all regions.

Overall, 33% of teachers *agreed or strongly agreed* that there are equity issues when students use technologies in their classes). Reported equity issues were higher among major city teachers (36%) than outer-regional teachers (16%), and varied non-linearly by schools' ICSEA band (high 33%, mid-high 45%, low-mid 30%, low 23%). This suggests equity challenges are not confined to just the lowest-ICSEA settings, as about one-third of high ICSEA school teachers also express equity concerns.

6.4.5 Student distraction and self-regulation

> ***Teachers (52%) report students are frequently distracted, with only 42% indicating that students are able to shift their attention away from screens when asked.***

Almost a third (32%) of teachers reported that screen use *often or always* has negative effects on students' social interactions in class. Less than half of the teachers (42%) reported that students are *often or always* able to turn attention away from screens when asked. Half of the teachers (52%) found that students would *often or always* be distracted by unrelated content, or by other students using screens in class (50%). Overall, these findings suggest that managing attention and minimising off-task screen behaviour remain persistent classroom challenges, with many teachers reporting impacts on both student focus and peer interactions.

6.4.6 Teacher co-regulation strategies at school

> ***Most (66%) teachers actively manage classroom screen use through limits and explicit conversations, but relatively few (18%) communicate with parents about home learning use.***

Two-thirds (66%) of teachers indicated that they try to limit the amount that students use screens in their classes (73% primary vs 61% secondary), but only 27% of teachers reported their school provides device monitoring software to staff.

Most teachers (71%) indicated that they *often or always* talk with students about how and when they should use their digital devices. However, only 18% indicated they *often or always* communicate with parents about how students should use digital devices at home for learning. A notable minority never communicate with parents about this (18% primary; 22% secondary), suggesting a potential gap between parent expectations and current school-home communication practices.

6.4.7 Support for screen use

> ***Only slightly more than half of teachers (56%) agreed that they had access to professional learning and resources to support screen-based teaching, while most (74%) felt prepared to help students use digital devices effectively for learning.***

A majority of teachers (84%) *agreed or strongly agreed* that their school leadership is supportive of integrating technology. Nearly three-quarters of teachers (74%) agreed they feel prepared to help students use digital devices effectively for learning. However, substantially fewer (56%) indicated they have access to professional learning and resources to support screen-based teaching, with fewer primary (50%) than secondary teachers (61%) agreeing.

Teachers' reported level of technical support varied substantially: 72% were in agreement overall, but agreement was notably higher among secondary (83%) than primary teachers (58%), and was higher in larger enrolment schools (90%) than in small schools (51%). This raises the possibility that school resourcing and context could interfere with teachers' day-to-day capacity to implement screen-based teaching effectively.

6.5 Conclusion: Teacher survey

Overall, many teachers indicate that digital technologies are a routine part of classroom learning, particularly in secondary settings, but their views of their educational value were mixed. While just over half regarded screens as more advantageous than disadvantageous for learning, one fifth of teachers disagreed, indicating that teacher support for technology is contingent rather than unequivocal. Just over half of teachers support limits on screen use for learning, with higher limits recommended for secondary than primary. Teachers were most supportive of the use of digital technologies for developing students' digital literacies.

At the same time, teachers report persistent challenges that shape day-to-day practice: student distraction and uneven self-regulation, alongside ongoing concerns about cybersafety, wellbeing and equity in the classroom. Teachers commonly respond through co-regulation strategies — setting limits and explicitly discussing appropriate use with students. However, comparatively less communication with parents about expectations for learning-related device use at home suggests an opportunity to strengthen consistency between school and home approaches.

The findings suggest that improving learning efficacy with screens will depend less on increasing access and more on strengthening the conditions around use, such as:

- Practical supports for teachers (including reliable technical support and professional learning),
- Clearer shared expectations for students, and
- More consistent school-home guidance to reinforce responsible and effective screen use across settings.

7. Pre-Service Teacher Survey Findings

Pre-service teacher (PST) survey results indicate generally positive attitudes towards the use of digital devices for learning, alongside an awareness of wellbeing, equity, and self-regulation challenges. PSTs reported high levels of access to devices and internet during professional experience placements, with somewhat weaker perceptions regarding technical support. While most PSTs felt prepared to support students' educational screen use, they reported frequent distraction and variable student capacity to self-regulate, highlighting the importance of explicit co-regulation strategies.

7.1 Pre-service teacher participants

The survey received 805 responses from pre-service teachers (PSTs) enrolled in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs in 11 NSW universities. Most respondents were enrolled in undergraduate ITE programs (82%), with the remainder undertaking postgraduate programs (18%). Participants were distributed across different stages of their degrees, with 26% having completed 25% or less of their program, 40% between 26–50%, 18% between 51–75%, and 17% having completed more than 75% of their studies. In terms of specialisation, just over half of the sample were preparing to teach in Primary Education (53%), followed by Secondary Education (35%). Smaller proportions identified Early Childhood, Special Education, or other program pathways. Secondary PSTs reported a wide range of teaching areas, including HSIE (22%), Science (21%), Mathematics (21%), English (20%), PDHPE (18%), TAS (15%) and Creative Arts (15%), with lower representation in Languages (5%), VET (1%), and other areas (4%).

