

The logo for 'TEC GIRLS' is centered on a pink, irregular hexagonal background. The text 'TEC GIRLS' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a dark blue drop shadow. To the right of the word 'TEC' is a stylized white arrow pointing upwards and to the right, also with a dark blue drop shadow. Below the text is a small, teal-colored wavy line.

**TEC
GIRLS**

2026 AI Attitudes Report

Introduction

How young people feel about an AI future?

Five years ago, I founded TECgirls and TECwomen CIC in response to the gender gaps I was seeing across technology, engineering and the creative digital sector. Too few girls were choosing technology pathways and too few women were progressing into technical careers. Across industry, we've seen the consequences of unequal access, confidence and opportunity. Today, a new challenge is emerging, driven by AI. There is a growing concern that AI may reinforce the inequalities that already exist.

As an organisation working with girls from primary school through to higher education across rural and coastal communities, we believe this is a critical moment. The communities we work with already face significant social mobility challenges. If we fail to act now, there is a real risk that existing gaps in opportunity, confidence and participation will be accelerated by AI.

This report was created because we wanted to move beyond assumptions around AI use and understand how young people are really experiencing AI. What we found challenges some common assumptions.

AI is not a future technology. For 91% of young people AI is already embedded in their everyday lives.

Perhaps most strikingly, girls and boys are using AI at broadly the same rates. This stands in contrast to workplace data, where women are less likely to adopt AI tools and remain underrepresented in AI leadership and development. At first glance, this appears encouraging. However, a closer look reveals a more complex picture.

While girls and boys are using AI at similar rates, they are not experiencing AI in the same way. Girls are more likely to use AI for homework and learning, while boys are more likely to explore a wider range of AI tools and platforms. Girls report lower confidence in their AI skills, are more likely to want support when using AI, and many remain uncertain about what AI will mean for their future.

The report also highlights a clear tension. Young people are enthusiastic users of AI, yet many are navigating it without support with 80% using it at home. Over a third have lied about using AI and a similar proportion have seen AI used in harmful ways. 87% of all students are concerned about AI's impact on their future careers and only 8% of girls believe AI will make the world better.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the emerging challenge is not one of adoption. Young people have already adopted AI. The challenge is understanding, confidence, guidance and responsible use. Most importantly, young people are asking for help. They want AI to be part of education, but they want support to use it safely, ethically and effectively. They do not want to navigate this technology alone. This is not the moment to sit back and wait to see what happens. We did that with social media, and we are still dealing with the consequences. Instead, this is the moment to give young people the skills, environments and guidance they need to thrive in an AI-driven world.

At TECgirls, we believe the future of AI education must go beyond prompts and productivity. Young people need more than technical skills. They need the confidence to question AI, understand its limitations, recognise its risks and use it responsibly. They need to become ethical and aspirational AI citizens. It is my hope this report helps inform that conversation and inspires greater investment in the support, education and opportunities young people themselves are telling us they need.



Caitlin Gould
TECwomen CIC + TECgirls
Founder and Director
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Key Highlights

91%

Of young people use AI tools.

71%

Use ChatGPT (1% use Claude)

55%

Use AI for research / finding information

87%

Think AI will affect future careers

62%

Use AI for homework

49%

Think they should be allowed to use AI in the classroom.

32%

Have lied about AI use

29%

Have seen harmful AI use

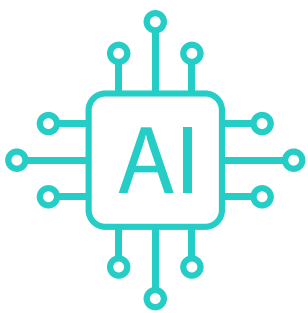
36%

Think AI should only be used with guidance/help

AI is already a part of their daily life

Most Used AI Tools

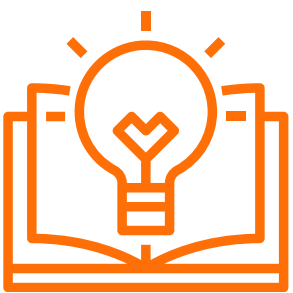
	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
Voice Assistants (Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant)	75%	68%
ChatGPT	73%	71%
Snapchat AI (My AI)	63%	55%
AI in Video Games	27%	49%
Google Gemini (formerly Bard)	30%	37%
Microsoft Copilot	28%	22%
AI Writing Assistants	19%	32%
Image Generators (Midjourney, DALL·E, etc.)	17%	23%
xAI / Grok	2%	13%
Claude	1%	1%
None of the Above	2%	2%



