CENSUS

Student Report

Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy

for the 2025/2026 academic year

refract
foundation


WE ARE A
TOGETHER
EVERYONE
ACHIEVES
MORE
Hack Club
HACK CLUB

Founder's Foreword

A huge thank you to Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy for participating in the pilot of Census. As our first participating institution, we're extremely grateful for the support of the senior leadership team as well as the computing department for allowing us to gather these important insights into the digital literacy of staff and students.

We surveyed students across years 7, 8 & 9, with a total participant count of 261. Our results show a good overall diversity of genders, races, SEN and pupil premium students who participated.

Our staff survey collected 16 responses, from a variety of departments. Although this was only a small sample, we hope that this data is still insightful into supporting staff in a digital society.

This marks the beginning of Census and the journey of The Refract Foundation as a whole. We are genuinely thankful for our collaboration with OSCA on two occasions: the Census pilot and Campfire Birmingham. We would be delighted to work with OSCA again in the future!

If you have any questions about anything presented in this report, or the data you have been given access to, please don't hesitate to reach out to me through the below contact information.

Yours faithfully,

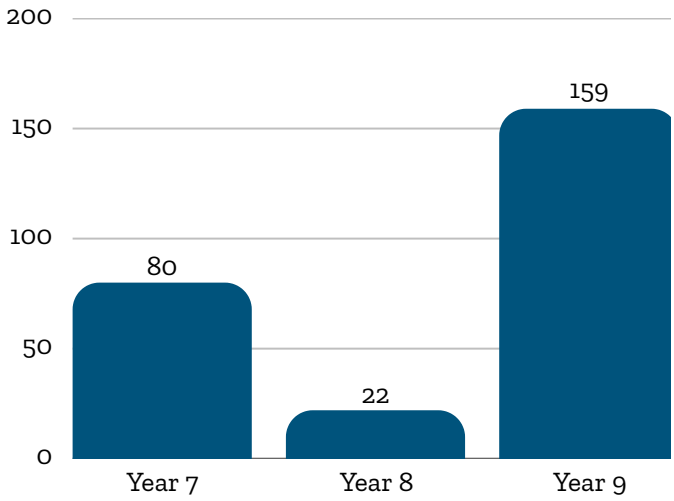
Oliver Potter

Founder & Programme Director

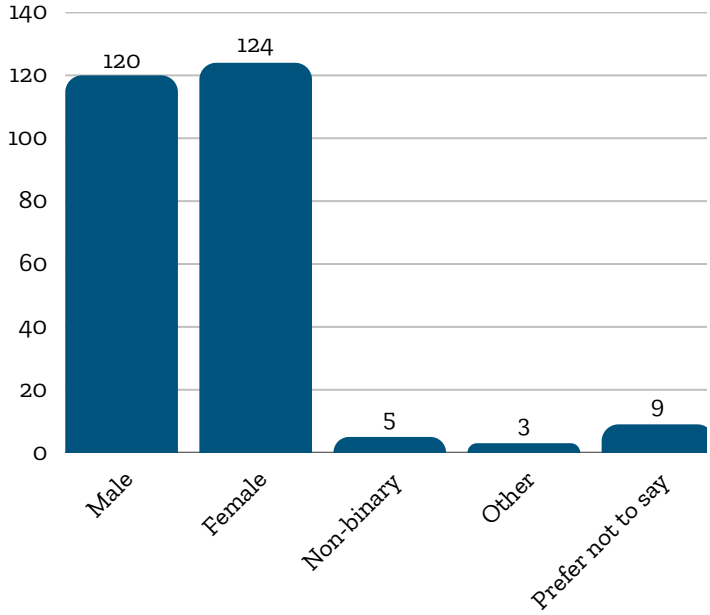
oliver@refractfoundation.org
/in/opott
refractfoundation.org

