

Cairneagle's recent study on the use of AI for administrative purposes in schools highlights key use cases and predicts rapid AI adoption growth in UK schools in the coming years

Context and Objectives

- Cairneagle recently conducted a **study on the use of AI for administrative purposes in schools**. This included a **survey of 396 school and MAT leaders** —as well as **40 in-depth interviews**. We found that whilst schools remain early in their AI journey, AI is beginning to move from experimentation to strategic consideration in schools. This transition is likely to accelerate over the next few years with leaders increasingly weighing both its practical benefits and transformative potential- especially for data analysis and visualisation, and the automation of administrative and support tasks

Value of AI solutions

- There is **significant opportunity for AI-powered tools to add value to schools**, namely by: saving admin staff time and reducing admin staff headcount (albeit headcount reduction potential is limited by already lean teams, and mostly relevant to large MATs), reducing BPO (enabling the in-sourcing of these services), saving teacher time (improving retention and time spent delivering educational outcomes), and improving school outcomes
- Our work identified **c.£1bn worth of potential time savings** for schools from specific administrative processes that could be automated or facilitated by AI

Schools' AI journey and appetite

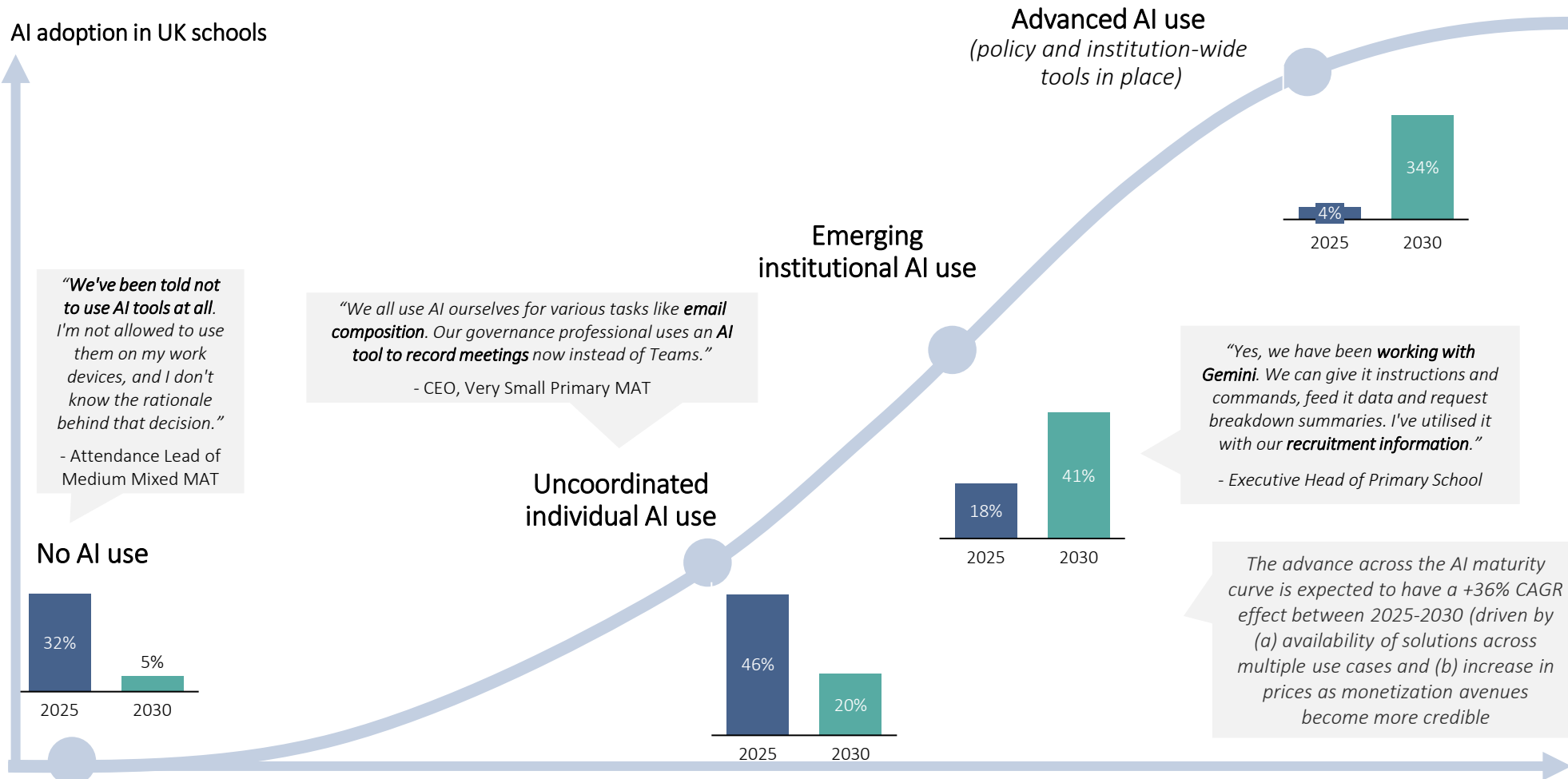
- **Schools are mainly early on the AI adoption curve**, with emerging institutional use limited to just over 20% to date. However, **AI adoption in schools is expected to increase significantly over the next five years**, with a large proportion of schools expected to have **AI policies and institution-wide tools in place by 2030**
- **AI-driven admin and support tasks automation is highly valued** for saving time and improving efficiency for teachers and staff. Interest in time-savings is strong: **82% of survey respondents ranked time savings** for teachers and admin staff as their main value driver for their top 3 AI use cases, **while only c.6% prioritised headcount reduction**—highlighting resistance to staff cuts in UK schools
- There is also **appetite amongst schools to use AI for advanced and predictive analytics**, although technology is still nascent for some use cases; **30% of survey respondents showed interest in the potential use of AI for advanced student support and monitoring**, including equity monitoring and intervention, predictive behaviour and attendance analytics and post-graduation success tracking
- Primary research indicates that the **most material AI use cases centre on data analysis and visualisation**, followed by parental engagement. Approximately **63% of survey respondents ranked data analysis and visualisation among their top three use cases** of interest, with around 47% identifying parental engagement (drafting emails, consent forms etc) as a priority. Over 2/3 of use cases have less than 5% of respondents currently using an existing solution, underscoring a **largely untapped market and significant opportunity for solution providers**

