Classroom AI apps expose children to porn site trackers and give UK students wrong US helplines, new report reveals

(London, 10 September 2025) Children using well-known AI-powered apps in classrooms, such as Grammarly, Character.AI and others, are being tracked by adult website advertisers, given dangerous misinformation about self-harm and taught false facts, according to new research carried out by LSE and 5Rights Foundation's Digital Futures for Children centre.

The alarming findings emerge as the House of Lords prepares to debate crucial amendments to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill next week, which would give the Government new powers to regulate the use of tech in the classroom, including AI.

Major failures across popular classroom apps

Researchers carried out a child-rights audit of five AI tools widely used in education settings– Character.AI, Grammarly, MagicSchool AI, Microsoft Copilot and Mind's Eye – uncovering systematic rights-based concerns related to privacy, safety and accuracy:

- **Children's data exposed to commercial tracking from adult websites:** despite claims about its safety and privacy, AI-powered personalisation app, MagicSchool AI, enables tracking cookies by default for users as young as 12. This exposes children to commercial tracking from adult website advertisers, including erotic and friend-finder websites. Similarly, Grammarly allows marketing platforms of companies like Facebook, Microsoft and Google to use education account data for commercial purposes.
- **AI chatbots teaching false facts and creating dangerous dependencies:** AI chatbots used for classroom learning have been found sometimes to confuse fictional characters with real figures and provide students with inconsistent information, which is inconducive to a learning environment. The platform's design can also trigger unhealthy emotional dependency, with some child users reporting severe mental health struggles.
- **Vulnerable children abandoned when seeking help:** researchers found that children in the UK reporting bullying or suicidal thoughts on the MagicSchool AI chatbot can be provided with US emergency helpline numbers instead of UK resources. When researchers tested the tool, it also refused to engage with children seeking help until they explicitly mentioned suicide multiple times.
- **Plagiarism detectors falsely accusing students:** AI plagiarism detection tools, available in apps such as *Grammarly,* have well-known limitations, including false accusations.

However, this does not prevent the company from advertising its effectiveness. Confusingly, the app tells teachers to continue using their own professional judgement, meaning the burden remains on the workforce.

- **Data of children with disabilities shared without consent:** Mind's Eye (Smartbox) - designed for adults and children with disabilities, shares children's data with its group companies in the US and EU without explaining why or offering any option to refuse, while biased outputs risk making these children feel excluded rather than supported.

Parliament considers action

EdTech remains unregulated in England beyond basic data protection laws. There is no central list of AI-facilitated EdTech products in schools, and no public list of approved products meeting expected safety standards.

The proposed amendments being discussed would require that:

- EdTech must be effective, safe and do what it claims to do
- Where AI is used, it must be clearly labelled
- Children's personal data should not be stored outside of the school by third parties

With GenAI being used across most school subjects, according to the Department of Education, Parliament must act now before these unregulated tools become even more entrenched in children's education.

> **Dr. Ayca Atabey, lead author of the study, said: "**Across all GenAI tools we studied, children's perspectives were largely excluded from their design, governance and evaluation, and all tools undermine children's rights to privacy and protection from commercial exploitation.**"**
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> **Colette Collins-Walsh, Head of UK Affairs at 5Rights Foundation, said:** "The pandemic saw a rapid digitalisation of education, but in the five years since, no one has stopped to think if this is benefiting children. This is having serious consequences: children are being tracked by erotic websites and chatbots are providing wrong emergency helplines, risking lives and creating dependencies that can damage mental health.
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> As the Government presses ahead with spreading AI far and wide, we must have rules in place to protect children and their education. In the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, parliament has a chance to ensure this happens."

The research forms the first report by the LSE and 5Rights *A Better EdTech Future for Children* project, which will develop best practices, rights-based recommendations and stimulate public

debate over the best ways to achieve more inclusive, transparent and accountable digital learning environments.