Demographic Overview

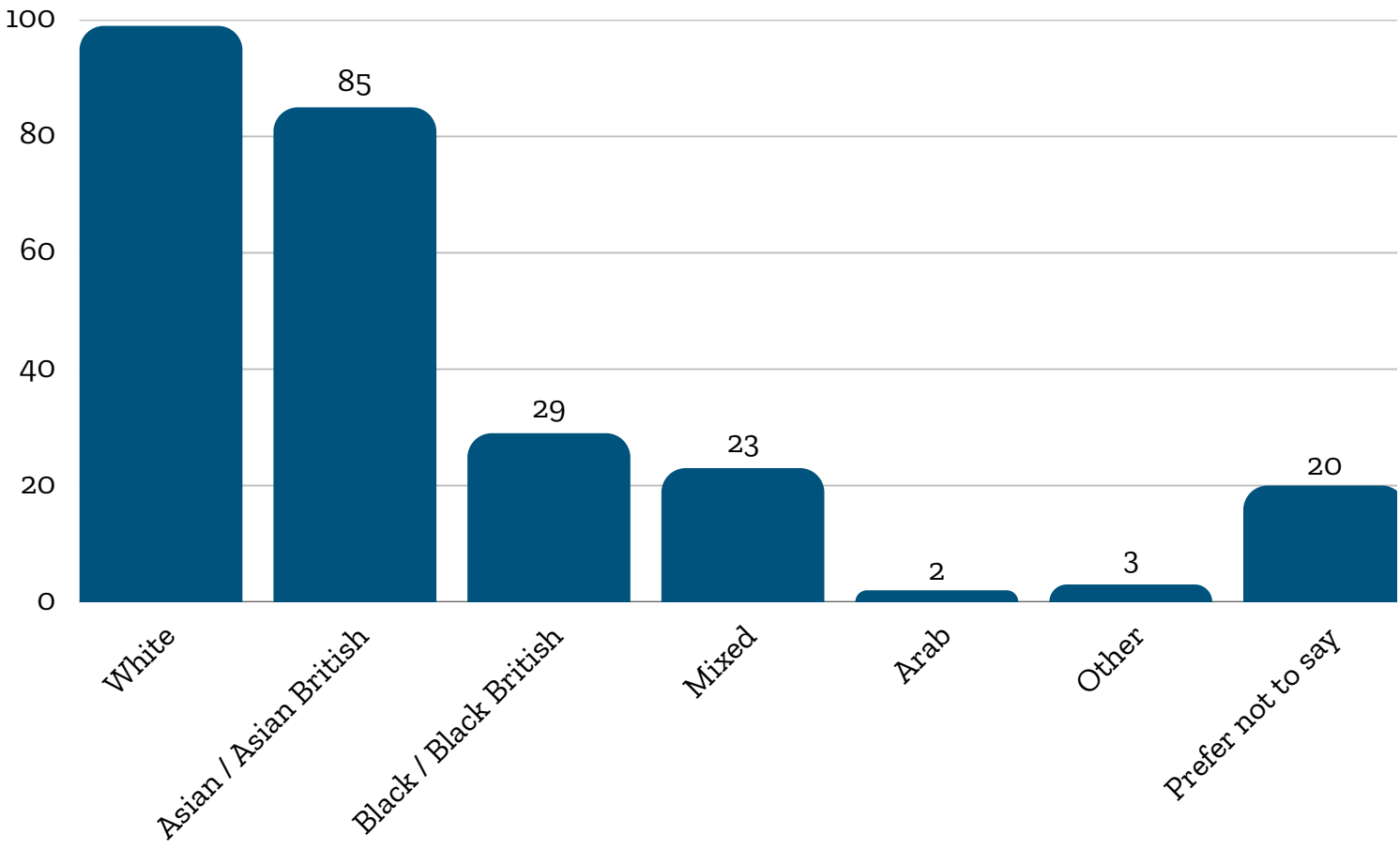
Responses by Year Group



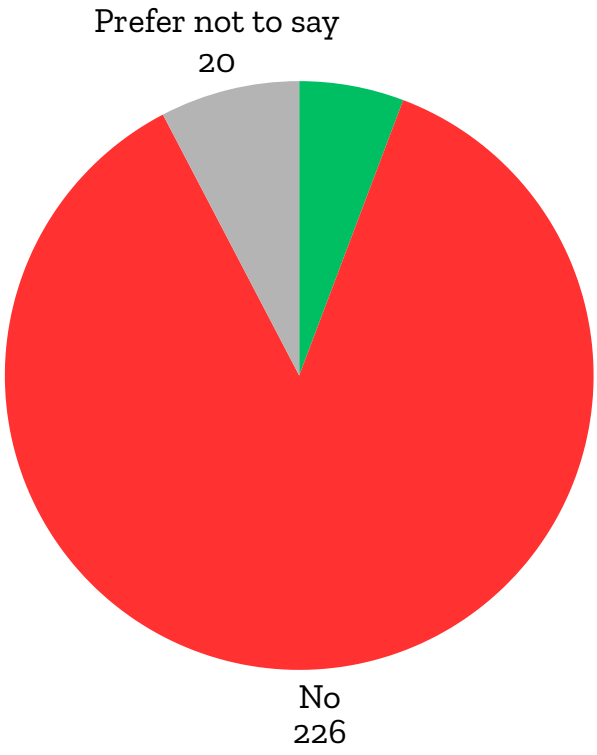
Responses by Gender



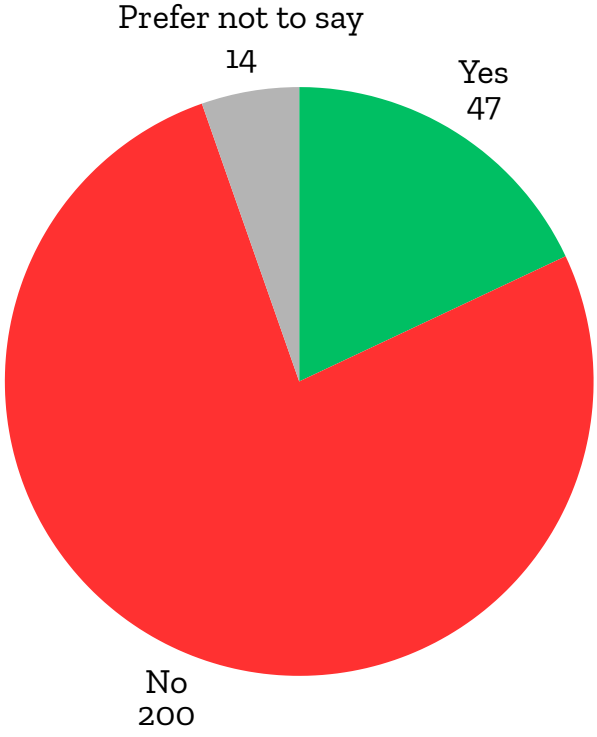
Responses by Ethnicity



Responses by SEN Status



Responses by Financial Support Status



Access Overview

Smartphone Access

Students with smartphone access
250

Students without smartphone access
11

Smartphone Access by Location

