AI Tools for Schools – Leaders

A rapid, practical guide for principals and senior leaders to use today

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Why this guide?

Leaders don't need another shiny toy, they need leverage. The tools below can remove hours from your week, sharpen decision-making, and improve communication with staff, students, families and your board or head office.
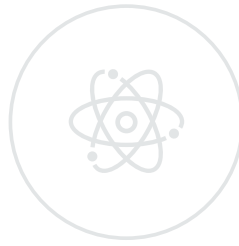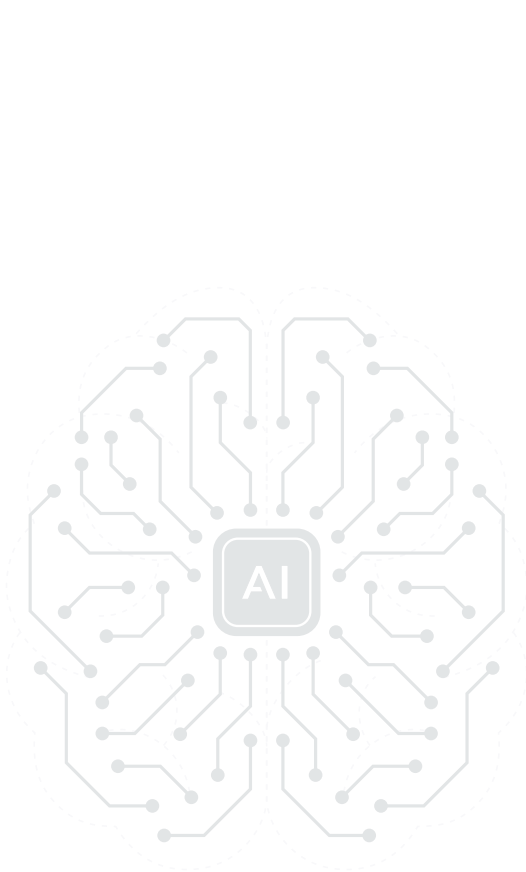
Use this document to:

- Identify high-impact use cases across your leadership responsibilities.

- Trial quick, safe experiments in your own workflow first.

- Engage stakeholders to determine what is (and isn't) valuable in your school.

Rule of thumb

If a tool doesn't reliably save you 10-30% time on a task or improve quality, it's not ready for schoolwide rollout.

Relevance: Leadership responsibilities this guide targets

We have constructed this document to acknowledge your multi-faceted role across many domains:

- **People & Culture:** Staff communications, coaching, recruitment.
- **Teaching & Learning Oversight:** Curriculum alignment, reporting, assessment quality.
- **Operations & Finance:** Schedules, timetables, procurement, facilities.
- **Risk, Policy & Compliance:** Policies, audits, incident reports, WHS, privacy.
- **Community & Governance:** Newsletters, board papers, media, stakeholder messaging.
- **Strategy:** Environmental scans, roadmaps, KPIs, evaluation.

Responsibility: Data safety principles

As every school leader knows, AI brings with it both huge opportunities and also risks. Please remember the following when using AI tools either for yourself or with others:

1. **No personal or sensitive data** (students, staff, families) into public tools unless your enterprise agreement and settings explicitly allow it.
2. Prefer **enterprise/education tenants** (Microsoft 365, Google Workspace) with logging, DLP and admin controls. Disable model training where possible.
3. Keep a **human in the loop** for decisions that affect people, money, risk, or reputation.
4. Record **consent** for any meeting recording/transcription.
5. Start with **low-risk content** (planning, drafting, summarising) before moving to higher-risk processes.

The tools and how leaders can use them

1. ChatGPT (OpenAI)

What it's for:
Fast drafting, structured thinking, scenario planning, feedback on writing.

Leadership quick wins:

- **People & Culture:** Draft position descriptions, selection criteria, interview question banks, and candidate scoring rubrics.
- **Teaching & Learning:** Turn policy goals into observation checklists; create formative assessment exemplars; draft student/parent comms about learning changes.
- **Operations:** Convert procedures into step-by-step SOPs; create email templates for repetitive queries.
- **Compliance:** Draft or refactor policies; produce summaries of long documents into bullet-point action lists.
- **Governance:** Draft board paper outlines, executive summaries, and talking points.

Try-this-now prompt:
"You are my school's deputy principal. Rewrite the draft below into a 250-word update for staff. Keep the tone professional-friendly, reduce jargon, add 3 clear action points and a short FAQ. Draft follows: …"

> ⚠ **Watch-outs:**
> May invent references; always verify facts and figures. Avoid feeding confidential data unless using a compliant enterprise setup.

2. Claude (Anthropic)

What it's for:
Very strong document understanding and summarisation with long context windows.

Leadership quick wins:

- **Strategy:** Upload large reports (e.g., system policies, reviews) and ask for comparative analysis and implications for your school.
- **People & Culture:** Turn notes from walkthroughs into strength-focused feedback with next steps.
- **Governance:** Convert a 60-page report into a 1-page executive brief plus a slide outline.