Access the report

- Ends -

Notes to editors

1. **New research published by the LSE and 5Rights Digital Futures for Children Centre carried out a child rights audit of GenAI uses in UK schools.** All five audited Gen-AI-enabled tools were assessed between December 2024 and February 2025, and again in August 2025. The study found:
    - GenAI is being rapidly integrated into educational settings, in advance of any independent evidence of its learning benefits.
    - While each GenAI tool audited offered the potential to facilitate learning, expression and accessibility, each comes with notable risks.
    - None of the tools were found to be compliant with UK data protection regulation, including the Age Appropriate Design Code. This undermines children's rights to privacy and protection from commercial exploitation.
    - Product walkthroughs and data tracking methods revealed a host of risks to children's privacy, safety, education, expression, inclusion and freedom from commercial exploitation.
    - Improved policy and guidance are urgently needed to protect, remedy and fulfil children's rights at school as GenAI is more widely used.

2. **While EdTech can be helpful to schools and teachers for lesson planning and other administrative tasks, there have been widely reported issues, including:**
    - EdTech used in schools is highly invasive of children's privacy and relies on the extensive collection of children's data, allowing children's data to be used for commercial and profiling purposes, as well as datasets for training AI models.[1]
    - There is a shortage of independent evidence on whether these technologies deliver better educational outcomes for children versus those who do not use it.[2]
    - EdTech services are exempt from key legislation, including the Online Safety Act (2023), bypassing significant regulation that aims to keep children safe.

[1] Digital Futures Commission (2022) *Education Data Reality: The challenges for schools in managing children's education data*, 5Rights Foundation, London School of Economics and Political Science

[2] West, M. (2023) *An ed-tech tragedy? Educational technologies and school closures in the time of COVID-19*, UNESCO, DOI: https://doi.org/10.54675/LYGF2153

- There is a growing concern amongst parents about the amount of time children spend using devices and 'screen time', with children's screen exposure increasing by 50 minutes as a result of both education and leisure after the pandemic.[3]
- The vast majority of EdTech used in schools are commercial, for-profit services and products.[4] This means that their longevity and permanence rely upon private companies, which, in the case of Google and Microsoft, are not based in the UK and could withdraw their services at any time. This leaves the public education system vulnerable to commercial and market forces.
- Total reliance on technology in schools also makes education vulnerable to cyber-attacks, which ICO figures reveal are a growing problem, leaving some children without education.[5]

3. **The House of Lords will debate amendments to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill in the first weeks of September, which would ensure EdTech used in schools is effective and safe.** Amendments 493 and 494 in the names of Lord Holmes of Richmond and Baroness Beeban Kidron, honorary president of 5Rights Foundation, and Amendment 502K in the names of Baroness Beeban Kidron and Baroness Cass would:
    - Establish a code of practice to establish the pedagogical standards that EdTech must meet to be used in schools.
    - Require the Secretary of State to introduce regulations for the use of EdTech in schools in England, ensuring products deployed in schools are inclusive by design, accessible to all, transparent with training data and algorithms, labelled clearly if they use AI, do not provide data to third parties and do not store personal data outside of the school; and
    - Require the Secretary of State to produce guidance on procurement standards for EdTech products within six months of Royal Assent.
4. **5Rights and the LSE's Digital Futures for Children centre are researching the impact of EdTech on children's education to support schools and governments in understanding what good looks like and procuring rights-respecting services.**
    - 5Rights and the LSE's Digital Futures for Children centre's project *A better EdTech future for children* is a two-year research study to understand, develop and promote a framework by which to benchmark EdTech projects in the UK. Researchers will be exploring the impact of technology on children's rights, including their right to education, safety and privacy, including the current evidence for its use in schools, and holding direct studies with children, teachers, parents and pedagogical experts to understand their views on how, when and if it should be used during the school day.
5. **Digital Futures for Children centre** is a joint research venture between 5Rights and LSE. Stay in touch with the centre through LinkedIn, our website or via email at info@dfc-centre.net.

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[3] West, M. (2023) *An ed-tech tragedy? Educational technologies and school closures in the time of COVID-19*, UNESCO, DOI: https://doi.org/10.54675/LYGF2153

[4] West, M. (2023) *An ed-tech tragedy? Educational technologies and school closures in the time of COVID-19*, UNESCO, DOI: https://doi.org/10.54675/LYGF2153 pp. 156-158

[5] BBC News (2024) *Pupils miss class as school cyber-attacks rise*