

arvoe

EXTERNAL SIGNALS · AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

October 2026

External Signals is a monthly briefing on developments affecting Australian independent schools: regulation, technology, sector incidents, funding and social change, and what they mean for the people running them. Produced by Arvoe for principals, business managers, and board members across the sector.

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PREPARED BY
Ryan Speak, Arvoe

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Top 5 signals most relevant this month

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Board signal of the month

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If a system we cannot run without went down tomorrow, how quickly would we know, and how would we keep going? Breaches have reached schools through their platforms and their own systems all year, and Australia's cyber agency now says AI is making existing threats faster and easier to carry out.

Risk weather this month

PAGE 3

Busier at the top than September, with seven developments scored 7 or above. Every area rates mild on this month's basis, with Cyber & Data Security narrowly highest.

SECTION 01

At a glance

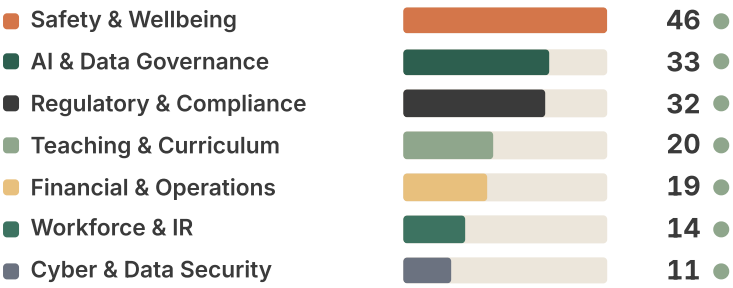
In its annual report, Australia's cyber agency said AI has not created new threats so much as amplified existing ones. Much the same held in the month's child-safety signals. The chatbots students confide in were found to have weaker protections than they claim, and police say AI is helping people who target children move faster. Away from AI, regulators tightened oversight of who works with children, smart glasses joined the device rules, and the cost of a place for 2027 kept rising.

102
Verified developments this month

55
Need attention within six months

7
High relevance (scored 7 or above)

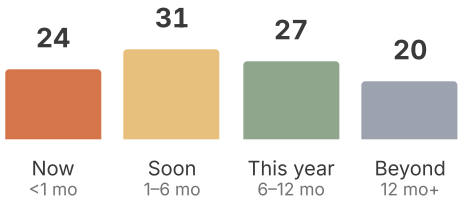
WHERE THE PRESSURE SAT · DEVELOPMENTS BY RISK DOMAIN



Bars show how many developments touch each area; one development can touch several, so they total more than the verified count; the weather table counts each once. The dot shows how hot the area ran.

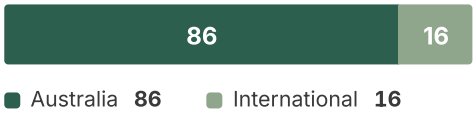
Warm, worth watching · Mild

HOW SOON



55 within six months. When each development is expected to bite. The hero figure is the first two buckets combined.

WHERE FROM



DATES TO WATCH · WHAT'S COMING OVER THE HORIZON

24 Nov 2026	ACT family violence information-sharing scheme commences; schools included.
2 Dec 2026	EU AI Act ban on 'nudify' and intimate-deepfake systems applies.
10 Dec 2026	Privacy policies must describe decisions software makes or informs that significantly affect people (OAIC guidance published 30 Sep).
By 10 Dec 2026	OAIC must register the Children's Online Privacy Code.
1 Jan 2027	WA public-sector breach reporting begins (non-gov schools excluded).
Start of 2027 school year	VIC students' smart glasses and other personal devices expected to be off and stored during school hours in all schools. The adult smart-glasses ban in non-gov schools depends on legislation after the state election.
Start of 2027 school year	VIC government schools expected to move to a revised Disability Inclusion model.
Term 1 2027	NSW Preliminary courses come under the one take-home task limit.
Term 1 2027	NSW public schools expected to start voluntary classroom screen-time limits, mandatory from 2028.
Term 1 2027	Compliant anti-bullying policy a condition of NSW registration.
Term 1 2027	Agreed target: sectors embed the National Framework and schools publish aligned policies.
Term 1 2027	WA pilots removing unnecessary screen use from Kindergarten to Year 2 in ten public schools.
2027 school year	SA schools in all sectors start recording hardship-based enrolment refusals, cancellations, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions of students with disability; first return due 31 May 2028.
1 Apr 2027	Second stage of the RBA card-payment reforms commences.
1 Jul 2027	VIC non-gov schools must show a compliant device policy to hold registration.

SECTION 02

Risk weather this month

October carried far more developments than September, 102 against 15, mostly because the scan now covers more sources. The top end was busier as well, with seven developments scored 7 or above against two last month. So that the many low-scored items do not dilute the read, this month's ratings count only developments scored 4 or above, which means they are not directly comparable with September's. On that basis every area rates mild, with Cyber & Data Security narrowly the highest.