91% of all young people have used AI across ALL genders.



80% of students reported using AI at home vs only 10% using it in a classroom at school and 2% using it at a friends house.



Girls were more likely to use AI for education-focused tasks.

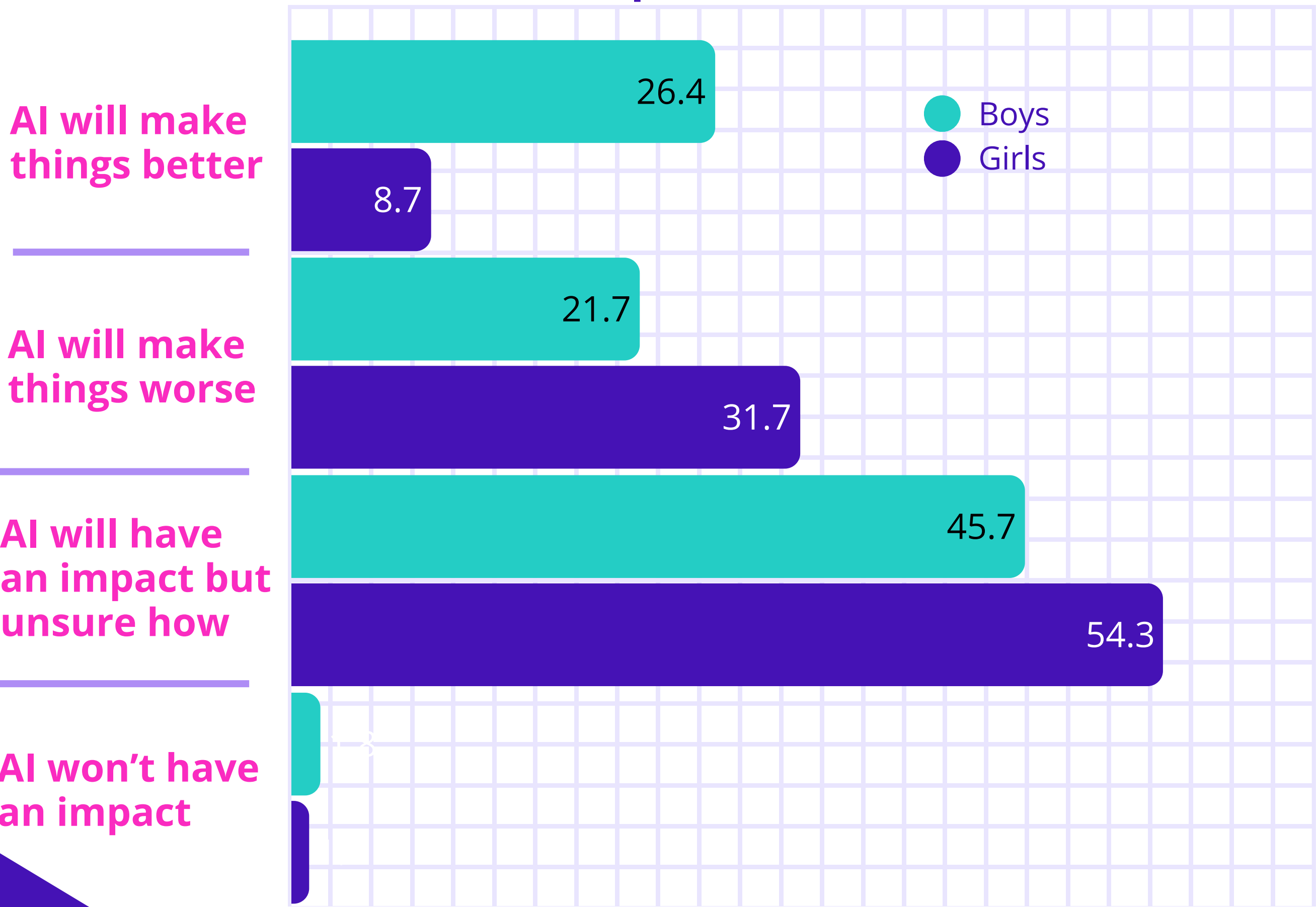
What They Use AI For

	Boys	Girls
Help with homework/studying	54%	71%
Finding information/research	54%	57%
Getting ideas for creative projects	30%	41%
AI in lessons at school	11%	17%
AI in video games	49%	28%
Chatting with AI/chatbots	24%	28%

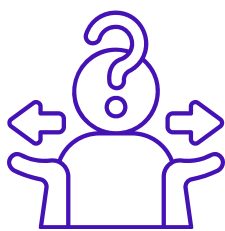
This suggests that girls are engaging with AI at similar levels to boys, but tend to use more conversational and educational AI tools, while boys are more likely to use gaming, creative and emerging AI platforms.

Students expressed mixed feelings about AI's impact

How students think AI will impact the world



Boys were almost three times more likely than girls to believe AI will make the world better



Over half of girls (54%) said AI would have an impact but weren't sure how

29%



Have seen someone use AI to create something harmful.

26% Girls vs 31% of Boys

32%



Have lied about using AI to parents or teachers.

33% Girls vs 29% of Boys

Students who reported lying about AI use were nearly twice as likely to have seen harmful AI use.

Will AI affect your future career?

87% of all students think AI will impact their future careers.

84% of girls vs 90% of boys

Students want to use AI more, with support

Should young people be allowed to use AI in School?

	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
Yes	42%	57%
Maybe, but only with help	40%	30%
No	14%	9%
No answer	5%	3%