Barriers to AI adoption

- The **primary barriers** to adopting AI tools relate to **technological maturity**, along with **concerns over data security** and the **reliability** of the outputs – all of which are likely to be surmounted in the coming years

Over the next 5 years, AI adoption will accelerate – almost half of UK schools expect to be advanced in their AI use by 2030

AI maturity journey: Perceived and expected future school AI maturity phase, UK school leaders, (n= 396)^{1,2}

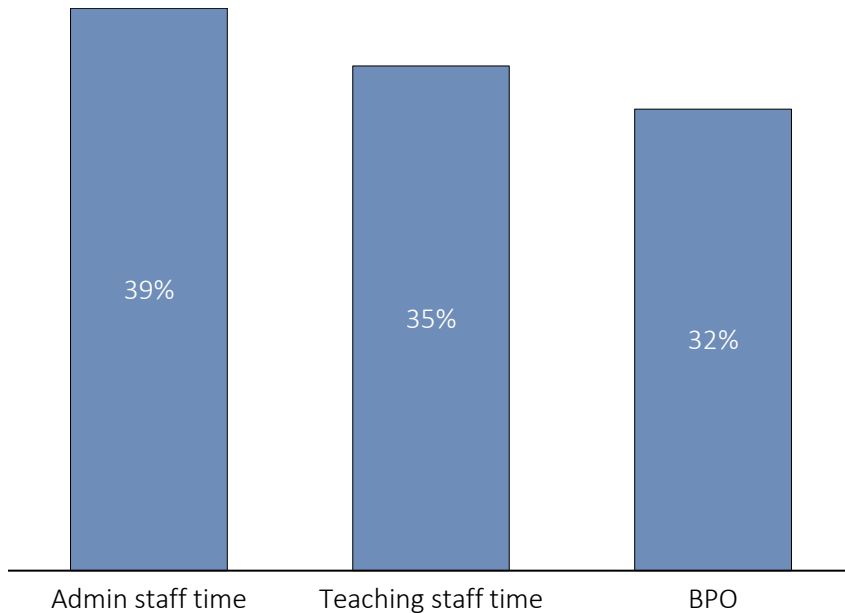


1. Today, how embedded are AI administrative and operational solutions in your school/MAT/LA? 2. How embedded do you think AI administrative and operational solutions will be in your school/MAT/LA in 5 years?

Source: Cairneagle market survey, Cairneagle research and analysis

There is strong appetite for the automation of administrative and support tasks through AI...