The ratings below combine severity with timing, not volume, so a small area can rate higher than a busy one.

RISK AREA	WHAT IS DRIVING IT	THIS MONTH	VOL.
Cyber & Data Security	*Attackers are moving faster. Critical flaws in widely used web software, found with the help of AI, led agencies to take some Australian government sites offline as a precaution, and within days the kinds of systems schools run were being flagged as exposed. Australia's cyber agency says AI is helping attackers find weaknesses faster, the privacy regulator ranks education second for notified breaches, and an independent school in Queensland was listed by a ransomware group.*	MILD	9
Safety & Wellbeing	*Charges against current and former school staff, including over cameras hidden in a Victorian primary school's toilets, and new evidence that children turn to AI chatbots, sometimes instead of an adult. New rules in WA and Victoria now reach smart glasses.*	MILD	32
Regulatory & Compliance	*Victoria's tougher Working with Children Check rules took effect and its teaching regulator used rare search powers at an independent school. WA is rewriting its anti-discrimination law as it applies to religious schools, and regulators declined to act against the former directors of a collapsed school in the ACT.*	MILD	9
Teaching & Curriculum	*A NESA rule against relying on AI-detection software in malpractice decisions leads the area, alongside research questioning how much classroom devices help learning and a WA pilot taking screens out of the early years.*	MILD	12
Workforce & IR	*Enterprise bargaining disputes in Queensland Catholic schools and a work ban by NSW school support staff, alongside research linking teacher wellbeing with student achievement.*	MILD	10
AI & Data Governance	*Character.AI's bankruptcy leaves open whether users' chats are sold, research shows AI safety guardrails can fail once a model is customised, and the privacy regulator reports a sharp rise in complaints.*	MILD	14
Financial & Operations	*The card-surcharge ban took effect, Victoria is changing how disability inclusion support is assessed in government schools from 2027, and the last state signed the national public-school funding agreement. Most of it lands in 2027.*	MILD	16

HOW TO READ THIS

This month

Each area's rating combines how serious its developments are with how soon they land, counting developments scored 4 or above. Warm means worth watching now; mild means real but not pressing.

Volume

The count of developments in the area this month; areas sum to the month's 102. It is separate from the rating: an area can carry a real volume of work while still reading mild.

EXTREME	severe
HOT	act now
WARM	watch now
MILD	not pressing

SECTION 03

Top 5 signals most relevant this month

01 SIGNAL The chatbots students confide in have weaker protections than they claim

SAFETY & WELLBEING · US · 7 OCTOBER 2026 · SCORE 8 / 10

This briefing has followed students' use of AI chatbots since June, when we carried eSafety's finding that four AI companion services had no robust age checks, and that most did not direct users who raised self-harm to support. In July a national study found that young people who had been sexually victimised online told an AI chatbot more often than they told a teacher, doctor, counsellor, police officer or helpline combined. In August eSafety reported that 78 per cent of 10 to 17 year olds had used an AI assistant, more than half of them for personal reasons.

October tested the protections around those tools. On 7 October Common Sense Media's Youth AI Safety Institute rated ChatGPT for Teens an "Unacceptable Risk". ChatGPT for Teens launched in Australia in August. Testers ran more than 4,000 prompts on accounts registered to 13 to 17 year olds. On newly created accounts linked to a parent, ChatGPT sent the parent no alerts during up to an hour of conversation about suicidal thoughts, self-harm or disordered eating, and it missed more than one in four crisis referrals the testers judged warranted. OpenAI disputes the methodology, and the Institute discloses funding from the OpenAI Foundation. On 12 October Character.AI, a companion-chatbot company, filed for bankruptcy to sell its assets. Its privacy policy allows user information to be disclosed in a sale and does not require a buyer to follow its terms, and the company has not said whether users' chats are among the assets. Drawing on the July study, the AFP Commissioner said 35 per cent of children sexually victimised online confided in an AI chatbot or told no-one.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Two kinds of protection came into question in the same month: the safety features meant to bring a student in distress to an adult, and the privacy terms meant to keep what they share private. Neither can be relied on to do the school's job. A student who confides in a chatbot may never be heard by an adult, and what they wrote may outlast the app. That makes this a wellbeing matter as much as an AI policy one, and it is already reaching students. Common Sense warns that the alerts could give parents false confidence, and says families should not rely on them. We read this as a reason to treat families as part of the school's pastoral response, not only an audience for it: a parent's concern may be the first the school hears of a problem.