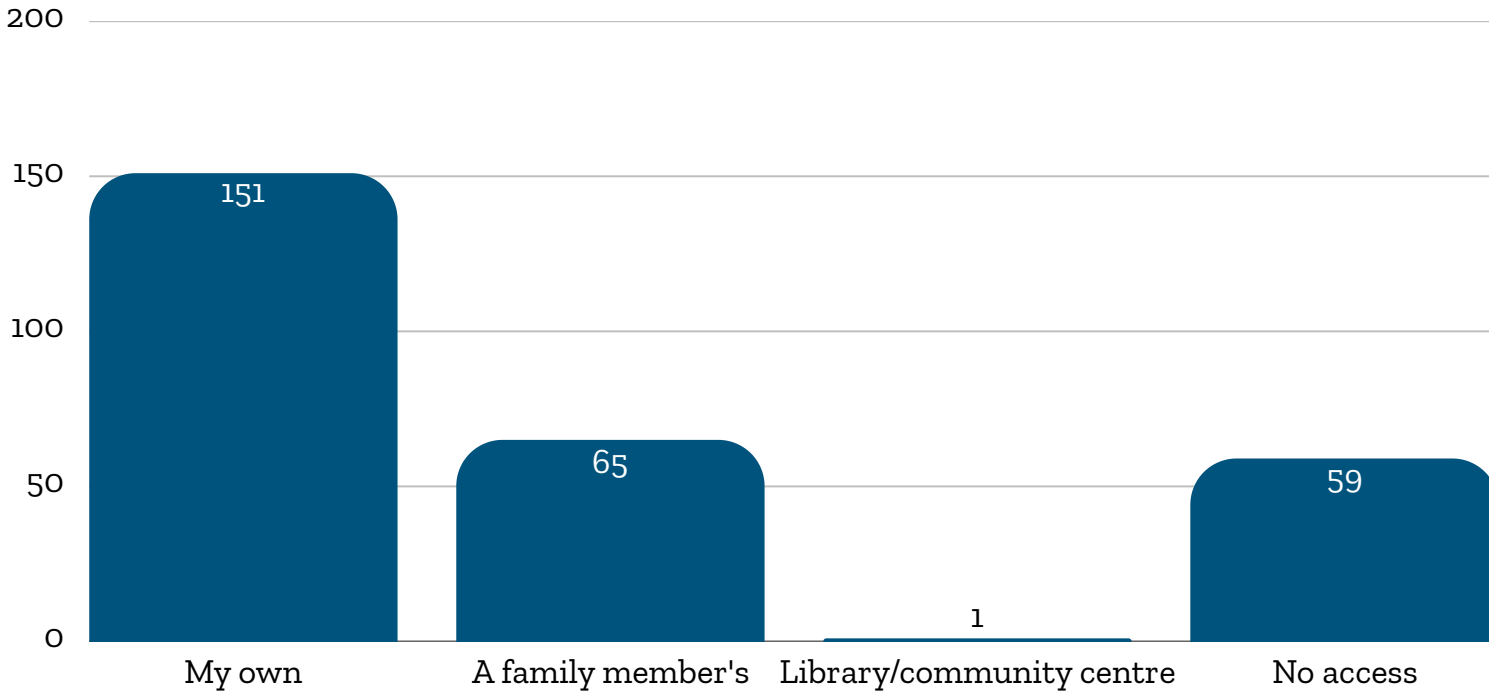
Insight
Smartphone access is almost universal among participating students, with only a small minority reporting no access. This provides a strong foundation for digital communication and online learning outside school. However, smartphones should not be viewed as a complete substitute for larger devices when completing coursework, creating documents or using specialist software.