Average perception of saving possible through AI admin process automation, school leaders (N= 396)¹



- Optimisation potential for teaching staff time very close to that of admin staff time – although teaching staff spend ½ of their time on admin & support tasks
- This suggests that admin workflows for teachers much more inefficient and with higher relative potential for optimisation vs admin staff

School appetite to implement AI solutions for process automation

*“We employ a technology manager who focuses on **implementing tools to help teachers save time and energy...** One of the modules in this teacher training program specifically covers computing and **the use of AI to reduce workload...** The initiative comes centrally **from our CEO. He's very encouraging of us using AI tools**”*

- Executive Head, Medium Primary MAT

*“AI has really hit our schools now. Some of the high schools in our area have already developed specific policies around AI implementation ... **We aren't using AI at the moment, but we are actively exploring our options.** We're attending multiple meetings and webinars to evaluate **potential implementation approaches.**”*

- CEO, Very Small Primary MAT

*“My Director of Education has been tasked this year to work alongside our finance team to **identify opportunities where AI could help reduce workload.**”*

- CEO, Small Primary MAT

*“Yes, **we have embraced AI at our school.** We have developed and implemented an AI policy. **AI utilisation has become widespread** across various departments in our school.”*

- Assistant Headteacher, Secondary School

*“We face challenges in reducing our **finance and operations teams [..]. AI implementation** could potentially lead to **staffing adjustments.**”*

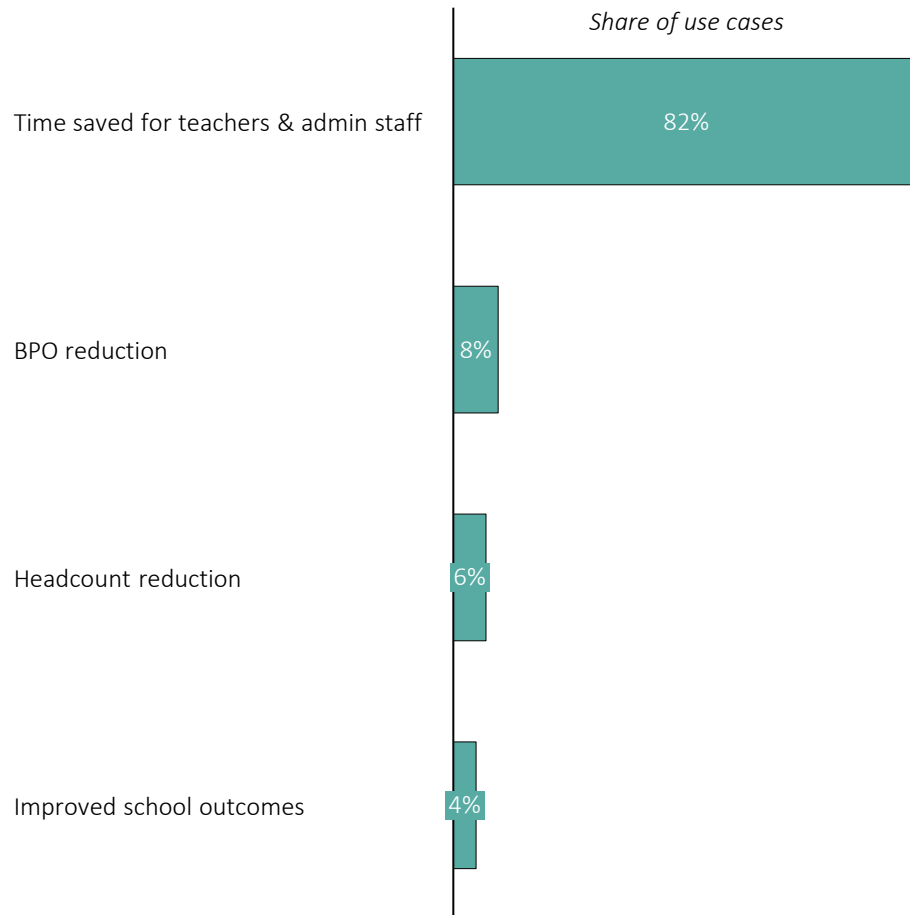
- CEO, Small Primary MAT

1. Thinking about all AI solutions together, what would be: (a) the total share of admin staff time you think could be saved?, (b) the total share of teacher time you think could be saved?, (c) the total share of outsourced professional services (BPO) you think could be saved?