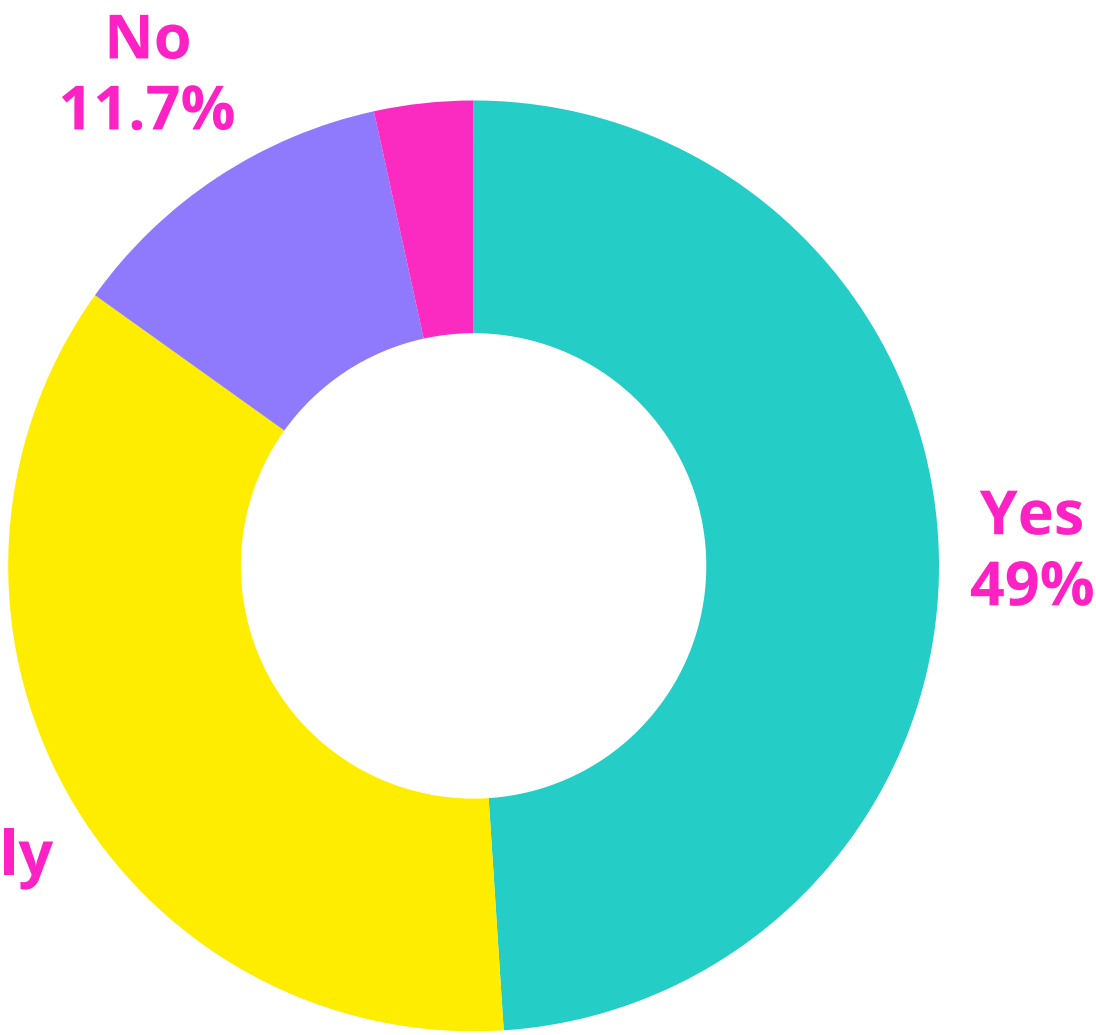
Across all genders young people want to use AI in school, but they would like help using it well.



41% of boys want more lessons about AI in school

21% of girls want more lessons about AI in school

Data across all genders



Girls

51% of girls said they felt really confident with using AI



34% of girls said they wanted more help using AI



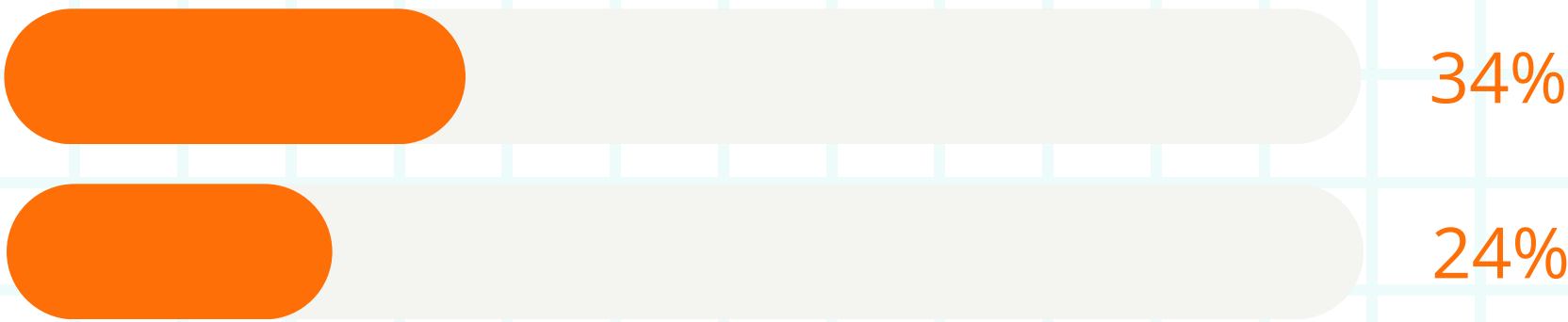
Girls used AI just as much as boys, but were less likely to feel confident using it