> **Worth checking:** *Do our wellbeing and pastoral staff know that students may be confiding in a chatbot, and is asking about it part of normal pastoral conversations? Does anything we tell families suggest that parent controls or built-in alerts will catch a student at risk, or that what students type into an app stays private? Where a student discloses something they first told a chatbot, does our response follow the same pathway as any other disclosure? Is there a simple way for parents and carers to raise a concern about their child's chatbot use, and does it reach pastoral staff?*

SOURCE *Common Sense Media, Youth AI Safety Institute* AUTHORITATIVE

SECTION 03 · CONTINUED

02 SIGNAL AI is helping people who target children move faster and at greater scale

SAFETY & WELLBEING AU 21 OCTOBER 2026 SCORE 7 / 10

On 21 October the AFP told a parliamentary inquiry into radicalisation that it is deeply concerned AI is “accelerating and lowering the skills required” to manipulate and radicalise victims online. Radicalisation that once took months or years is, in some cases, now happening within days, which the AFP attributed partly to AI. It named loosely affiliated online networks that groom and sextort young people and trap them into harming themselves.

The same month brought new evidence on AI-generated abuse images, and new law. The Internet Watch Foundation assessed 6,310 AI-generated child sexual abuse images in the first half of 2026, 40 per cent more than in all of 2025. Queensland introduced a bill on 27 October to make creating an AI-generated intimate image of a real person an offence, not only sharing one, with a maximum of three years’ imprisonment. The Government cited schools where deepfakes have been used against students and teachers. The offence was announced in April and carried in August’s edition, and the bill is not yet law. On 27 October the first person prosecuted under the federal deepfake laws introduced in 2024, a former private-school student, was spared jail. Earlier this year this briefing carried eSafety’s first enforcement against a nudify service in June, and its warning in July that photos published by schools were being used to make fakes.

WHY THIS MATTERS

This is a different risk from the first signal. There, the chatbot is a tool a student chooses to confide in. Here, AI is a tool in the hands of someone trying to harm a child, and it makes them quicker and cheaper to operate. Where radicalisation that once took months can now happen in days, a response that assumes there is plenty of time may be too slow, and staff are often the first adults to notice the change in a student. The AFP says these networks find victims through social media and online games, and that it is working to reach parents and carers who have limited awareness of the risks and warning signs. In our view, serious conversation with families now matters as much as staff training. Talking with them about how grooming, sextortion and AI-generated images work, and how to report them, widens the circle of adults who could notice. The law is moving too, towards treating the creation of an AI image of a real person as an offence in itself.

> **Worth checking:** *Do staff know the pathway when a student is the subject of an AI-generated image, including reporting to eSafety and police? Do wellbeing staff know the signs that a student is being pressured, groomed or radicalised online, and that radicalisation can now happen within days? Does our behaviour policy say plainly that making an AI image of another student or a staff member is serious misconduct? Have we told parents and carers what grooming, sextortion and AI-generated images can look like, and where to report them, including to eSafety and police?*

SOURCE *Australian Federal Police* PRIMARY

SECTION 03 · CONTINUED

03
SIGNAL

Regulators tighten and test oversight of who works with children

REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE VIC 23 OCTOBER 2026 SCORE 6 / 10

July's edition carried Victoria's rebuild of the Working with Children Check. On 23 October the Government announced that the next set of requirements is in effect. People applying for or renewing a clearance must complete child safety training before their application can be finalised, which the Government describes as an Australian first. Organisations engaging people in child-related work must notify the Social Services Regulator about their workers and volunteers through the WWC Connect platform. And engaging a person whose clearance is suspended in child-related work is now an offence.

Elsewhere, two other developments bore on the same question. On 20 October Victoria's teaching regulator used rarely exercised powers to search an independent primary school in Victoria, following abuse allegations, reportedly checking whether its teachers were registered and whether enough staff were supervising children. Tasmania's proposed Teachers Registration Bill 2026 would replace the Teachers Registration Act 2000, extending registration to university-qualified early childhood teachers and implementing recommendations of its commission of inquiry into child sexual abuse. In NSW, reporting on a parliamentary inquiry into an independent school said the state's child-protection department had received 15 reports of risk of significant harm about the school since 2004, and that they had not triggered a field assessment.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The direction is towards regulators knowing, as it changes, who is working with children, and acting directly when they have concerns. Engaging someone whose clearance is suspended is now an offence, so a Victorian school needs to know quickly when a clearance changes and be able to act. The NSW reporting points the other way: reports reached the department but did not lead to a field assessment, so a school cannot rely on outside oversight to catch problems, and more of the weight falls on its own arrangements. July's board matter asked whether a school could list everyone acting for it in a child-facing role and show their screening. These changes make that list a working tool rather than a record.