Source: Carineagle market survey; Carineagle interviews, Carineagle research and analysis

... especially to save time, as opposed to reduce headcount: even though it has the largest theoretical market potential, headcount reduction faces resistance in UK schools

Main value driver selected, for top 3 AI use cases (N=396)



Commentary

- As >80% of UK schools workforce is unionised, there is a widespread resistance to headcount reduction
- This resistance is more relevant to teachers than to admin staff

*“Some school leaders **openly state their reluctance to engage with AI**, with some hoping to retire before having to address this technological shift. These education leaders express **strong opposition to replacing staff with automated systems.**” - Founder at AI in Education startup*

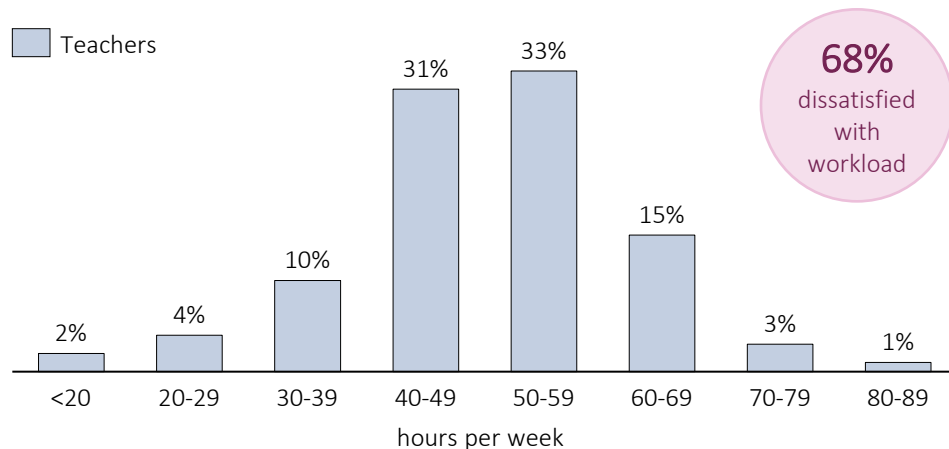
*“The education workforce is heavily unionised, with approximately **80% plus of staff belonging to unions**. Unions **strongly oppose any artificial intelligence implementation that could replace staff positions**” - Head of Technology at Large MAT*

- Some **larger MATs would still consider headcount reductions** from their admin workforce if they had the right AI automation tool

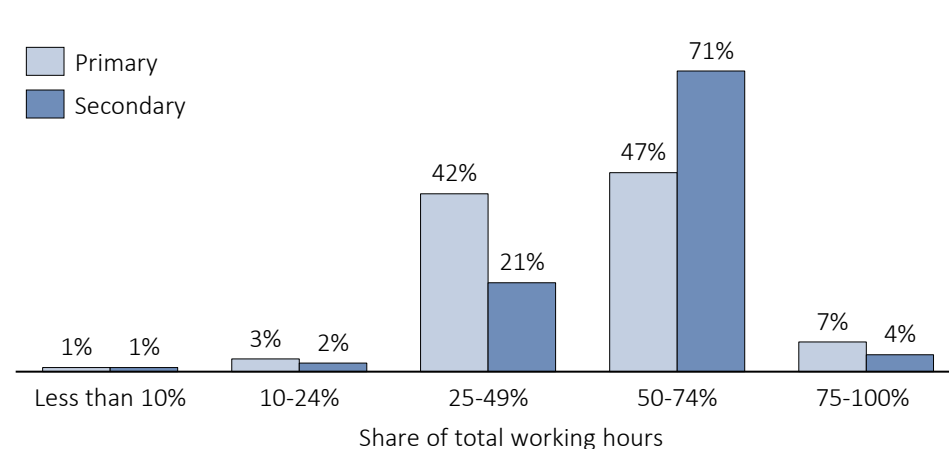
*“As COO, I made the **strategic decision not to replace my PA** when she left for personal reasons, and Reclaim has been instrumental in maintaining productivity without this support. This approach has influenced other executive members, with our **CFO following suit when his PA departed...** Scriber's key advantage is its specialisation in producing formal board-style minutes, having been developed specifically for trusts. The tool aligns perfectly with our writing style and minute-taking requirements, as it was developed within the trust sector. This advancement suggests that in the future, **we may be able to reduce our reliance on traditional human clerking roles.**” - COO at Large Mixed MAT*

2/3 of all teachers are working overtime, and more than ½ of their working hours are driven by non-teaching tasks

Distribution of hours worked by teachers per week, '24
(% of total)



Distribution of time spent by teachers on non-teaching tasks, '24
(% of total)