Tablet Access

Students with tablet access
202

Students without tablet access
59

Tablet Access by Location



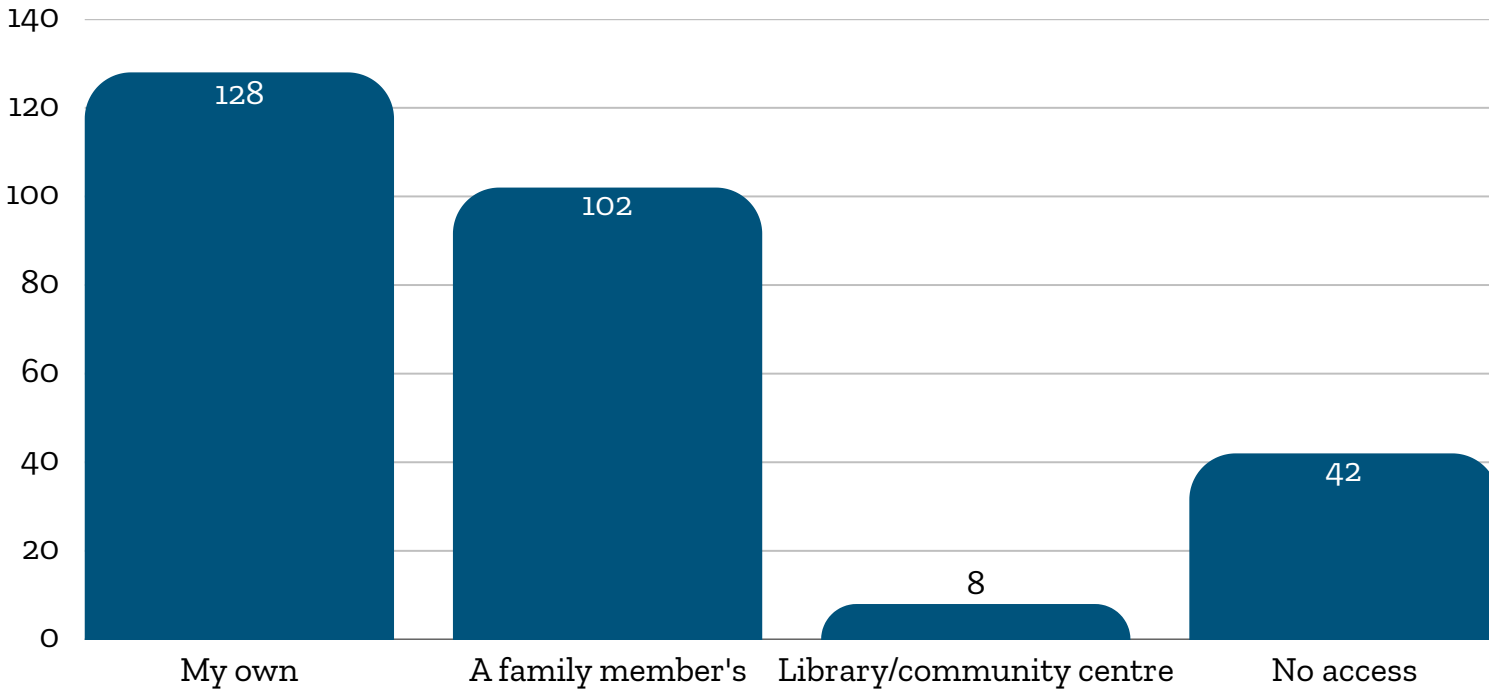
Insight
Tablet access is widespread, although a notable proportion of students rely on shared devices or have no access at all. While tablets can support many learning activities, they often have limitations for more advanced educational tasks, meaning they should complement rather than replace access to laptops or desktop computers.