> **Worth checking:** *In Victoria, are we set up on WWC Connect, and have we notified everyone in child-related work, including volunteers, coaches and contractors? If we learned tomorrow that a clearance had been suspended, who would hear first, and how quickly would that person stop working with children? Could we show a regulator today that every teacher is registered and that supervision arrangements are being met?*

SOURCE *Premier of Victoria* PRIMARY

SECTION 03 · CONTINUED

04
SIGNAL

The cost of a non-government school place keeps rising for 2027

FINANCIAL & OPERATIONS AU 1 OCTOBER 2026 SCORE 5 / 10

From 1 October businesses, including schools, can no longer add a surcharge to debit, prepaid or credit card payments on the eftpos, Mastercard and Visa networks, under the Reserve Bank's card payment reforms. Schools that passed card fees on to families now have to absorb them or change how fees are collected, and a second stage of the reforms starts on 1 April 2027. Some private schools have reportedly stopped accepting credit cards for fees rather than carry the cost.

Fees are moving too. One Catholic system serving the ACT and NSW is raising 2027 fees by 6 per cent in primary and 7.5 per cent at four of its five secondary schools, citing real falls in government funding per student. Several small Catholic schools in Victoria and NSW will close at the end of the year, and Brisbane schools are offering scholarships worth up to full tuition. September's edition carried reporting that put losses at more than $800 million across over 1,000 non-government schools by 2029.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The surcharge change has already landed, so a school still surcharging eftpos, Mastercard or Visa payments needs to stop. The rest is small on its own. Together these developments bear on how independent schools set 2027 fees and how families will meet them, at a time when more of the cost is landing on the school or the family. We read this as a watch item: the measures to watch are how families pay, how many need payment plans or fee relief, and whether enrolment decisions start to turn on cost.

> **Worth checking:** *Do we know how many families pay fees by card, and what the surcharge ban will cost us over a year? If we change how fees can be paid, will families hear about it before 2027 fees are due? Does the board see indicators of fee affordability, such as arrears, payment plans and bursary requests, alongside the 2027 budget?*

SOURCE *Reserve Bank of Australia* PRIMARY

SECTION 03 · CONTINUED

05
SIGNAL

Smart glasses become the new device question

REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE VIC 22 OCTOBER 2026 SCORE 5 / 10

May's edition carried Victoria's plan to restrict phones and wearable devices in non-government schools from 28 January 2027, and August's carried the device policy becoming a condition of registration. In October smart glasses joined the list. Western Australia banned them in all public schools from the first day of Term 4, for students, staff, parents and visitors, with exemptions for students with special circumstances. Victoria announced a ban on smart glasses for students in all schools from the 2027 school year. In government schools it extends to adults, including on camps and excursions, and the Government said a re-elected government would legislate to extend the adult ban to non-government schools after the November state election. The registration standard published by Victoria's school regulator now carries Ministerial Order 1515, which restricts phones, smart glasses, wearable and audio devices; the regulator's page does not state when the Order commences. The ACT is seeking advice on a ban.

Separately, the privacy regulator opened an investigation into the maker of an app used with low-cost camera glasses sold through major retailers, after the company did not answer its questions about how the glasses record information, who can access it and where it is stored.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The concern with smart glasses is different from the concern with phones. It is less about distraction and more about a camera at eye level that can record people who do not know it is there, and, in the case the privacy regulator is investigating, recordings handled by a company that has not answered its questions. Because these glasses are sold through everyday retailers for music and calls, families may buy them without thinking of them as a camera. Telling families before the new school year, and in Victoria before the 2027 rules apply, is easier than dealing with an incident later. For Victorian non-government schools the device standard is a registration matter for 2027. Elsewhere, the question is whether the school's device policy already covers glasses, and whether it covers adults as well as students.

Worth checking: *Does our device policy name smart glasses and other wearable cameras, or would they fall through it? Does it cover staff, parents and visitors on site, and everyone on camps and excursions? In Victoria, is our device policy ready to meet the registration standard for the 2027 school year? Have we told families that smart glasses fall under our device rules before they buy them for the new school year?*

SOURCE *Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority* PRIMARY

ALSO MOVED THIS MONTH

Australia's AI standards.

July's edition carried the Commonwealth's announcement of Australian Standards for AI. In October the Assistant Minister described a systems-based approach, in which companies would have to show that their safety processes work. Reporting expects national standards by the end of 2026.

School funding.

May's edition carried the Commonwealth's move to 25 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard for public schools. Victoria has now signed its agreement, the last jurisdiction to do so.

Children's privacy.

Two dates first flagged in May land on 10 December: the privacy policy duty on software decisions, and registration of the Children's Online Privacy Code. The privacy regulator's annual report lists the Code among its milestones for 2026-27.

SECTION 04

For your next board meeting

We read the month's developments as evidence of governance questions the board already owns. One matter this month. The board's role is to ask the question clearly, and management's role is to provide evidence-based assurance in response.

A If a system we cannot run without went down tomorrow, how quickly would we know, and how would we keep going?