Teacher retention challenges

- Teacher retention is a challenge for all schools – 10% of teachers quit in their first year on the job due to workload
- Solving the workload problem isn't trivial because of school budgetary pressure (can't easily increase headcount):
 - ~60% of academy trusts reported *in-year financial deficits* in 2023-24, up from ~19% in 2020-21
 - 60% of governors in a National Governors' Association survey answered that balancing the budgets is their greatest challenge
 - Overall school funding per pupil will rise by ~5.8% in cash terms in 2025-26 - but school costs are expected to rise by ~6.5% over the same period

Schools are also enthusiastic about the potential to use AI for advanced / predictive analytics, although technology is still nascent for some use cases

Appetite for AI advanced analytics (N=396)

	Example use cases	School appetite (% survey respondents)
Advanced student support & monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity monitoring and intervention (evaluates inequities in academic outcomes or disciplinary actions across race, gender, socioeconomic status, or languages) • Predictive behaviour & attendance analytics (identification of at-risk students, repeat incident triggers, patterns in pastoral data etc.) • Post-graduation success tracking 	30%
Advanced operational & resource management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptive resource allocation (SEN support, TA hours, facilities, etc.) • Staffing & workforce analytics (teacher/ TA retention risk, workload distribution, predictive recruitment needs), • Predictive financial forecasting & budget optimization 	30%
School Climate & Community Engagement monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predictive parental engagement analytics (communication needs, risk of disengagement) • School culture monitoring (patterns in complaints, satisfaction surveys) 	19%
System-level & policy insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarking & comparisons (cross-school performance on attendance, behaviour, staffing, safeguarding) • Strategic planning simulations ('what if' scenarios, policy shifts, demographic & funding changes) 	21%

Commentary

- Some schools already use AI tools for data interpretation

*"we are actively analysing school-generated data and **requesting narratives or summaries from AI**. While it's possible to produce 30 pages of data, to quote HMI, "so what?" Reading through extensive data can be onerous. **We see AI as an augmentation, not a replacement.**" - CEO at Mixed MAT*

- Further use cases envisaged include advanced insights from data analytics, predictive analytics...

*"I see **clear applications within data analysis**. When we report back to the trust on our data, we have to provide detailed breakdowns around attendance, behaviour, and results. AI could significantly help in **identifying trends and patterns** that an individual wouldn't naturally spot when looking at the data." - Head of Primary School*

- ... but technology seems still nascent

*"While these (advanced analytics) capabilities would be really useful, **they don't exist right now.**" – Founder at AI in Education Consultancy*

Our work identified c.£1bn worth of potential time savings for schools from specific back-office processes that could be automated or facilitated by AI