Laptop Access

Students with laptop access
219

Students without laptop access
42

Laptop Access by Location



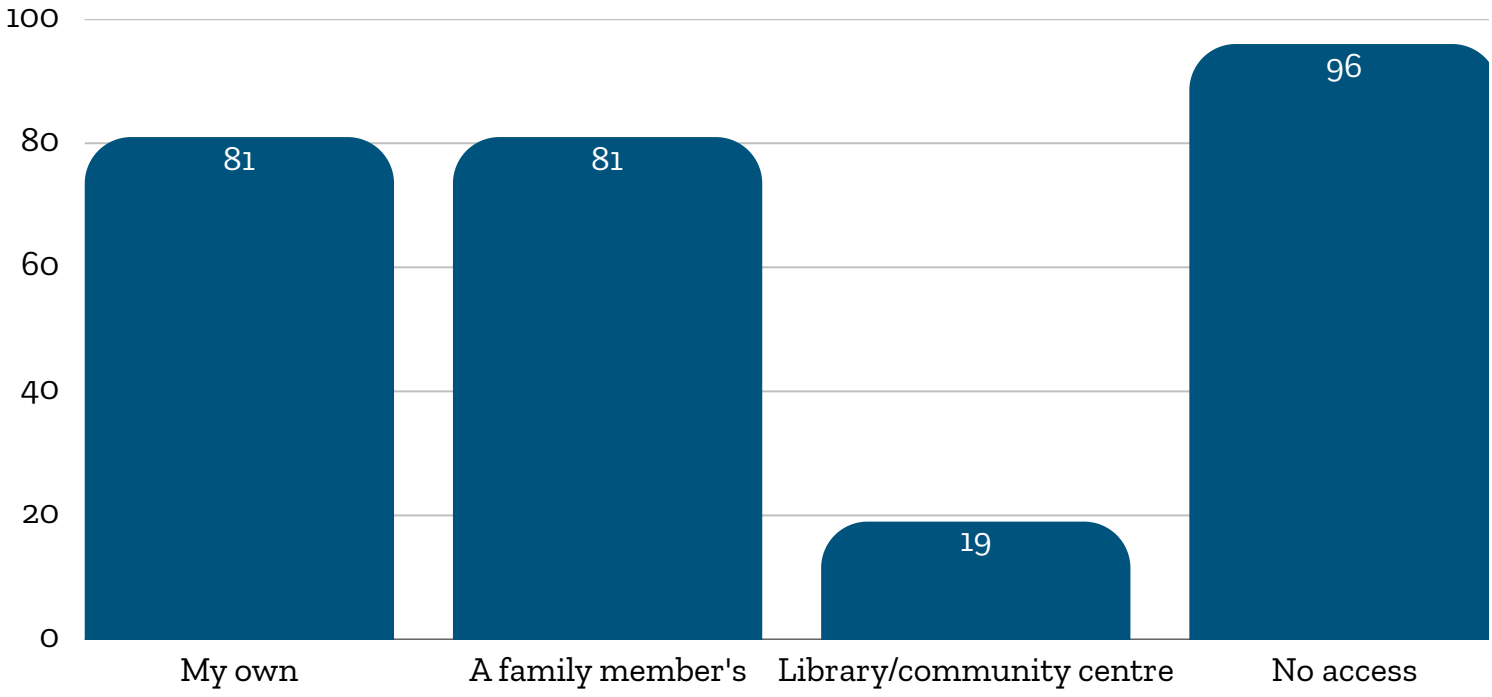
Insight
Most students have access to a laptop, but almost half of these rely on a shared household device rather than having one of their own. Shared access may reduce opportunities for independent study, particularly during busy periods such as homework deadlines or revision, highlighting the importance of considering both ownership and availability when assessing digital access.

Computer Access

Students with computer access
165

Students without computer access
96

Computer Access by Location



Insight

Desktop computer access is the lowest of the four device categories, with over one-third of students reporting no access. Although many digital tasks can now be completed on portable devices, desktop computers remain important for activities such as programming, multimedia creation and other resource-intensive applications. This may present a barrier for students wishing to develop more advanced digital skills outside school.

Confidence Overview

Computer Use
Average Confidence - 4 / 5

Smartphone Use
Average Confidence - 4.71 / 5

Sending Emails / Attachments
Average Confidence - 3.28 / 5

AI Use
Average Confidence - 3.77 / 5

Using Websites / Forms
Average Confidence - 3.86 / 5

Online Safety
Average Confidence - 3.5 / 5

Maintaining Passwords
Average Confidence - 4.08 / 5

Communication
Average Confidence - 3.97 / 5

Key finding
Students reported the greatest confidence using smartphones (4.71/5) and maintaining passwords (4.08/5), reflecting familiarity with everyday technology. Confidence was noticeably lower for sending emails and attachments (3.28/5), suggesting professional digital communication remains an area for development.

Online Safety Overview

I can identify a scam email or message.

Yes	No	Unsure
179	7	7

I know what to do if my account gets hacked.

Yes	No	Unsure
157	52	52

I understand how to check if a website is trustworthy.

Yes	No	Unsure
173	27	61

I have received a suspicious message or scam attempt before.

