



WHY 2025 IS THE TURNING POINT FOR AI IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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askkira.com

“The education sector stands at a crossroads. Last month, I sat down with 12 MAT CEOs, and every single one shared the same concern: how to harness AI while keeping their schools' data secure and their staff empowered.

Here's what's really happening on the ground...”

*In talking with Multi-Academy Trust leaders recently, one theme kept coming up: **AI is no longer a distant possibility —it's here, and it's reshaping education leadership in real-time.** There's a palpable buzz in the air, but let's be honest, it's mixed with a healthy dose of "What on earth do we do with this?"*

We're all grappling with the big questions. How do we bring AI into our schools without losing our way? How do we make sure it's a tool that enhances our teachers' superpowers rather than trying to replace them? And, most importantly, how do we use it to improve outcomes for students?

The UK education system is standing at the edge of this new AI-powered landscape: a pivotal moment. With government initiatives like the £1 million funding for AI tools to reduce teacher workload and improve feedback accuracy, the groundwork is being laid for a dramatic shift. It's exciting, it's daunting, but as MAT CEOs know all too well, adopting AI isn't just about technology; it's about people, processes, and trust, and it's absolutely crucial that we get it right.

AI Adoption in MATs: Where Are We Now?

General AI vs Targeted AI

A recent survey revealed that nearly 50% of UK teachers are already using AI in some capacity. This represents a substantial increase from 2023, when only 31% of teachers reported using generative AI. However, many tools don't meet the specific needs of UK education standards, leading to concerns on security, accuracy and reliability.

According to the DfE, generative AI tools trained on targeted datasets created by curriculum guidance, lessons plans and pupil work specific to the UK education system, can achieve up to 92% accuracy in feedback, compared to 67% with generic models currently being used. This is a game-changer for reducing teacher workload, and a clear indication that AI in the education sector needs to prioritise adoption of tools which are tailored to UK education standards, and the comprehensive training required to ensure effective and ethical use of AI in schools.

Challenges MATs Face

1. Data Overload: MATs are drowning in data but lacking actionable insights.

How can we use AI effectively and ethically to process the sheer volume of data across our schools to drive improvement?

2. Security Concerns: With GDPR at the forefront, ensuring data privacy remains a top priority. In a school setting, this is paramount.

How can we balance the potential benefits of AI with the need to protect sensitive information?"

3. Staff Resistance: Teachers often fear that AI will replace their expertise rather than complement it. Some teachers will embrace the change, some will resist. Amongst my discussion with the MAT leaders, one CEO shared how they piloted an AI tool for marking assessments. The results were promising—marking time was halved—but staff were hesitant to trust the system fully. This highlights a critical challenge: building confidence in AI tools among educators.

How are MAT leaders listening to their teaching staff's concerns to enable positive uptake and utilisation of AI tools?

2025: The Transformation Point

So why is 2025 different? Three key factors converge this year to make it a turning point:

1. New Technologies and Capabilities

With the dawn of 2025, came a renewed focus, and investment, from the government to harness the potential for AI to drive growth and “high rising standards across schools”. A centrepiece of this transformation is the £3 million DfE’s content store, set to launch this year. This innovative resource will ensure that AI tools are trained on accurate, curriculum-aligned data, therefore enhancing their reliability and effectiveness in education settings.

It is likely that this developing AI technology will go beyond simple tech like educational apps and marking software. Platforms like askKira.com offer personalised learning experiences, can assess student progress in real-time and adjust lesson plans dynamically. These AI-powered tools are not only transforming traditional classroom practice, but are also equipping educational leaders with comprehensive guides and strategic frameworks for effective AI integration in schools.

2. Regulatory Changes

The government’s Plan for Change prioritises AI as a cornerstone of public service transformation, including education. Priorities which have long been championed by AI edTech companies like askKira.com are now being reflected in policy and educational reform.

Initiatives like the EdTech Evidence Board aim to build trust by validating effective AI products. The DfE has proposed the development of an online resource where teachers and education leaders can access essential training in adopting AI into schools and classrooms. This government initiative is calling on edtech firms to be “transparent” about the evidence behind their product offering to MATs, schools and colleges.