Try-this-now prompt:
"In bullets, extract risks, opportunities, and required actions from the attached policy. Group by Teaching & Learning, Operations, Finance, and Community."

> ⚠ **Watch-outs:**
> As with all LLMs, keep a human in the loop for accuracy and tone.

3. Perplexity

What it's for:
Research assistant that surfaces sources and citations quickly.

Leadership quick wins:

- **Strategy:** Scan for current guidance on AI in education, duty of care, or assessment trends with linked sources.
- **Compliance:** Generate a reading list on privacy obligations or WHS practices, with summaries and links.
- **Community:** Compile evidence-informed talking points for parent forums.

Try-this-now prompt:
"Find recent, credible sources on 'AI and assessment integrity in secondary schools'. Summarise key positions in 8 bullets, then output a 200-word neutral briefing for our leadership team with citations."

⚠️ **Watch-outs:**
Still requires source checking; follow links and verify.

4. Gemini (Google) / Copilot (Microsoft)

What it's for:
AI inside your existing ecosystem (Gmail/Docs/Sheets/Drive or Outlook/Word/Excel/SharePoint/Teams). Best for secure, auditable use at scale.

Leadership quick wins:

- **Ops & Finance:** Summarise long email threads; generate draft replies; produce spreadsheets and formulas; create dashboards from existing data.
- **Teaching & Learning:** Turn curriculum documents into planning templates; generate lesson outline libraries for leaders to share.
- **Compliance:** Ask for a policy comparison table across your shared drive; generate version histories and change logs.
- **Governance:** Auto-summarise board pack folders into briefing notes with links back to source files.

Try-this-now prompt (Docs/Word):
"Create a two-page policy brief from these three documents. Keep citations/linkbacks to the originals and finish with a dated action checklist."

⚠️ **Watch-outs:**
Value depends on your tenant setup, licensing, and data hygiene. Invest in folder structure and naming conventions first.

5. Fireflies.ai / Otter.ai

What it's for:
Meeting recording, AI notes, action items, searchable transcripts.

Leadership quick wins:

- **People & Culture:** Consistent notes for leadership and wellbeing meetings with action tracking.

- **Operations:** Capture decisions and due dates from timetable, facilities, and excursion planning meetings.

- **Governance:** Prepare post-meeting summaries with motions, decisions and follow-ups.

Try-this-now prompt:
Before the meeting: "Today's goal is X; expected decisions are Y; attendees are Z."
After the meeting: "Draft a 150-word update to staff with 3 actions and owners."

> ⚠ **Watch-outs:**
> Obtain consent; avoid confidential student or HR detail; store recordings in your enterprise drive with retention rules.

6. Canva / Adobe (Express & Creative Cloud with Firefly)

What it's for:
Fast, on-brand visuals and documents; AI features for layout, images, copy and translation.

Leadership quick wins:

- **Community:** Produce polished newsletters, event flyers, social posts, and principal updates in minutes using school brand kits.

- **Teaching & Learning:** Create quick explainer one-pagers for staff PD or student assemblies.

- **Governance:** Convert a dense policy into a 1-page infographic; export slide decks with speaker notes.

Try-this-now workflow:
Start from a brand template → paste your text → use Magic Write/Firefly to refine headings and summaries → export to PDF and PNG.

> ⚠ **Watch-outs:**
> Check generated images for appropriateness and licensing; lock brand elements to prevent drift.

7. **NotebookLM (Google)**   ⌒ NotebookLM

What it's for:
Organising, synthesising, and exploring knowledge from your documents, notes, and sources with AI support.

Leadership quick wins:

- **Community:** Collate board minutes, policy documents, and newsletters into a single searchable knowledge base for your leadership team.

- **Teaching & Learning:** Assemble course materials, lesson plans, and research into personalised notebooks that summarise and highlight key concepts for staff or students.

- **Governance:** Extract action points and compliance items from lengthy procedures or meeting transcripts, then create targeted summaries for different stakeholders.

Try-this-now workflow:

a. Import files or paste text → ask Notebook LM to generate insights, summaries, or suggested next steps → tag notes by project or focus area → export highlights for sharing via email or presentations.

b. Create an Audio Overview (2-person podcast) that summarises the information and can be listened to, rather than read -> send this to your leadership team to listen to before your next leadership team meeting.

c. Create a Video Overview (informational video) that adds a visual layer of engagement to the information -> use this in your next leadership team meeting to highlight the potential of AI to explain ideas.

> ⚠ **Watch-outs:**
> Review AI-generated summaries for accuracy; set sharing permissions carefully to protect confidential information; keep notebooks updated as new documents are added.

Choosing the right tool for the job

- **Drafting & structure:** ChatGPT, Claude
- **Long-document analysis:** Claude, NotebookLM
- **Research with sources:** Perplexity
- **Inside your ecosystem (auditability & controls):** Gemini / Copilot
- **Meetings & follow-through:** Fireflies / Otter
- **Comms & design:** Canva / Adobe

Good → Better → Best

Good: Personal trials for your own work.