Yes	No	Unsure
182	50	29

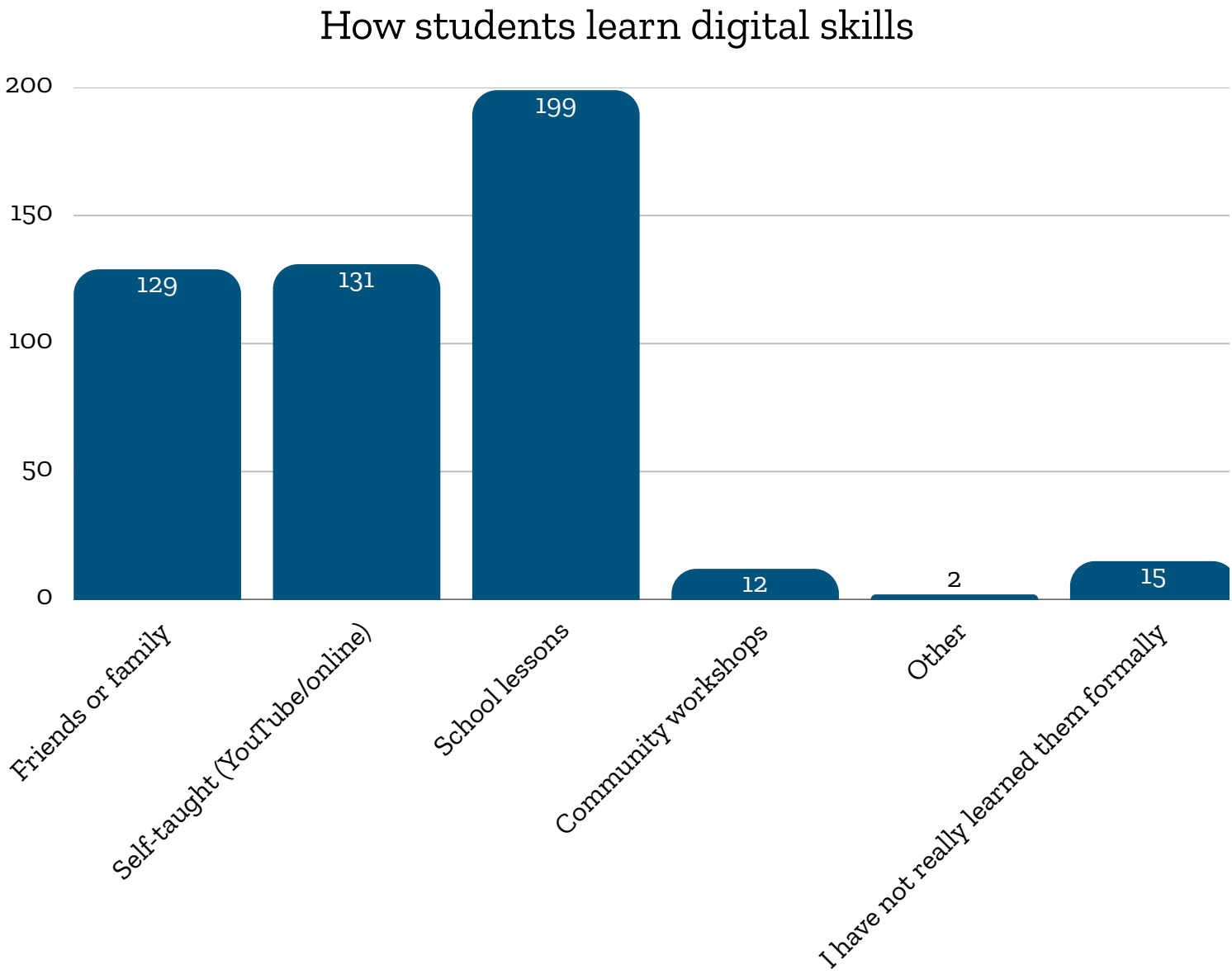
I have clicked on something online that later felt unsafe or suspicious.

Yes	No	Unsure
93	125	43

I feel safe when using the internet.