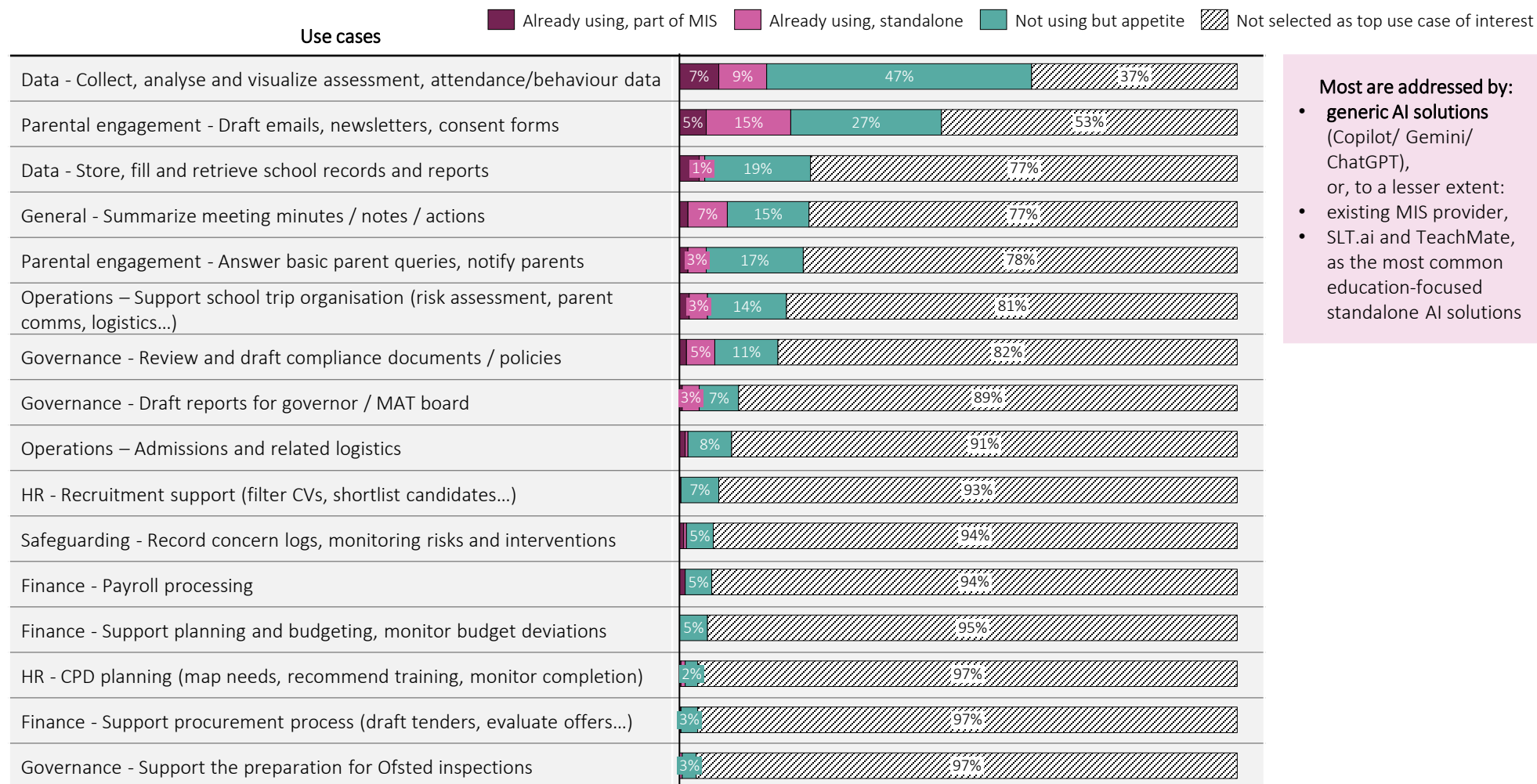
Use cases	# weekly admin hours	% time saved	Value of time saved (£m)	TAM ¹ (£M)	Appetite (% survey respondents who selected in top 3 use cases of interest)
Data - Collect, analyse and visualize assessment, attendance/behaviour data	50.7	56%	77.1	14.8	63%
Parental engagement - Draft emails, newsletters, consent forms	61.8	55%	90.9	14.4	47%
Data - Store, fill and retrieve school records and reports	99.1	62%	166.5	14.8	23%
General - Summarize meeting minutes / notes / actions	52.3	47%	66.7	10.1	23%
Parental engagement - Answer basic parent queries, notify parents	75.5	61%	124.7	12.9	22%
Operations – Support school trip organisation (risk assessment, parent comms, logistics...)	39.9	53%	57.3	7.7	19%
Governance - Review and draft compliance documents / policies	30.9	56%	46.4	4.1	18%
Governance - Draft reports for governor / MAT board	20.4	58%	31.9	10.3	11%
Operations – Admissions and related logistics	50.6	59%	80.5	13.7	9%
HR - Recruitment support (filter CVs, shortlist candidates...)	18.7	51%	26.0	6.6	7%
Safeguarding - Record concern logs, monitoring risks and interventions	68.2	49%	89.4	13.5	6%
Finance - Payroll processing	41.6	46%	52.0	12.9	6%
Finance - Support planning and budgeting, monitor budget deviations	46.6	61%	76.5	13.8	5%
HR - CPD planning (map needs, recommend training, monitor completion)	14.3	57%	22.1	7.3	3%
Finance - Support procurement process (draft tenders, evaluate offers...)	21.8	53%	31.0	9.8	3%
Governance - Support the preparation for Ofsted inspections	38.1	54%	55.1	8.3	3%
Total			£1,094m	£182m	

Largest TAM opportunities in collecting & visualizing assessment data, parental engagement and filling & retrieving school reports

1. Bottom-up values adjusted to reconcile to the combined value of levers 1, 2 and 4 (headcount and time saved for admin staff, BPO reduction and improved school outcomes)
Source: Cairneagle AI survey; Cairneagle research and analysis

The most immediate use cases are related to data analysis and visualisation, followed by parental engagement and safeguarding, with AI penetration at very early stages