Boys

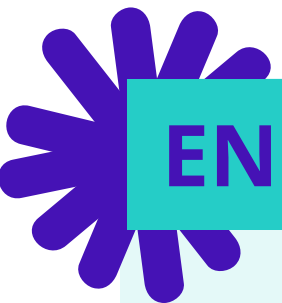
63% of boys said they felt really confident with using AI



24% of boys said they wanted more help using AI



Conclusions & Recommendations



ENGAGE:

Young people are using AI primarily at home, with little structured support around how to use it well. Schools need clear frameworks for integrating AI into learning, alongside honest conversations about its risks and limitations. The Department for Education's reformed national curriculum commits to teaching AI literacy from an early age and replacing the current Computer Science GCSE with a broader, future-facing Computing qualification. This is a significant and welcome step, but curriculum reform alone will not be enough if teachers are not supported to deliver it. It also won't make change fast enough. We recommend creating AI pathways that start in Key Stage 2, when children are first encountering these technologies and before misconceptions and confidence gaps have time to take hold.



INSPIRE:

87% of students believe AI will affect careers in general. However, there is a lack of clarity around how, with girls more uncertain. Young people need structured opportunities to explore how AI skills translate into careers with real-world experience and relatable role models. Closing the gap between abstract awareness and personal aspiration is one of the most important things we can do right now.



EXCITE:

Confidence is the gateway to meaningful AI Citizenship and girls are reaching that gateway with less support than their male peers. Targeted confidence-building programmes, representation, and active encouragement are fundamental to ensuring girls are not left behind in an AI-enabled future. They also need to feel agency and potential for positive change in an AI future with opportunities to explore how they can make a difference.

The young people in this survey are already living with AI. What they need now is the knowledge to understand it, the confidence to use it well, and the support to shape it as creators and critical thinkers.

The TECgirls Response and Actions

As a direct response to this research, TECgirls are launching our new AI Citizenship Pathway to compliment the work we are already doing with our AI in Education Summit.

We plan to start in Primary School to reach users right as they begin exploring the technology and to help combat early formed misconceptions about AI. We also know that young people are forming emotional attachments to AI at an early age and we feel it's critical to ensure young people see AI as a tool, not a friend or teacher. At this stage we also need to support parents, carers and teachers who heavily influence young peoples ideas and use of AI.

As an organisation focused on empowering women and girls to build the future, our pathway will predominantly work with girls. However, this research has shown the need for all genders to be supported in some key areas. Especially around the ethical use of AI and the harms that could be created with misuse. That is a key conversation for young men as well as women. This is why we've included AI Ethics workshops across whole year groups to engage important AI Citizenship activities, debates and conversations.

We also want to give young people a chance to think about how AI will impact their careers and build up experience using AI as a tool. This is where our AI Youth Ambassadors programme will come in along with opportunities for work experience and workplace skills development.

Please contact Chloe Rickard to discuss chloe@tecgirls.co.uk

TECgirls AI Citizenship Pathway (Ages 8-24)

Primary (Ages 8-11): Early Awareness & Identity Formation

Focus: Teaching AI as a tool and how to question its uses.

Activities:

- AI Explorers - A hybrid afterschool TECgirls Mentors Club, using a proven format to engage young girls and provide much needed CPD for teachers
- Playing with AI Community events for Families
- AI in Education Summit for Teachers

Secondary (Ages 12-16): Applied Exploration & Aspiration

Focus: Citizenship and ethics; questioning and building with AI to solve problems.

