## Transcript for ‘Using AI to enhance learning in a primary setting’

Hello, I'm Sasha van Straten, the Director of Digital Learning and Head of Computing at Merchant Taylors' Prep School. We're an all-boys school with pupils in classes from nursery to Year 8. We're in the process of moving to a primary model, where our students will leave us at the end of Year 6. AI in education brings numerous benefits, from reducing administrative workload to enhancing student learning and engagement. But it's important to approach it with a clear strategy, understanding where AI adds value and where it doesn't.

In my school, we've been using AI in different ways across leadership, teaching, and student learning. And from what I've seen, there are five key benefits to engaging with AI in education. One of the biggest is reducing administrative workload. Instead of spending hours on lesson planning, assessment rubrics, or report writing, AI tools like ChatGPT can help structure and refine ideas quickly.

For example, to generate rubrics for project-based learning in my primary computing classes. Instead of manually writing them, I can describe what I need. And AI draft a structured rubric within seconds. This means my students get a clear sense of expectations and what good looks like without me spending extra time creating each rubric from scratch.

AI also helps with resource creation. I use tools like Canva and Midjourney to create visuals and graphics. Whether I need an image, a diagram, or a realistic illustration, AI speeds up the process. AI isn't just for teachers and students; it's also helping school leaders communicate more effectively.

I've introduced ChatGPT, Ideogram, and Napkin to senior staff, and they've found them invaluable for the following reasons. It helps them create engaging presentations to share ideas visually and to do so at speed. It helps to explore different communication styles, which is useful for sensitive, or complex messages. And it's like having an always available coaching assistant, helping leaders refine their messaging and make decisions faster.

AI can transform student learning, not by replacing teaching, but by enhancing feedback and critical thinking. Students can receive AI-generated feedback within minutes, rather than waiting for teacher marking. In computing, for example, students can receive almost instant written feedback on assignments, using a tool called Curipod. They reflect on the AI feedback and then they justify the reasoning to me.

I agree with this feedback because I disagree because I partially agree. But this process develops critical thinking and improves communication skills. Instead of surface level responses, students are engaging more deeply with their work, discussing their ideas, and even peer reviewing in a more structured way.

It also means that learning becomes more collaborative. Students are discussing AI-generated feedback together, refining their thinking, and supporting each other's learning. A key part of AI adoption is building AI literacy. Many students are already using AI at home. Half my Year 4s said they were doing so when I asked them.

So rather than ignoring AI, we've integrated it into our Acceptable Usage Policy or AUP, ensuring pupils engage safely and responsibly. We tell students they can use AI, but it must be a tool we've authorised, and they can't copy and paste. It's part of their research and content creation toolkit. But the final product must be their own thoughts and analysis.

By experiencing AI firsthand, students learn when AI is useful and when it's not, how to craft effective prompts, when AI might be misleading or biassed, how to engage with AI critically, rather than passively. We also take a pedagogy first approach. AI doesn't need to be embedded in everything. Instead, we focus on situations when it enhances learning. This can be helping students develop inquiry skills, debating techniques, or graphic design, for example.

Students can use AI to gather facts and knowledge faster, giving them more time to apply critical thinking skills to the topic at hand. What they also need to do is consider the feedback they are getting from the AI. Is that itself accurate? So what's happening is a double dose of critical thinking skills.

AI has great potential for personalised learning, but it's not perfect yet. While AI tools could one day provide tailored coaching for students, right now, accuracy is a challenge. Large language models still hallucinate, so the responses must be checked. However, there are already benefits.

AI can support some neurodivergent learners by summarising information for students with ADHD or helping students with dyslexia use accurate speech to text tools. It can read out content, reducing the challenges of comprehending and analysing long passages. Text to speech and summarization tools can help students focus without the distractions of other events happening on screen.

AI-powered research tools allow teachers to quickly process complex materials, directing their attention where it's needed most. Even if schools aren't using AI widely yet, understanding its potential ensures they'll be ready when the technology matures, and they feel ready to deploy. Ultimately, engaging with AI in education isn't about replacing teachers. It's about enhancing the work we do.

AI saves time, supports leadership, improves student engagement, builds AI literacy when taught effectively, and has the potential for more personalised learning in the future. But AI isn't a magic bullet. It works best when used thoughtfully and strategically in ways that align with the school's existing pedagogy and culture.