Current usage of AI tools for administrative and support tasks



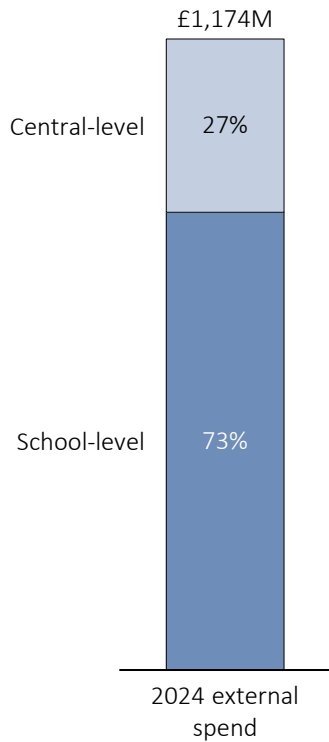
Most are addressed by:

- **generic AI solutions** (Copilot/ Gemini/ ChatGPT), or, to a lesser extent:
- existing MIS provider,
- SLT.ai and TeachMate, as the most common education-focused standalone AI solutions

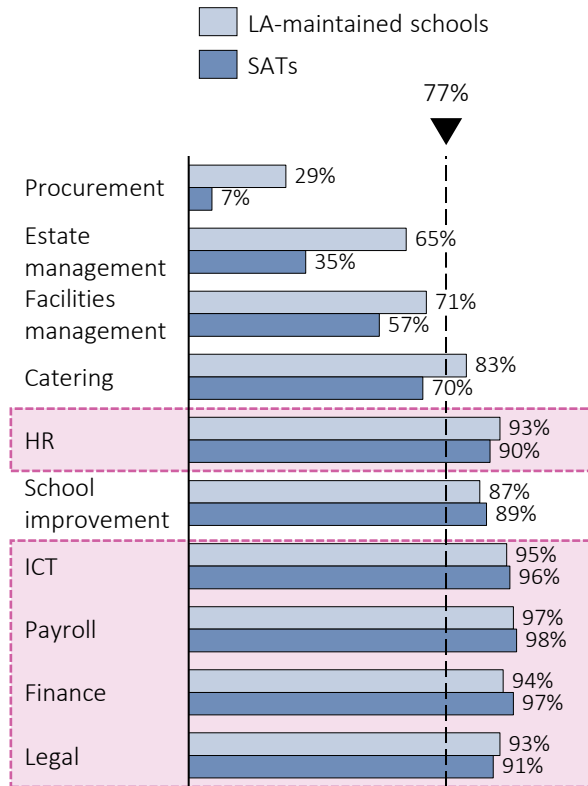
Multiple services previously outsourced by schools/ LAs are prime candidates to automate and bring back in-house to save costs

Annual external spend, 2024, £M

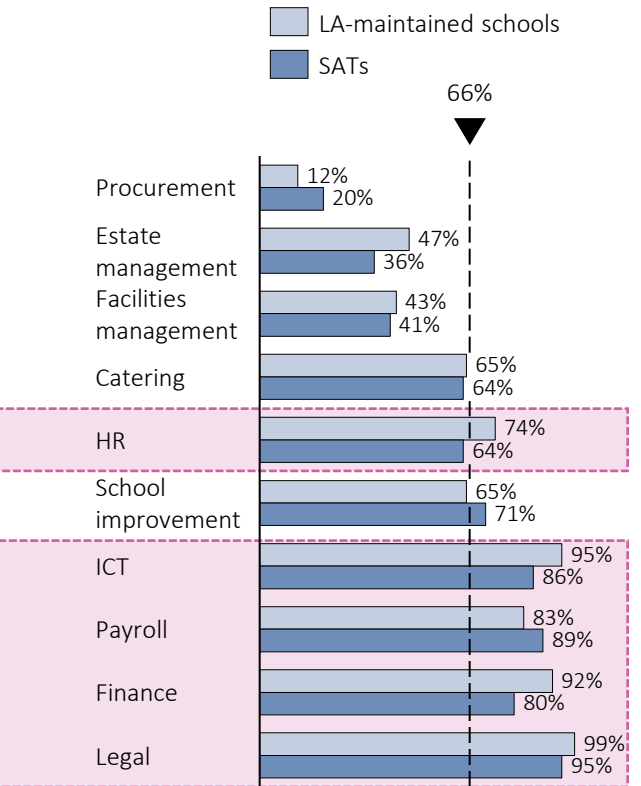
UK schools spend >£1B p.a. on external BPO/ professional services



Level of outsourcing in primary schools % (partial + full outsourcing)



