

GUEST COLUMN: October 2026

Beyond the gatekeepers David Ingram

'Unfortunately, right now we are not preparing for it. I don't see evidence that leaders, experts, and communities are confronting the challenges adequately. There is no plan to ease the entry into the AI era.'

Bill Gates <https://www.gatesnotes.com/>

While Gates is writing about society at large, his observation resonates strongly with education.

AI presents school leaders with a bewildering range of questions. Some are practical and immediate. Which platforms should we use? How do we assess providers? What should we budget for? How do we protect student data?

Others are more profound.

How do we respond to deepfakes, misinformation and AI-enabled manipulation? What does academic integrity mean when students can generate essays, code and creative work in seconds? How do we gain the benefits of cognitive offloading without allowing students to avoid the intellectual struggle through which understanding develops?

What happens if young people become emotionally dependent on AI chatbots rather than learning to navigate relationships with classmates, teachers and families?

It is hardly surprising that some schools have adopted a cautious stance. I have spoken to leaders who deliberately describe their schools as 'AI sceptic' Some school systems have restricted access while they consider questions of safety, learning and wellbeing. Such caution is understandable. The pace of change is extraordinary, the evidence base is still emerging, and there is no shortage of conflicting opinions.

Yet there is a fundamental problem with a purely wait-and-see approach.

The reality is that many of our students are already using AI. They use it to explain concepts, generate ideas, summarise information, prepare for assessments and,

increasingly, as a source of conversation or advice. Whether schools approve is, in many respects, beside the point. This technological shift is happening with or without us. That changes our role.

We cannot just be the gatekeepers. We must be the guides.

If students are already engaging with AI, we have a responsibility to help them do so thoughtfully. They need to understand what AI is, how it works and why its outputs can be useful without necessarily being true. They need to recognise its capabilities and opportunities, but also its limitations, risks and wider consequences. Above all, they need to develop judgement.

This is the purpose of the *AI Critical Thinking Curriculum Framework* being implemented across the Education in Motion family of schools. Its aim is to help learners understand, question and use AI responsibly. Developed in collaboration with Professor Rose Luckin, the framework grows with the learner, moving from simple awareness towards independent, ethical and evidence-based decision-making.

In the Junior School, students develop basic AI literacy. They learn that AI is not magic and not a source of authority. It identifies patterns, makes predictions and sometimes makes mistakes. Alongside this, students develop habits around privacy, digital safety and verification, learning to ask simple but important questions such as: *How does AI know that?* and *Should I check this elsewhere?*

As students move into Middle School, the focus shifts to critical evaluation. They explore how AI systems are trained, how bias can emerge, why confidence is not the same as accuracy, and how to assess the credibility of AI-generated information. They also begin grappling with cognitive offloading: understanding the difference between using AI to support learning and using AI to replace the thinking required for learning.

By Senior School, the conversation becomes broader and more complex. Students examine AI's impact on employment, democracy, misinformation, human relationships and society as a whole. They explore questions of ethics, governance, accountability and power while engaging in research, debate and project-based inquiry. The goal is not to create AI engineers, but thoughtful citizens capable of navigating an AI-rich world with discernment and integrity.

Across all age groups, the framework is built on a common belief: AI literacy is not primarily about using tools. It is about judgement. It is about knowing when to trust, when to question, when to verify and when to think for yourself. In a world where AI can increasingly generate answers, those human capacities become more important, not less.

None of this can be achieved through a curriculum document alone. Professional learning for staff is essential.

We cannot expect teachers to guide students through a world they have had no opportunity to explore themselves. AI training now forms a mandatory part of our annual professional learning programme, differentiated to recognise that colleagues begin from very different levels of experience and confidence.

Across the Education in Motion family of schools, our Global Professional Learning Day provides dedicated time for educators to share emerging practice, debate difficult questions and develop capability together. The principle is straightforward: start from where we are and move forward.

There is no definitive playbook. The technology is new, the landscape is changing rapidly, and many of the most important questions remain unresolved. Perhaps this is one of those moments when perfection becomes the enemy of good.

We can wait for complete certainty, comprehensive policies and definitive evidence. Or we can accept that uncertainty is part of the challenge while still taking thoughtful, purposeful steps forward.

AI presents real risks. It also offers remarkable opportunities. Both are true.

Waiting and watching may feel like the safer option, but it risks doing our students and staff a disservice. Education has always involved preparing young people for a world that does not yet fully exist. That responsibility becomes more important, not less, during periods of profound technological change.

As Bill Gates concludes: 'This unprecedented technology demands an unprecedented global response'.

Educational leaders must be part of that response.

We cannot afford either blind enthusiasm or passive observation. Our task is to lead and learn simultaneously: grounded in our values, guided by sound educational principles, alert to the risks and open to the opportunities.

We cannot know precisely where this journey will take us. But we do know that standing still is not a neutral choice.

David Ingram is Head of College, Dulwich, Singapore