

AI Governance in Schools: A Practical Starting Point

Where AI is already being used across your school, the risks leadership may not see, and what a structured governance review actually covers.

Grounded in the Stewardship pillar of the MIT CISR Enterprise AI Adoption Maturity Framework, based on published research by Weill, Woerner & Sebastian, MIT Center for Information Systems Research (Dec 2024 & Aug 2025), the research base behind the AI Adoption Maturity Assessment.

AI is already being used across your school. The question is whether leadership knows where it is being used, what information is being entered, and who is accountable for managing the risk.

This guide sets out what that risk looks like in practice, and what a structured governance review actually covers.

Risks leadership may not see

COMMON EXPOSURE POINTS IN SCHOOLS RIGHT NOW

Personal or unapproved accounts

Staff using personal or unapproved AI accounts, outside any school visibility or control.

Sensitive information exposure

Student or staff information being entered into public AI tools.

Unreviewed AI output

AI-generated material being relied upon without human review.

Inconsistent rules

Different rules for staff and students, or in practice, no clear rules at all.

Unknown vendor handling

Unclear or unknown vendor data handling and retention practices.

Integrity & reputational exposure

Assessment integrity, copyright, and reputational exposure.

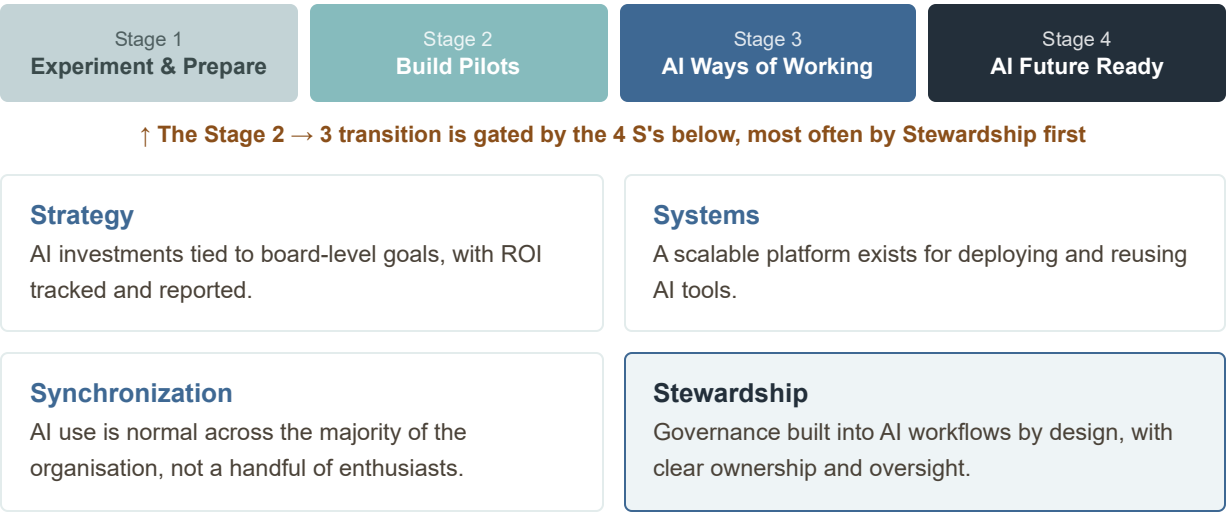
Warning signs leadership should recognise

- ! Staff cannot clearly say which AI tools are approved.
- ! Different departments are applying different rules.
- ! No one maintains a register of AI tools or use cases.
- ! Sensitive information may be entered into public AI platforms.
- ! Leadership cannot demonstrate how AI risks are monitored.

Why this is usually the first wall schools hit

MIT CISR's research, drawn from 721 organisations, found a clear financial pattern: organisations below Stage 3 of AI maturity underperform their industry peers, while those at Stage 3 and above outperform them. The move from Stage 2 to Stage 3 is the single most financially significant transition in the model, and it is gated by four practical factors the research calls the "4 S's": Strategy, Systems, Synchronization, and Stewardship.

In our conversations with schools, Stewardship, meaning governance, is often the first gap to surface.



What good governance actually includes

An acceptable-use policy is a starting point, not the whole picture. In practice, good governance includes:

1

Clear ownership and decision rights

Who is accountable for AI governance, and who can approve or decline a new use case.

2

An approved AI tool and use-case register

A maintained record of what tools are sanctioned and what they are actually used for.

3

Privacy and vendor assessment

Understanding what each AI vendor does with submitted data, and for how long.

4

Human review requirements

A rule that AI-generated material is checked by a person before it is relied upon.

5

Staff and student usage rules

Consistent expectations across the whole school, not department by department.

6

Incident and escalation processes

A known path for reporting misuse, a data exposure, or an unclear situation.

7

Training and capability development

Building staff confidence and judgement, not just publishing a document.

8

Monitoring, review and leadership reporting

Real visibility for leadership on how AI is being used and what risk that represents.

Put simply, good governance is not the absence of AI use. Unauthorised AI use is actively identified and reduced through approved alternatives, clear rules, and practical oversight.

Why a policy alone is not enough

An acceptable-use policy is one control, not a complete governance framework. It only provides real assurance when there is evidence that it reflects how AI is actually being used, is understood by staff and students, is backed by practical processes such as the register and review steps above, and is being monitored over time. A policy that exists on paper but is disconnected from what is actually happening in classrooms and staff rooms will not hold up under scrutiny, whether from a regulator, an insurer, or a parent.

Six immediate risk-reduction steps

These steps will not resolve AI governance on their own, but they reduce the most immediate and visible risks while a fuller review is underway:

1. **Publish a plain-language Acceptable Use Policy** for staff and students, covering what tools are approved, what data must never be entered, and what happens when the policy is not

followed.

2. **Name an owner.** Governance drifts when it belongs to everyone and no one. One person or a small group should be accountable for keeping the policy current.
3. **Run a quick shadow-use audit.** Ask staff, informally, what AI tools they are already using day to day. This almost always reveals more activity than leadership expects, and it tells you exactly where the policy needs to focus first.
4. **Define what must never go into a public AI tool,** such as identifiable student records, health or wellbeing notes, and unpublished assessment material. A short, specific list beats a long, vague one.
5. **Set a simple approval path** for staff to request a new tool, so the answer to "can I use this?" is a known process rather than a guess.
6. **Review the policy twice a year.** The tools and the risks both move quickly; a policy written once and left untouched stops being credible within a couple of terms.

These actions do not necessarily require new technology. They do require an accurate view of current AI use, clear decisions about risk and accountability, and governance that reflects the school's actual operating environment. A generic policy alone will not provide that assurance.

THE NEXT STEP

Start with an AI Governance and Maturity Review

Understand what AI is already happening across your school, where the material risks sit, and what should be addressed first.

- ✓ A current-state maturity position
- ✓ An AI use and exposure map
- ✓ Priority risk findings
- ✓ Governance gap analysis
- ✓ A practical 90-day roadmap

[Book an initial AI Governance discussion](#)

Framework reference: Weill, P., Woerner, S., & Sebastian, I. MIT Center for Information Systems Research (CISR), Quarterly Research Briefings, Dec 2024 and Aug 2025. This guide is an original Strategenics resource informed by that published research; it is not a reproduction of MIT CISR's materials.

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