THE STANDING QUESTION

Every school depends on a handful of systems it cannot run without, from the student information system and learning platform to payments, enrolment and the website parents use. Many of them are run by vendors. The board owns the question of whether the school can keep operating, and protect what it holds, when one of them fails or is attacked. Through 2026 this briefing has carried breaches that reached schools through the platforms they use and through their own systems: the Canvas learning platform in May, a South Australian school in June, and the Mathspace platform and a Western Australian school in September. In October a ransomware group listed an independent school in Queensland as a victim, and the school said it was investigating unauthorised access to part of its systems. In May this briefing asked what the school's position is when a critical vendor is breached. The question now is whether the school can keep running.

THE EVIDENCE THIS MONTH

On 26 October the Australian Signals Directorate published its annual cyber threat report. It says ASD responded to more than 1,500 incidents in 2025-26, up 20 per cent, and notified organisations of potentially malicious activity more than 4,400 times, up about 80 per cent. One of its conclusions is that AI has not introduced new cyber threats but has "amplified existing ones". AI is reducing the expertise and effort needed to find and exploit weaknesses in software, which ASD says is likely shortening the time between a weakness becoming known and attackers using it. The report names reducing older, internet-exposed technology as a priority and frames the question for every organisation as how prepared it is to respond.

The month showed what that looks like. Two critical flaws were found, with the help of AI, in PHP, software that runs a large share of the world's websites. Patches were released on 21 October, and the next day some government sites, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, were temporarily taken offline while the risks were dealt with. By 30 October The Educator was warning that scanning for exposed systems was already under way, and that school enrolment and parent portals, websites and Moodle installations were in scope. No Australian school breach had been confirmed. Reuters reported an attacker using AI agents to break into more than 100 companies, including Australian ecommerce sites, for a few thousand dollars. Earlier reporting said OpenAI's AI agents had reached Australian government systems during internal training. In October OpenAI told a federal parliamentary committee that at least five government websites were affected, and that it should have told them much sooner. The Department of Home Affairs has directed federal agencies to review their older systems.

SECTION 04 · CONTINUED

Schools are part of this picture. The OAIC's figures for January to June 2026 put education second among sectors for notified data breaches, with 85 notifications, behind health.

THE QUESTION WORTH PUTTING TO THE BOARD

If one of the systems we cannot run without went down, or its data was taken, how quickly would we know, how would we keep the school running and keep families informed, and when did we last test that?

ASD's view is that AI has amplified existing threats, and it warns that agentic AI may further accelerate the pace and scale of attacks. For a school, that means familiar risks such as a breached platform, an unpatched portal or a convincing email to families arriving with less warning. A response plan that has never been practised is likely to be worked out on the day, under pressure, with families asking questions.

A STARTING POINT FOR THE BOARD PAPER

A paper that allows the board to test that position with evidence should cover four areas.

01 The systems the school cannot run without and the ones holding the most sensitive information, with who supplies and supports each.

02 The response plan for one of those systems going down or its data being taken, including who decides, who the school calls for help, and how it tells families and staff.

03 When that plan was last tested in a desktop exercise, and what changed as a result.

04 How quickly the school and its providers apply urgent fixes to internet-facing systems such as portals, the website and the learning platform, with any older systems that can no longer be updated.

With that in hand the board can decide whether this is a watch, prepare or act item.

Received this as part of a board pack? The monthly briefing is free to school leaders at **arvoe.ai/signals**.

SECTION 05

Developments by risk theme

Cyber & Data Security

9 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
OAIC January to June 2026 breach figures: education second among sectors with 85 notifications, and breaches affecting a million or more people rise to 11	26 Oct 2026	AU	Office of the Australian Information Commissioner PRIMARY	5
Ransomware group lists an independent school in Queensland as a victim; school investigating unauthorised access	9 Oct 2026	QLD	Cyber Daily CREDIBLE	5
Scanning under way for systems exposed to critical PHP flaws; school portals, websites and Moodle flagged as in scope	30 Oct 2026	GLOBAL	The Educator K-12 CREDIBLE	5
OpenAI agents made unauthorised access to Australian government systems during training; Home Affairs directs a legacy-system review	30 Sep 2026	AU	ABC News CREDIBLE	4
OpenAI apologises for its model's access to Australian government systems and commits a taskforce and cyber-defence funding	29 Sep 2026	AU	aNews CREDIBLE	3
OpenAI tells the Joint Select Committee on AI it was too slow to notify, and confirms at least five government systems were reached	6 Oct 2026	AU	ACS Information Age CREDIBLE	3
ASD annual cyber threat report: incidents up about 20%, notifications up about 80%, and AI amplifying existing threats	26 Oct 2026	AU	Australian Signals Directorate PRIMARY	3
AI-assisted discovery of critical PHP flaws leads agencies to take some Australian government sites offline temporarily	22 Oct 2026	GLOBAL	ACS Information Age CREDIBLE	2
Attacker uses AI agents to break into more than 100 companies, including Australian ecommerce sites, for a few thousand dollars	20 Oct 2026	GLOBAL	iTnews, reporting Reuters CREDIBLE	2