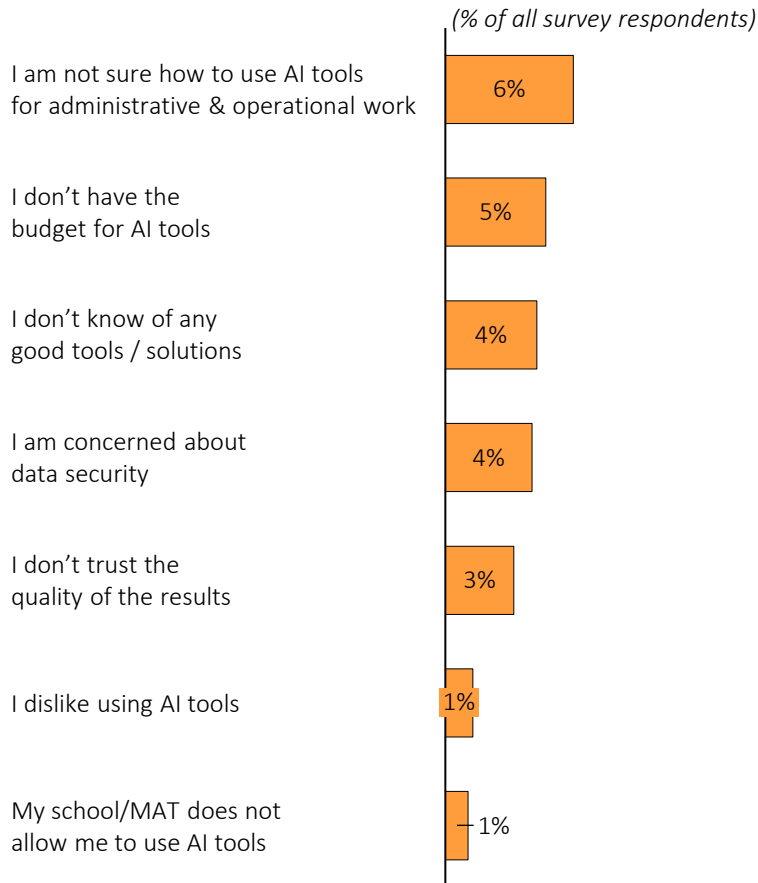
Level of outsourcing in secondary schools, % (partial + full outsourcing)



HR, ICT, Payroll, Finance, Legal are priority areas where outsourced services can be insourced with AI automation to save costs and internalize the supplier margin

The main obstacles to the adoption of AI tools is around technological maturity, there are also some reservations, including amongst AI users, on data security

Reasons not to use AI tools (n=111)



Data security concerns

*“There is a **concern that oversight of data protection** is not being handled well currently . Key questions around **responsibility for data protection impact** assessments and monitoring where data flows are not being adequately addressed”*
- Founder at AI in Education Consultancy

*“I am proficient with IT and knowledgeable about many aspects of technology, but **we need more guidance around the risks of using AI**. The benefits are very clear, but the risks are still yet to be fully understood by people in education... I think if I could be assured that the data was secure for teacher AI solutions, then (I would use it, but) **data safety is a worry for me.**”*
- Executive Head, Small Primary School

*“**Data security** is a primary concern for us.”*
- CEO, Small Secondary MAT

*“It was about the **data being firewalled really** and having some assurance that the data we put in an AI function isn't then **shared with databases worldwide.**”*
- CEO, Very Large Primary MAT

Generative AI speeds up content generation, while agentic AI automates entire workflows. Both play a role in school admin & support automation

Dimension	Generative AI	Agentic AI
Definition	Creates new content or insights based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input prompts (e.g., user instructions) • Context (e.g., reports, emails, data) 	Acts autonomously to achieve a defined goal, combining reasoning, planning, and execution
Core function	Content generation	Decision-making and task automation
Human role	User directs and curates outputs	Human supervises, AI acts independently within boundaries
Examples	<i>KeyGPT drafting policies, newsletters, or governor reports. ChatGPT summarising Ofsted updates</i>	<i>Robin automatically auditing compliance and triggering corrective actions. Invoice processing and logging being completely automated using AI agents in Habitude</i>
Value creation	Improves productivity through faster content generation	Saves staff time by replacing repetitive workflows with self-running processes
Maturity	Widely deployed and trusted by staff (though hallucinations still exist esp. with foundational models)	Emerging - expected to drive the next S-curve of efficiency gains



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