Yes	No	Unsure
196	18	47

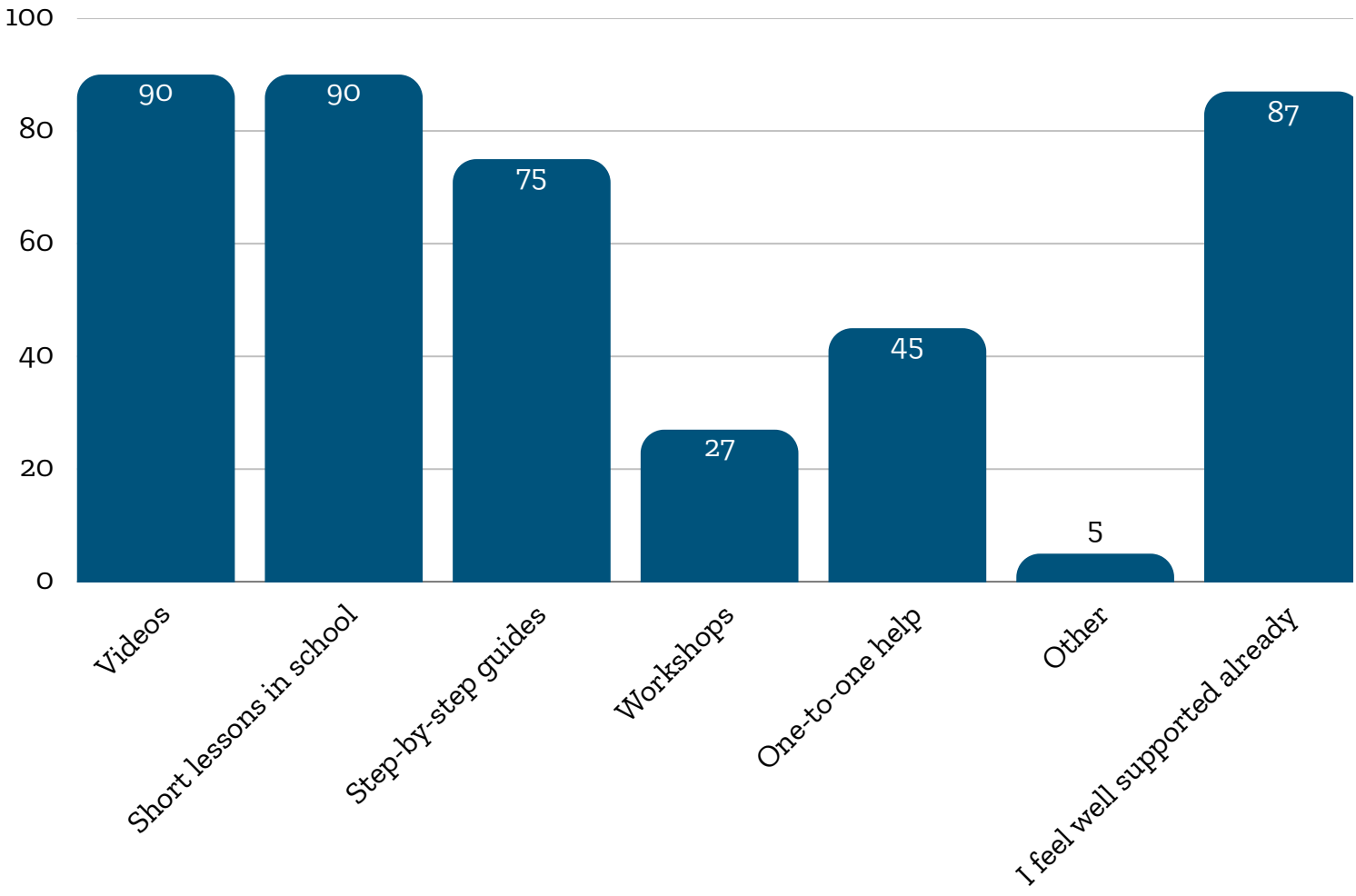
Learning Overview



Insight

Digital literacy is developed through a combination of formal education and independent learning. While school remains the primary source of digital skills education, students frequently supplement this through online resources and support from family members, highlighting the importance of encouraging safe independent learning.

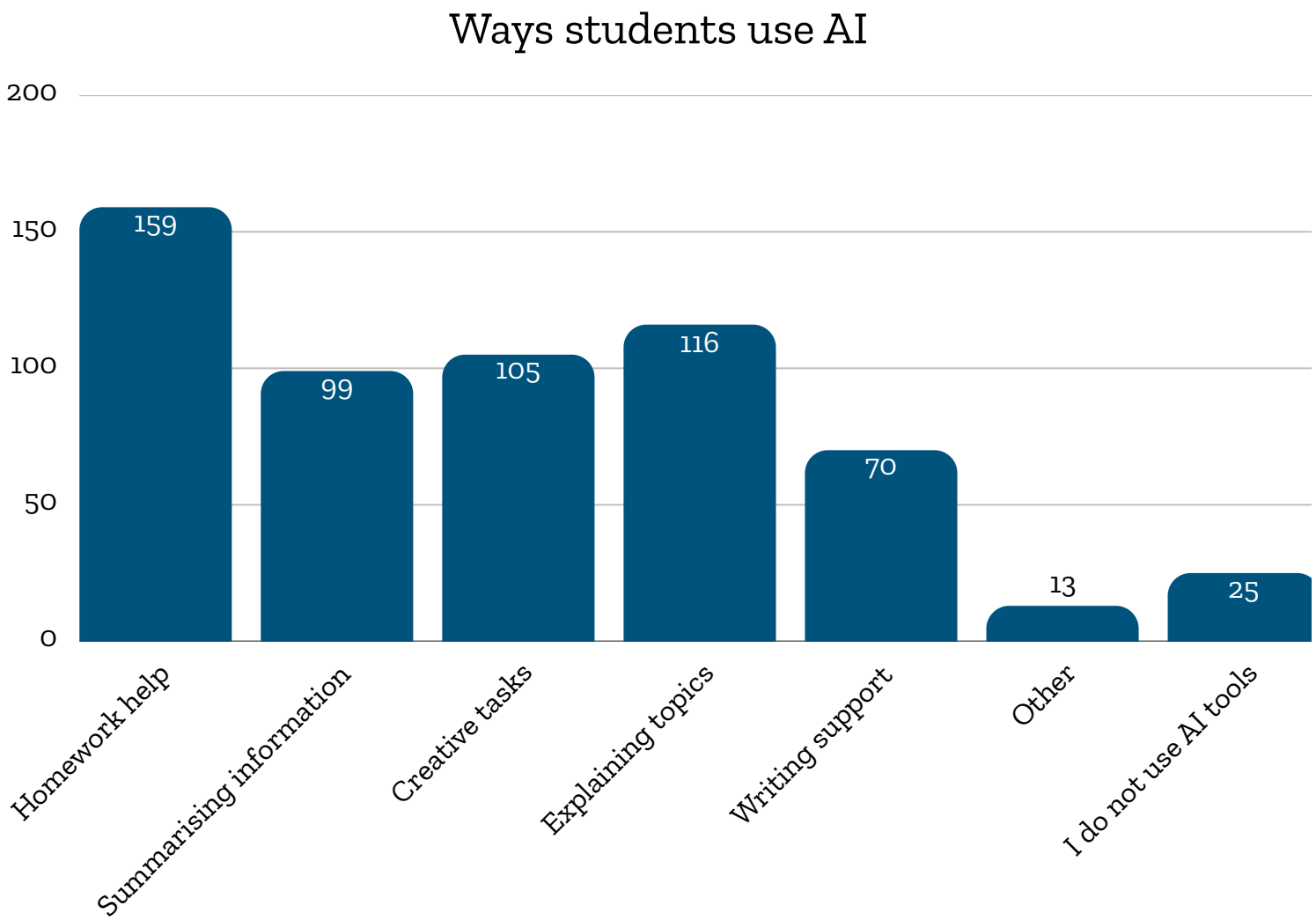
How they believe they could improve digital skills



AI Usage Overview

Have you used AI tools before?