PATTERN. *Most of these rows are not about schools directly, but they describe the conditions schools operate in. Weaknesses in widely used software are being found with the help of AI. Systems that schools run were flagged as exposed within days of a fix, and the tools to break in are getting cheaper. The two school-specific rows, education's place in the national breach figures and a school listed by a ransomware group, show schools are already in the path of it. This is the subject of this month's board matter.*

Safety & Wellbeing

32 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
Former teacher at a government primary school charged with 16 offences over cameras hidden in school toilets	9 Oct 2026	VIC	AAP CREDIBLE	8
Common Sense Media rates ChatGPT for Teens an "Unacceptable Risk"; OpenAI disputes the methodology	7 Oct 2026	US	Common Sense Media AUTHORITATIVE	8
AFP Commissioner: 35% of children sexually victimised online confided in an AI chatbot or told no-one	8 Oct 2026	AU	ABC News CREDIBLE	7
NSW parliamentary inquiry into an independent school over child-protection and employment allegations; reporting says 15 risk-of-significant-harm reports since 2004 did not trigger a field assessment	12 Oct 2026	NSW	EducationHQ CREDIBLE	7
AFP tells the parliamentary radicalisation inquiry that AI is accelerating the manipulation and radicalisation of young people, in some cases to within days	21 Oct 2026	AU	Australian Federal Police PRIMARY	7
WA bans smart glasses in all public schools from the first day of Term 4, for students, staff and visitors	22 Sep 2026	WA	Government of Western Australia PRIMARY	5
Former teacher at an independent school in Victoria charged with three counts of sexual assault of a child under his care	2 Oct 2026	VIC	ABC News CREDIBLE	4
Students tell the Alannah & Madeline Foundation they doubt reporting harm to online platforms leads to action	9 Oct 2026	AU	The Educator CREDIBLE	4
IWF: more AI-generated child sexual abuse images in the first half of 2026 than in all of 2025	5 Oct 2026	UK	Internet Watch Foundation AUTHORITATIVE	4

SECTION 05 · CONTINUED

Safety & Wellbeing · continued

32 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
Victoria to ban smart glasses in all schools from the 2027 school year	21 Oct 2026	VIC	Premier of Victoria PRIMARY	4
Year 8 student allegedly stabbed by another student at a public high school in the ACT	22 Oct 2026	ACT	Canberra Daily CREDIBLE	4
14-year-old charged over the alleged stabbing at the ACT high school	23 Oct 2026	ACT	Region Canberra CREDIBLE	4
Home education rising sharply, with experts pointing to families pushed out of schools	21 Oct 2026	AU	The Educator K-12 CREDIBLE	4
Queensland introduces a bill to make creating AI-generated intimate images an offence, citing students and teachers	27 Oct 2026	QLD	Queensland Government PRIMARY	4
First person prosecuted under the federal deepfake laws introduced in 2024, a former private-school student, is spared jail	27 Oct 2026	SA	The Canberra Times CREDIBLE	3
ACT seeks advice on banning smart glasses in public schools	19 Oct 2026	ACT	The Canberra Times SECONDARY	2
16 further developments scored 3 or below: further criminal matters involving school staff in NSW, WA and SA; two charges in NSW over threatened or attempted violence near children; the federal Digital Duty of Care Bill's exposure draft and introduction; a lawsuit by eight US states against OpenAI; a national anti-bullying campaign; NSW's school counsellor workforce; research on peer belonging and resilience; youth mental health and screen-use surveys; UNICEF on independent AI evaluation for children; and a chemical exposure in a science class				≤3

PATTERN. *Two threads run through the area. The first is staff with access to children: several current and former staff were charged in October, including over cameras hidden in a primary school's toilets, most of them allegations still before the courts. The second is AI, both the chatbots children confide in and the use of AI by people who target children, whether to groom, radicalise or create abuse images. Both come back to whether the adults around students would notice and know what to do.*

Regulatory & Compliance

9 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
Victoria's new Working with Children Check measures in effect: training before clearance, WWC Connect notification and a suspended-clearance offence	23 Oct 2026	VIC	Premier of Victoria PRIMARY	6
Victorian Institute of Teaching uses rare search powers at an independent primary school amid abuse allegations	20 Oct 2026	VIC	ABC News CREDIBLE	6
Victoria's registration standard on personal devices updated: Ministerial Order 1515 restricts phones, smart glasses, wearable and audio devices	22 Oct 2026	VIC	VRQA PRIMARY	5
WA to rewrite its Equal Opportunity Act so religious schools can no longer dismiss teachers or expel students over sexuality, or refuse enrolment over disability	20 Oct 2026	WA	ABC News CREDIBLE	4
Regulators decline to pursue the former directors of a collapsed independent school in the ACT despite insolvent-trading findings	31 Oct 2026	ACT	The Canberra Times CREDIBLE	4
4 further developments scored 3 or below: South Australia's royal commission into AI begins; a private member's bill on faith-school exemptions; a minister considering a multi-member eSafety commission; and a minor-party pledge on face coverings				≤3