Activities:

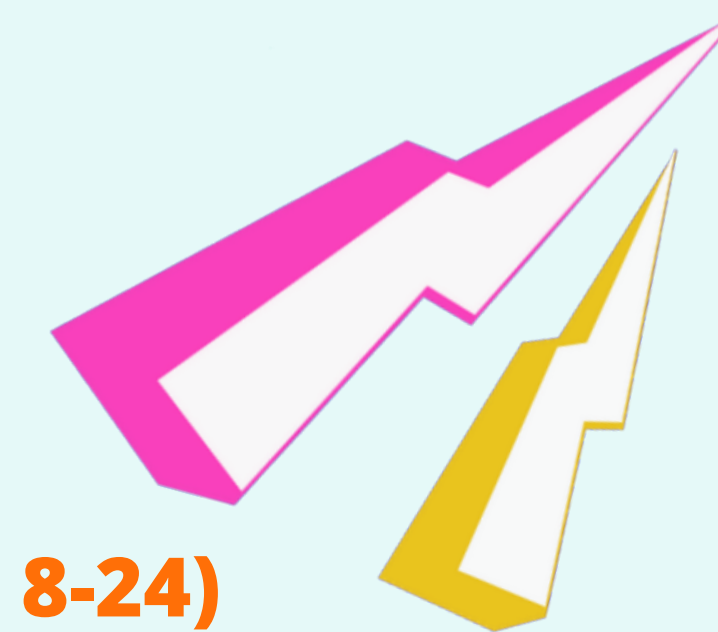
- Ethical AI Pioneers Challenge Day for girls to teach AI leadership skills.
- AI Ethics School Workshops for year 9 students.

Further & Higher Education (Ages 16-24): Transition & Progression

Focus: Applying AI skills in the workplace and increasing youth voice on AI ethics.

Activities:

- AI Work Experience Week
- NextGen Online Course
- Youth Ambassadors Programme

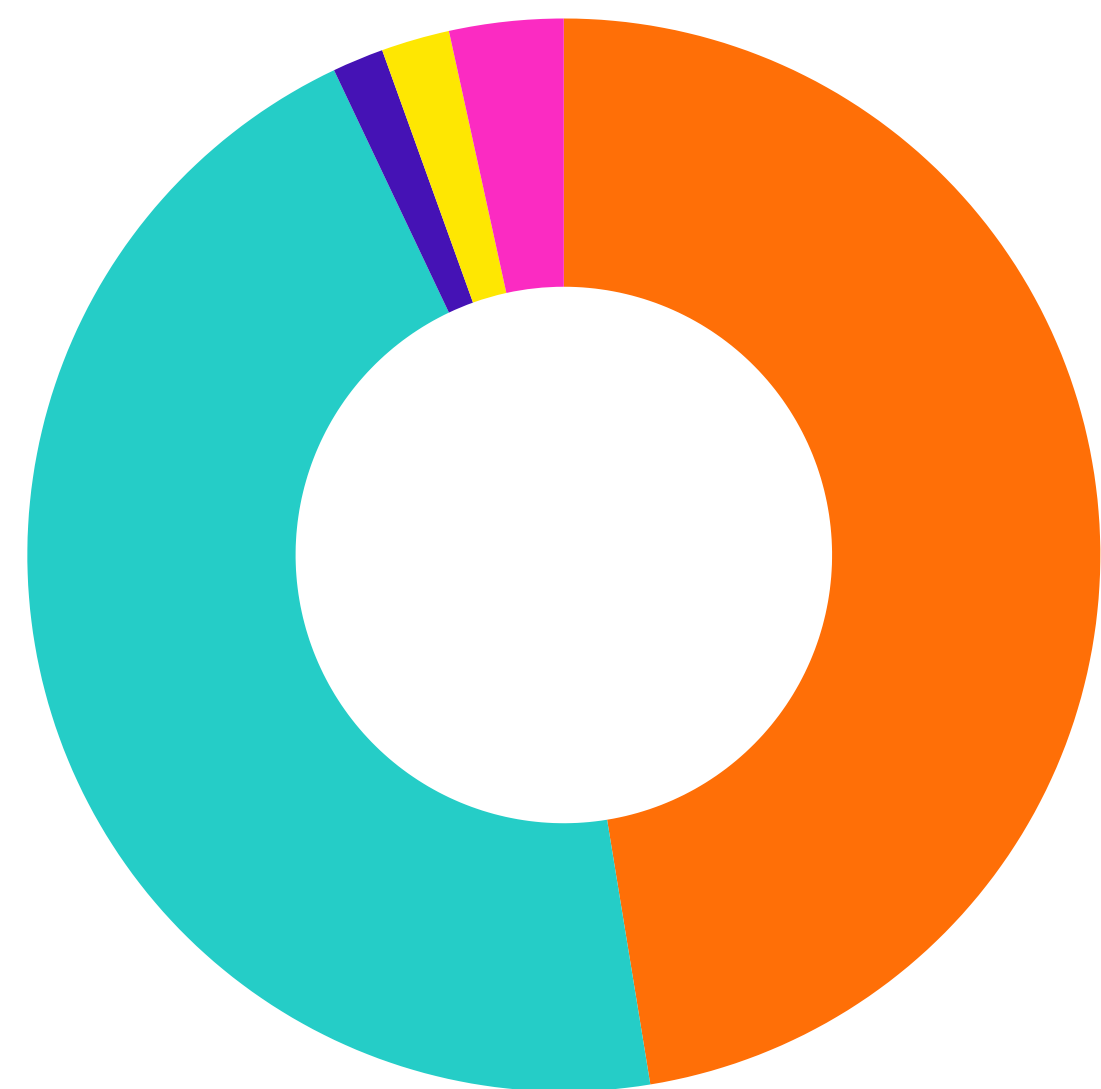


582 students took part

Data was collected through a combination of paper and digital surveys across four state-funded schools in Cornwall. In each school, the entire Year 9 