The respondents were predominantly female (78%) and under 25 years old (77%). Just under 5% of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Table 11 shows the key demographic characteristics of the pre-service teacher sample.



Table 11. Key Demographic Characteristics of Pre-service Teacher Sample

Characteristics	Category	n (%)
Type of ITE Program	Undergraduate	626 (78%)
	Postgraduate	141 (18%)
Stage of Degree	25% or less	201 (26%)
	26-50%	306 (40%)
	51-75%	133 (17%)
	More than 75%	130 (16%)
Professional Experience	Completed	421 (55%)
Aboriginality	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	39 (5%)
Specialisation	Primary	409 (53%)
	Secondary	268 (35%)
KLA	HSIE	177 (22%)
	Science	165 (21%)
	Mathematics	165 (21%)
	English	161 (20%)
	PDHPE	142 (18%)
	Creative Arts	121 (15%)
	TAS	120 (15%)
	Languages	42 (5%)
	VET	11 (1%)
	Other	31 (4%)
Gender	Female	334 (82%)
Age	Under 25	111 (77%)
	25 and over	94 (23%)

7.2 Pre-service teachers' recommended limits for students' screen time

Most PSTs supported recommended screen use limits in all contexts, with stronger endorsement for limiting leisure screen time than limiting learning-related screen time.

- Over half of the PSTs (61%) recommended daily screen-time limit *at school for learning*. For those who recommended a limit, the average recommendation was 126 minutes.
- Three-quarters of PSTs (76%) endorse having limits for screen use *at school for leisure*. For those who recommended a limit, the average recommendation was 38 minutes.
- For screen use *outside of school for learning*, 57% of PSTs endorse having limits. For those who recommended a limit, the average recommendation was 102 minutes.
- For screen use *outside school for leisure*, just under three-quarters of PSTs endorse having limits (71%). For those who recommended a limit, the average recommendation was 126 minutes.

7.3 Pre-service teacher perspectives

7.3.1 Professional experience access and support

> ***PSTs generally report strong access to devices and reliable internet on placement, alongside supportive school leadership and supervising teachers, but express mixed views about the adequacy of technical support.***

Over half of respondents (55%) reported having completed at least one professional experience placement, with a wide range of teaching days completed, indicating varied levels of school-based experience across the sample. For those who have completed professional experience placement, a majority of PSTs (73%) *agreed or strongly agreed* that students had good access to digital devices for learning with 80% stating there was reliable internet access in their most recent professional experience school. Most PSTs agreed that school leadership was supportive of integrating technology. Similarly, 74% of PSTs reported that their supervising teacher supported students' use of digital technologies in class. In contrast, perceptions of good technical support were more mixed, with just over half of PSTs (55%) indicating that technical support was adequate.

7.3.2 Preparedness to support educational screen use

> ***Most PSTs (71%) felt prepared to support effective screen use for learning, but results indicate scope to strengthen ITE for effective screen-use. About two-thirds (62%) of PSTs indicate that their university studies have helped them to understand how students can use screens effectively for learning.***

Most PSTs (71%) *agreed or strongly agreed* that they felt prepared to help students effectively use digital devices for learning in their classes. Just under two-thirds of PSTs (62%) indicated

that their university studies had helped them to understand how students can use screens effectively for learning, and 65% reported similar learning from professional experience placements. This points to an opportunity to strengthen explicit instruction and modelling — across both coursework and professional experience — on when, why and how screens may support learning.

7.3.3 Learning value and digital literacies

> ***PSTs are broadly positive about the learning value of devices and strongly endorsed their role in building students' digital literacies. However, only half (51%) indicated that the benefits of using technologies in class outweigh the disadvantages.***

Two-thirds of PSTs (67%) *agreed or strongly agreed* that using digital devices in their classes would help students learn better. More (85%) agreed that digital devices are important for developing students' digital literacies. However, just over half (51%) agreed that the benefits of using technologies in class outweigh the disadvantages (35% neutral, 14% disagreeing).

7.3.4 Wellbeing, cybersafety and equity

> ***Alongside positive attitudes, PSTs anticipate issues with student use of screens in classrooms, particularly equity issues, and also cybersafety and wellbeing concerns indicating a cautious, balanced view of educational screen use.***

A significant proportion of PSTs *agreed or strongly agreed* that cybersafety issues (47%), wellbeing issues (43%), and equity issues (51%) are likely to arise when students use digital technologies in class.