PATTERN. *Two of the main rows are regulators acting on child safety in Victoria, one with new duties and one with rarely used powers, and both rest on the school knowing who is working with children and whether they are cleared. The ACT case points the other way. Administrators found the former directors traded while insolvent, and the regulators each left the matter to the other. For an independent school board it is a reminder that its own oversight of solvency and fee handling may be the only check that operates in time.*

SECTION 05 · CONTINUED

Teaching & Curriculum

12 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
NESA ACE Rule: schools must not rely on AI-detection software when deciding malpractice	16 Sep 2026	NSW	NSW Education Standards Authority PRIMARY	7
Macquarie University study: 53% of teachers think devices help students learn, and 84% of secondary students say screens distract them	9 Oct 2026	AU	The Educator CREDIBLE	5
WA to pilot removing unnecessary screen use in Kindergarten to Year 2 in ten public schools from Term 1 2027	12 Oct 2026	WA	Government of Western Australia PRIMARY	5
Turnitin reports AU and NZ work written outside its own tool more likely to be flagged as AI-written; vendor data, not a controlled trial	8 Oct 2026	AU	IT Brief Australia CREDIBLE	4
AI-first private school model expands in the US, with adults acting as guides rather than teachers	5 Jul 2026	US	The Decoder CREDIBLE	4
ACARA proposes curriculum changes covering the Holocaust and antisemitism, the rule of law, and ethical sharing of online content; ministers to consider	28 Oct 2026	AU	CathNews CREDIBLE	4
6 further developments scored 3 or below: a teacher survey on the learning-styles myth; an overseas trial of classroom phone bans; a think-tank proposal for national exams; falling Year 12 creative arts enrolments; the ACT's push to change NAPLAN similar-school comparisons; and NSW's ten-year music plan				≤3

PATTERN. *The area is mostly about the place of technology in learning, and the direction is towards limits. NESA's assessment rules bar relying on detection software to decide malpractice, WA is taking screens out of the early years, and new research questions how much devices help. The Turnitin figures are the vendor's own and compare self-selected groups, so they say more about the market for integrity tools than about AI use. Schools reviewing assessment and device policy will find the evidence leaning one way.*

Workforce & IR

10 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
Queensland Catholic school staff reject the employers' enterprise agreement offer in an advisory vote; reproductive-health leave a flashpoint	8 Oct 2026	QLD	IEU-QNT AUTHORITATIVE	4
Catholic school staff to vote on protected industrial action after a Fair Work Commission ballot order	19 Oct 2026	AU	On Notice CREDIBLE	4
NSW public school support staff directed by their union not to secure students into vehicles	20 Oct 2026	NSW	Public Service Association of NSW AUTHORITATIVE	4
ACU-led review links teacher wellbeing with student motivation and achievement, across more than 350,000 teachers	7 Oct 2026	GLOBAL	The Conversation CREDIBLE	4
Teach For Australia-commissioned analysis reports higher Year 9 NAPLAN growth in its partner schools	16 Oct 2026	AU	The Educator CREDIBLE	4
Tasmania introduces a bill to replace the Teachers Registration Act 2000 and extend registration to university-qualified early childhood teachers	30 Oct 2026	TAS	Parliament of Tasmania PRIMARY	3
4 further developments scored 3 or below: ACT public schools closed for two hours during industrial action; Tasmania cutting inclusion support roles; an NT bill to merge teacher registration and curriculum boards; and a NSW union survey on preparation time				≤3

PATTERN. *Bargaining dominated the area, most visibly in Queensland Catholic schools, where staff rejected the employers' offer, and a Fair Work Commission order set up a protected action ballot for Catholic school staff. The NSW work ban is narrower but useful for any school: it turns on whether a task is in a role's duties, whether staff are trained for it and who is liable if it goes wrong. The ACU review adds evidence, correlational rather than causal, that how teachers are faring is linked to how students do.*

SECTION 05 · CONTINUED

AI & Data Governance

14 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
Character.AI files for bankruptcy and an asset sale; whether users' chat logs are included is not stated	12 Oct 2026	GLOBAL	Straight Arrow News CREDIBLE	7
UNSW study finds AI safety guardrails can fail when a model is given a persona or fine-tuned	7 Oct 2026	AU	The Educator CREDIBLE	6
World Economic Forum white paper sets out practices for children's safety and wellbeing with AI	30 Sep 2026	GLOBAL	World Economic Forum AUTHORITATIVE	4
OAIC annual report: privacy complaints up 60%, and the Children's Online Privacy Code among its milestones for 2026-27	22 Oct 2026	AU	Office of the Australian Information Commissioner PRIMARY	4
OAIC opens an investigation into the maker of an app used with low-cost camera glasses	7 Oct 2026	AU	Office of the Australian Information Commissioner PRIMARY	3
Assistant Minister describes a systems-based approach to national AI standards; reporting puts standards at the end of 2026	8 Oct 2026	AU	Region CREDIBLE	3
8 further developments scored 3 or below: federal and party moves on AI standards and a national AI position; an AI company's evidence to the parliamentary AI inquiry; an AI company's report that its agents weakened their own safety monitors; federal agencies softening their AI oversight commitments; UK plans for edtech certification; and US calls for research funding on AI in schools				≤3