cohort was invited to take part in the research. We also spoke with students at Cornwall College.

Respondents' Gender

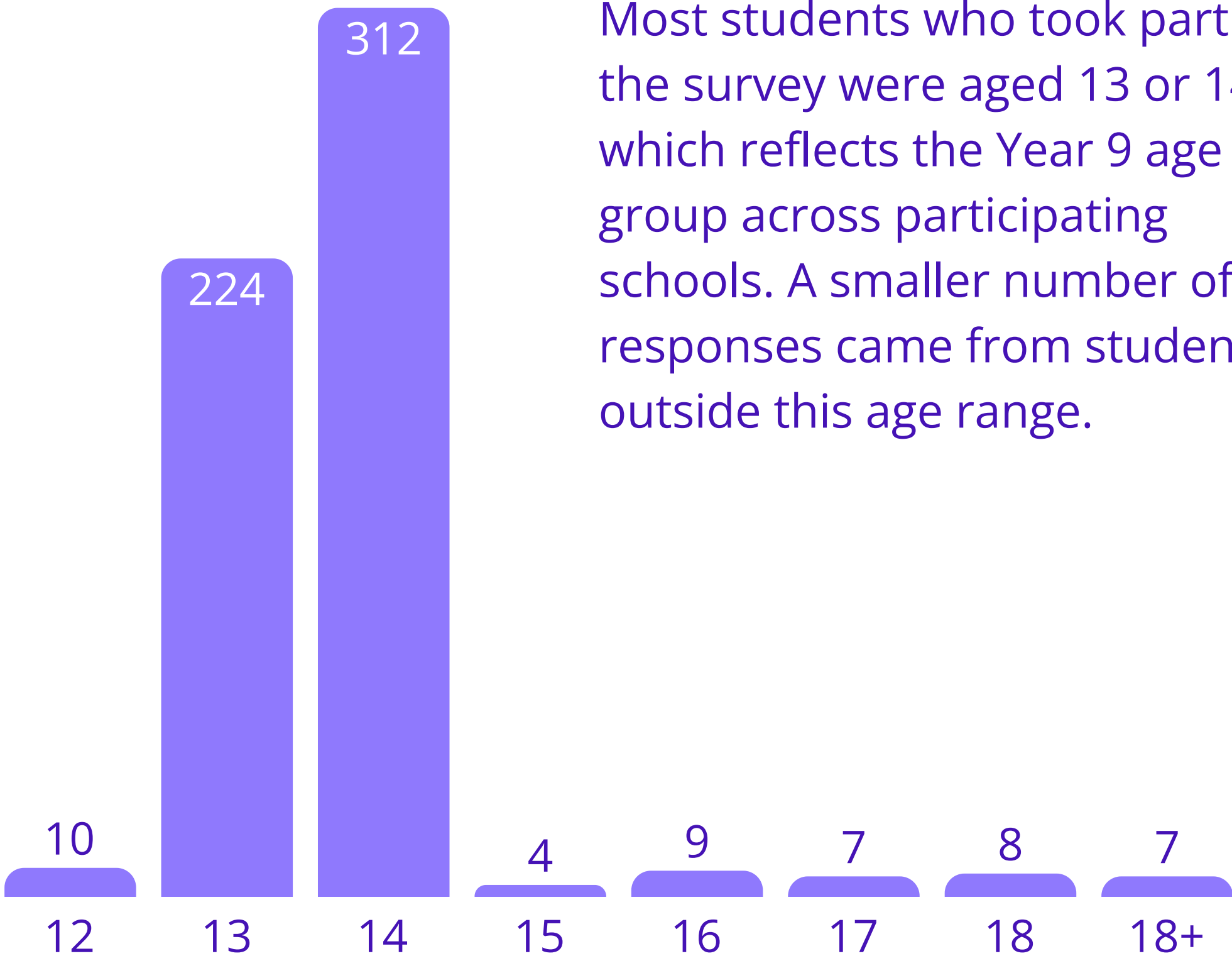
Participants represented a range of gender identities, allowing us to explore differences in how young people experience and think about AI.