7.3.5 PST perception on student self-regulation

> ***PSTs expect distraction to be frequent and student self-regulation to be variable, with some impact on classroom social interactions and a clear need for active classroom management.***

Around half of the PSTs felt that students would *often* or *always* be distracted by unrelated content (51%) when using screens in class and by other students' screen use (46%). Only one-third of PSTs (36%) believed that students would *often* or *always* be able to turn attention away from screens when asked). Around one-quarter (26%) indicated that screen use would *often* or *always* negatively affect students' social interactions. These patterns underscore perceived classroom management demands associated with educational screen use.

7.3.6 Anticipated co-regulation at school

> ***Most PSTs (87%) anticipate using co-regulation strategies such as setting limits and explicitly teaching appropriate use, and many (77%) expect to communicate with parents about learning-related screen use at home.***

Two-thirds (67%) of PSTs reported that they would *often* or *always* limit the amount of screen use in their classes. Even stronger support was evident for explicit discussion with students about appropriate screen use, with a large majority (87%) of PSTs indicating that they would *often* or *always* talk with students about when and how digital devices should be used. Strong support was also evident for communication with parents regarding students' screen use at home for learning, with 77% of PSTs reporting that they would *often* or *always* communicate with parents about how digital devices should be used outside of school for educational purposes. This indicates that most PSTs anticipate an active role in providing guidance about screen use in the classroom as well as at home.

7.4 Conclusion: Pre-service teacher

Overall, PSTs express preparedness to work in technology-rich classrooms and are broadly supportive of digital device use to develop student digital literacies. At the same time, they anticipate the practical challenges that accompany classroom screen use, especially distraction, uneven self-regulation, and equity, wellbeing and cybersafety challenges. The findings suggest that supporting PSTs will depend on strengthening both their knowledge of effective technology use and their ability to do so by:

- continuing to build pedagogical knowledge relating to the use of technology through ITE coursework, and
- ensuring professional experience placements provide modelling of technology co-regulation strategies, effective routines, and school-home communication that help students use screens safely and productively.

8. Concluding remarks



This report shows broad agreement across students, parents, teachers, school leaders and pre-service teachers that digital technologies are a frequent part of contemporary schooling, particularly in secondary settings. However, views of the educational value of screens were mixed, and findings do not suggest unqualified support for screen use. Rather, stakeholders consistently highlighted both potential benefits for learning and significant challenges relating to distraction, self-regulation, wellbeing, cybersafety and equity. This suggests that attention should focus not only on access to digital technologies, but also on the conditions under which they are used and the extent to which they support learning.

The move from primary school to secondary school appears to be a critical juncture. At this point, students' total screen time typically increases, leisure and social use expand, and the lines between learning and non-learning use appear to become harder to manage. With this shift comes higher reported distraction and self-regulation challenges, suggesting that supports need to be proactive and developmentally targeted rather than reactive once problems are entrenched.

The findings also suggest that access alone is an incomplete equity story. While many communities report adequate devices and internet, uneven technical support in schools and uneven access to guidance and practical tools at home shape how effectively students can use technology day to day. The uneven uptake of monitoring software further highlights that support mechanisms are not consistently available across contexts.

Taken together, the findings identify areas that may strengthen more effective and equitable screen use across school and home contexts, including:

- Shared expectations regarding screen use across school and home;
- Explicit teaching of self-regulation and healthy digital routines;
- Practical supports for teachers including reliable technical assistance and professional learning; and
- Accessible, multilingual guidance for families, particularly where confidence in cybersafety is lower.

Finally, the growing use of AI Tools outside school reinforces the need for clear, school-led guidance on ethical and effective screen use, so students develop the judgement to use these digital tools purposefully in both learning and everyday life.

9. References

Colvin, K. F., & Gorgun, G. (2020). Collapsing Scale Categories: Comparing the Psychometric Properties of Resulting Scales. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 25(6). https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol25/iss1/6/

eSafety Commissioner. (2025). *Which platforms are age-restricted?* Australian Government. https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/industry-regulation/social-media-age-restrictions/which-platforms-are-age-restricted

eSafety Commissioner. (2026). *Guide to engaging external online safety providers*. Australian Government. https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-04/Educate_Guide_to_engaging_external_online_safety_providers.pdf

Graham, A., & Sahlberg, P (2021). *Growing Up Digital Australia: Phase 2 technical report*. Gonski Institute for Education. UNSW, Sydney. https://apo.org.au/node/311990

Johnstone, K., Kervin, L. & Wyeth, P. (2022). *Defining Digital Technology*. https://digitalchild.org.au/defining-digital-technology/

Laurens, K. R., Graham, L. J., Dix, K. L., Harris, F., Tzoumakis, S., Williams, K. E., Schofield, J. M., Prendergast, T., Waddy, N., Taiwo, M., Carr, V. J., & Green, M. J. (2022). School-based mental health promotion and early intervention programs in New South Wales, Australia: Mapping practice to policy and evidence. *School Mental Health, 14*(3), 582–597. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-021-09482-2

Schleicher, A. (2023). *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022. Insights and Interpretations*. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2023/12/pisa-2022-results-volume-i_76772a36/PISA%202022%20Insights%20and%20Interpretations.pdf