3. A Change in AI Culture

As more schools experiment with AI, success stories are building momentum and reducing scepticism among educators. Walk into any staffroom these days, and AI isn't just a buzzword – it's becoming a real conversation. Teachers are sharing stories that go beyond tech hype, talking about genuine classroom wins that are changing how they think about technology.

Teachers who were once skeptical are now cautiously curious. The narrative is shifting from "AI will replace us" to "AI might actually help us do our jobs better."

The Three Critical Shifts

To truly embrace this transformation, MAT leaders must focus on three critical shifts when making decisions on AI adoption across their schools:

1. From Data Overload to Actionable Insights

In the complex landscape of educational leadership, AI isn't just processing data – it's translating information into strategic intelligence. AI-powered tools can process vast amounts of data to deliver clear, actionable insights. For example:

- Identifying trends in student performance across academies
- Predicting areas where additional support is needed before issues arise
- Identification of learning gaps
- Granular insights across individual, cohort, and trust-wide levels

For MAT leaders, this means moving from reactive to proactive management and making evidence-based decisions more efficiently. The real power is not in the collection of the data, but the transformation of this information into targeted strategies for improvement.

2. From Security Concerns to Confident Compliance

With GDPR-compliant platforms hosted on UK servers, MATs can ensure data security while leveraging AI's potential. The DfE's evolving digital service will further simplify compliance tasks.

These significant changes in data security for educational AI-powered tools, give MAT leaders, and education leaders, the confidence to adopt AI into their schools knowing it is reliable and safe, and can turn to the next priority which is positive utilisation.

3. From Staff Resistance to Enthusiastic Adoption

Building trust is key. By involving teachers in pilot programmes and showing how AI complements their expertise (rather than replacing it), MATs can foster enthusiasm rather than fear. As MAT leaders we must recognise that success hinges on bringing our entire educational community along with us.

By creating an open dialogue across all levels with teaching staff, support staff and administrative teams, we can not only address concerns, but these conversations can help us tap into the wisdom and expertise of our staff to shape our schools' AI strategies.

This inclusive and collaborative approach will prepare MATs and schools for positive AI adoption, and optimum utilisation.

Practical Next Steps

To prepare for this turning point, here are some immediate actions MAT and school leaders can take:

Engage your staff

Gather insights into how teachers and staff are already using AI in their teaching practice or for administrative tasks. Ask questions to identify specific needs where AI could add value.

Start Small

Pilot an AI tool in one school or department before scaling across your trust.

Invest in Training

Equip staff with the skills to use AI effectively through workshops or masterclasses like Confederation of School Trusts' "Understanding the Principles of AI in Schools".

Prioritise Transparency

Communicate clearly about how data will be used and protected. This is THE question to ask when piloting an AI platform or tool. Ensure you have this information to reassure your stakeholders and school community, and make sure it is robust.

Measure Success

Define clear KPIs (e.g., reduced teacher workload or improved student outcomes) and track progress consistently.

Conclusion: A Vision for the Future

I believe we'll look back on this year as a turning point—a moment when UK education leadership embraced AI not as a threat but as an opportunity to transform teaching and learning, a year to grow and renew.

But this transformation requires bold leadership. It requires MAT CEOs who are willing to experiment, learn, and adapt. So let me leave you with this:

- What would your schools look like if teachers spent 50% less time on admin?
- How could AI-driven insights help you make better decisions for your trust?
- Are you ready to lead your MAT into this new era?

Let's start the conversation. Share your thoughts with me - mark@askKira.com, or sign up to our LinkedIn Live session where we'll dive deeper into practical strategies for adopting AI in education leadership.

Further information:

<https://tdtrust.org/2023/09/08/download-understanding-ai-for-school-tips-for-school-leaders/>

About the Author



Mark Unwin is a dynamic leader renowned for his unwavering commitment to positive change in education and beyond. Mark's journey has been characterised by a deep passion for improving learning outcomes and supporting educators, equipping him with a profound understanding of the needs and challenges faced by both learners and educators.