Total Number of Respondents

Boy	276
Girl	265
Non-binary	9
Other	12
Prefer not to say	20

Respondents' Age



Most students who took part in the survey were aged 13 or 14, which reflects the Year 9 age group across participating schools. A smaller number of responses came from students outside this age range.

Methodology

This report presents findings from a survey of 582 Year 9 students conducted across four state-funded mixed schools in Cornwall in early 2026. In each school, the entire Year 9 cohort was invited to participate. Additional responses were gathered from students attending a Cornwall College Careers event. Data was collected through a combination of paper and digital surveys to ensure accessibility across different school settings.

The survey explored students' use of AI tools and platforms, their confidence with AI, their attitudes toward AI's impact on education, careers, and society, and their experiences of harmful or dishonest AI use.

Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. Differences between confidence groups were tested using a one-way ANOVA, with results found to be statistically significant ($p < .001$). Open-ended survey responses were analysed using thematic analysis, with responses reviewed and grouped into themes to identify common ideas and concerns across the dataset.

Participating schools are anonymised throughout this report. Respondents represented a range of gender identities, with 276 identifying as boys, 265 as girls, 9 as non-binary, 12 as other, and 20 preferring not to say. The majority of respondents were aged 13 or 14, consistent with the Year 9 age group.

We would like to thank the students, teachers, and schools who gave their time to take part in this research. This report would not have been possible without their openness and enthusiasm. We are also grateful to the students who participated at the Cornwall College Careers event. The young people represented in this data are exactly why this work matters.

About the Author:

Kate Stephens is a freelance data analyst who has been working with TECgirls since December 2025. She holds a BSc (Hons) in Politics and International Relations from the University of Bristol, including a year studying Politics and Russian at the University of Chicago, and recently graduated from UCL with an MSc in Security Studies with distinction. Her academic background includes research experience in gender and politics, and she brings a strong grounding in social research methods and data analysis to her work.

Kate grew up in Cornwall and continues to live here. She understands first-hand the employment challenges facing people in the far South West, and is acutely aware of how the rise of AI risks deepening existing inequalities for young people in rural and coastal communities. She believes that young people in Cornwall deserve the same opportunities to develop confidence and skills in AI as those anywhere else in the country, and that achieving genuine equality in an AI-enabled future requires us to understand the experiences of young people today.