PATTERN. *The common thread is that the safeguards around AI products are less settled than they look. A company's privacy terms may not bind whoever buys it, a model's guardrails can fail once it is customised, and federal agencies have softened their own oversight commitments. Against that, the privacy regulator is busier and has a children's privacy code ahead. For schools approving AI tools, the questions are about what happens when things change, not only how a tool behaves on the day it is approved.*

Financial & Operations

16 DEVELOPMENTS

DEVELOPMENT	EVENT	STATE	SOURCE	SCORE
Victoria changes Disability Inclusion assessment for government schools from 2027; the AEU says about 7,000 students will lose individual support, and the Government says total funding is still growing	28 Oct 2026	VIC	EducationHQ CREDIBLE	6
RBA card-surcharge ban takes effect: schools can no longer surcharge debit, prepaid or credit card payments on the main networks	1 Oct 2026	AU	Reserve Bank of Australia PRIMARY	5
Victoria signs its school funding agreement with the Commonwealth, the last jurisdiction to do so	22 Oct 2026	VIC	Education Review CREDIBLE	4
One Catholic system in the ACT and NSW raises 2027 fees by 6% in primary and 7.5% at four of its five secondary schools	29 Sep 2026	ACT	ABC News CREDIBLE	3
Some private schools stop accepting credit cards for fees after the surcharge ban	9 Oct 2026	AU	Spectator Australia (opinion) SECONDARY	3
Three Catholic primary schools in Victoria to close at the end of 2026 on low enrolments	1 Oct 2026	VIC	ABC News CREDIBLE	2
A small Catholic secondary school in NSW to close at the end of 2026	7 Oct 2026	NSW	The Educator CREDIBLE	2
Brisbane non-government schools advertise scholarships, two offering up to full tuition	26 Oct 2026	QLD	Brisbane Times SECONDARY	2
8 further developments scored 3 or below: smaller 2027 budgets for most ACT public schools; Victoria telling families that public school curriculum materials are free; a rise in Victoria's payroll tax threshold for non-government schools; flood closures in south-east Queensland; a national summer briefing on hazards; outside school hours care and home computer access; and a tax bill's treatment of school fees				≤3

PATTERN. *Most of the area is about money for 2027. The surcharge ban is already in force and some schools have responded by no longer taking credit cards for fees. Victoria's change to disability inclusion assessment is for its government schools. Fee rises, closures and scholarship offers fill out a picture of families and schools both feeling the cost of the coming year.*

SECTION 06

How this briefing is made

THE SCANNING

Every month we scan the full policy, technology, social, economic, legal and environmental landscape affecting Australian schools, across all sectors rather than only independent. From that, we surface only what clears verification. This month the scan covered more sources than before and 102 developments cleared the bar; those scored 3 or below are summarised in one row per theme unless the Top 5, board matter or Also moved section draws on them. Developments are included in the month they were identified; the event date shown may fall either side of the period.

THE SCORING

Each development is scored for relevance to schools and placed on a horizon of how soon it lands and a set of risk domains. Each Top 5 signal brings related developments together and shows the score of the one it leads with. The risk weather combines severity and immediacy into a single read per area, so you can see where the pressure sits and track it month to month.

VERIFICATION

Every development is checked against its source, and load-bearing claims are read off the primary where one exists. Every source shown is labelled with its authority: primary is the instrument or the body itself, authoritative is a sector or expert body, credible is established reporting, and secondary is reporting at one remove. So you can see what a claim rests on. We do not name schools involved in adverse incidents, because the lesson does not depend on the name.

WHAT THIS IS AND ISN'T

This is a briefing to help you see what is coming and ask better questions. It is not compliance advice, and not a substitute for your own legal, IR or child-safety processes.

> **GOING DEEPER**
>
> *Want a signal read against your school's specific profile?*
>
> *Arvoe helps schools turn signals like these into a clear position for the board, backed by evidence. If the board question above raised something the school cannot yet answer with confidence, our quick interactive assessment is a free place to start. To have one of this edition's signals looked at for your school, reply to the email this briefing arrived with, or visit* ***arvoe.ai****.*

arvoe

Know where your school stands on every risk.

Have the answer ready for whoever asks.

RYAN SPEAK · RYAN@ARVOE.AI · ARVOE.AI/SIGNALS