Better: Team pilots with success criteria and a checklist.

Best: Enterprise rollout with policy, training, admin controls, and evaluation.

Starter prompts you can reuse

- **Summarise:** *"Summarise this document into: (a) 5 bullets for exec; (b) a 2-minute staff script; (c) a parent-friendly paragraph."*

- **SOP builder:** *"Turn the process below into an SOP with roles, steps, risks, and a 'common mistakes' section."*

- **Decision paper:** *"Create a decision memo with options, costs/benefits, risks, and a recommendation for our context."*

- **Meeting prep:** *"From last meeting's notes, list unresolved items, owners, and propose an agenda with timings."*

- **Recruitment:** *"Draft interview questions that test for X. Include scoring guides and a take-home task."*

Please see our **Leader Prompt Guide** for more information on prompting.

Leadership level pathways to AI exploration

The following suggestions may assist you in testing what's possible with AI before deploying any single idea through the whole school community.

Please remember to develop governance, strategy and policy before adopting school-wide practices with regards to AI.

A 30-day small-scale adoption plan (leader-led)

Week 1 – Explore (solo)

- Pick two low-risk tasks (e.g., newsletter draft, policy summary).
- Log time saved and quality improvements.

Week 2 – Pair (with an AP/HoD/EA)

- Run the same task together; compare outputs and refine prompts.
- Document a mini-SOP (how we do it here).

Week 3 – Pilot (small team)

- Choose one workflow (e.g., meeting notes → actions → staff update).
- Define success: time saved, fewer errors, clearer comms.

Week 4 – Review & Decide

- Share results with SLT; decide to stop, tweak, or scale.
- If scaling, identify training, policy tweaks, licensing, and metrics.

Stakeholder engagement: Open, Practical, Respectful

Staff

- Host a "10 minutes back" challenge – each team finds one AI-assisted task that returns 10 minutes a week.
- Run a voluntary PD lab: bring a task, leave with an SOP and a template.

Students

- Publish clear guidelines on acceptable use; co-design examples of AI-supported study habits.

Parents & Community

- Share how staff keep control: AI drafts, humans decide.
- Provide Q&A sessions with examples of improved clarity and timeliness of communication.

Board

- Present a one-page AI posture: opportunities, guardrails, investments, metrics.

Piloting small experiments (templates)

Pilot charter (1 page)

- **Problem:** What are we trying to fix?
- **Scope:** Team, documents, tools.
- **Guardrails:** Data, consent, approvals.
- **Success:** Time saved, error rate, satisfaction.
- Owner & Timeline.

Evaluation rubric (score 1–5)

- Time saved.
- Quality of output.
- Ease of use.
- Data/privacy fit.
- Staff acceptance.
- Cost/benefit.

What's not valuable (red flags)

- Tool demos that don't map to your actual workflows.
- Black-box tools without admin controls, audit trails, or data contracts.
- "One big launch" without opt-in pilots and feedback loops.
- Student or HR data in public models.
- Automations that remove human review for public-facing communications.

Minimum viable policy (leader talking points)

- **Purpose:** Reduce workload, improve clarity and consistency, keep staff in control.
- **Green lights:** Drafting, summarising, templates, translation, layout, meeting notes (with consent).
- **Red lines:** Personal/confidential data in public tools; automated decisions about people; unsupervised publication.
- **Accountability:** Humans remain responsible for outputs.
- **Training:** Short, role-based coaching and shared SOPs.

Procurement & setup checklist

- Admin controls, audit logs, DLP and data residency fit.
- Ability to disable model training and set retention.
- SSO and role-based access.
- Clear licensing model and exit plan.
- Accessibility features and translation support.
- Template libraries and version control.

Your next three moves

1. **Pick one tool** above and run a Week-1 solo experiment today.
2. **Schedule a 30-minute share-back** with SLT next week: what worked, what didn't, what to pilot.
3. **Nominate two champions** (one teaching, one operations) to lead a 4-week pilot using the charter and rubric.

> (i) This guide is intentionally brief and actionable. Use it to kick-start informed, low-risk experimentation that returns time to the work only humans can do: **leading people and learning**.

Let's continue the conversation

SENTRAL

You've explored the framework for AI in leadership; the next step is implementation. A powerful strategy requires a powerful platform.

Sentral is more than just a school management system; it's a strategic partner that streamlines everything from student data and reporting to payments and parent engagement, freeing your team to lead with confidence.

Schedule a strategic call:
Book a no-obligation demo with our team to see how Sentral can power your school's vision.

Discover the platform:
Learn more about how Sentral empowers strategic school leadership across Asia Pacific.

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The Next Word

Navigating the complexities of AI in education requires more than just prompts; it requires a strategic partner. At The Next Word, we help school leaders move beyond the hype to build robust AI strategies, deliver practical staff training, and create ethical frameworks that enhance learning while managing risk. We ensure you lead the change, not just react to it.

Ready to build a future-ready school?
Book a complimentary, no-obligation AI strategy call with our education team to map your school's next steps.

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