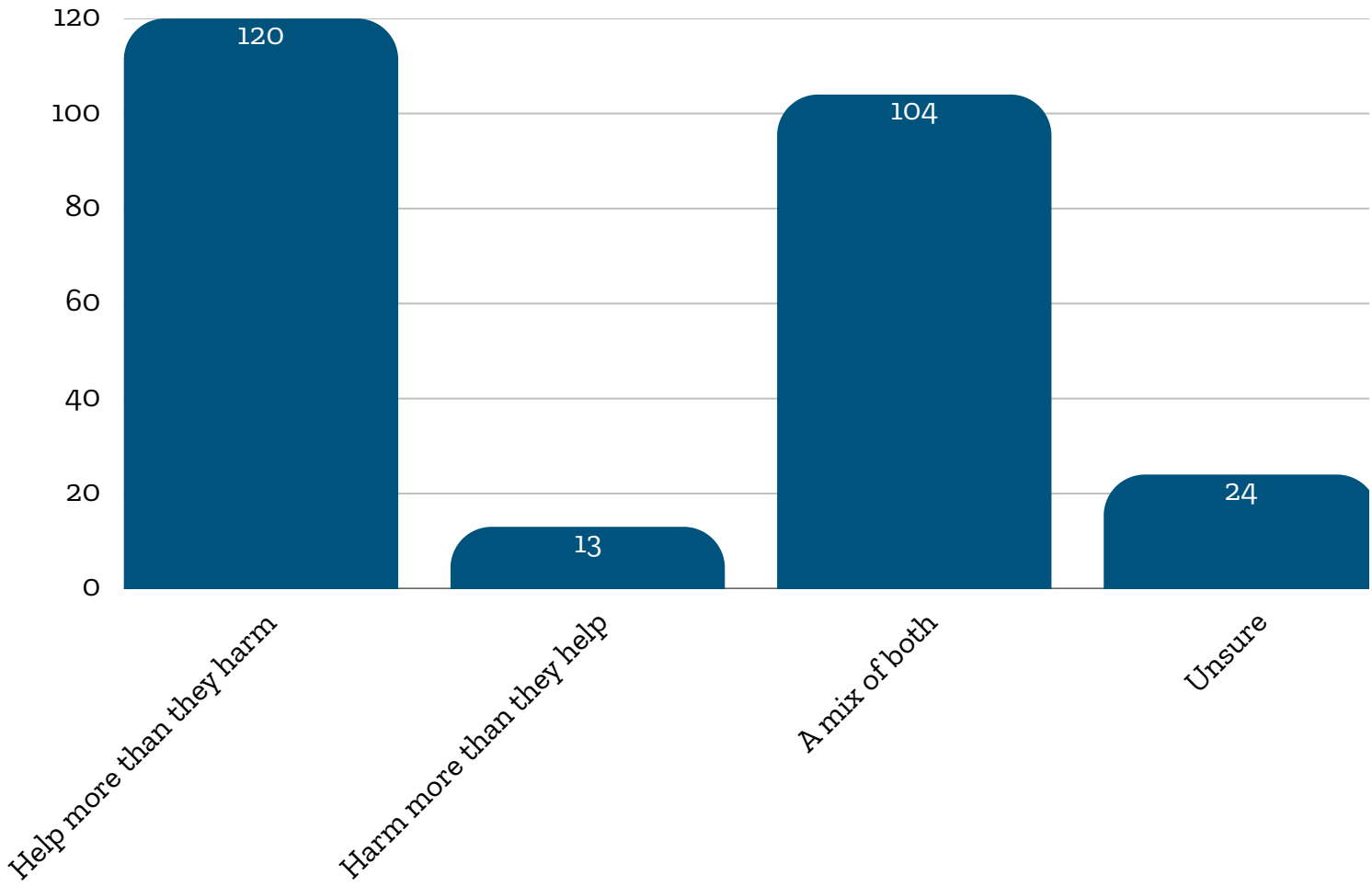
Yes, regularly	Yes, sometimes	No	Unsure
81	155	20	5



Have you been taught how to use AI safely, effectively and responsibly?

Yes	No	Unsure
165	50	46

Do you think AI tools help or make learning harder?



Verdict

AI tools have already become mainstream among students. Rather than preventing AI use, schools should focus on teaching responsible, critical and ethical use, ensuring students understand both the opportunities and limitations of generative AI.

Free Response Overview

Can you tell us about any challenges you face when using technology?

Theme	Summary
No challenges / Unsure	The largest group said they had no digital challenges, or answered "nothing", "none", "IDK" or similar.
Online safety	Many mentioned scams, unsafe websites, hacked accounts, or concerns about staying safe online.
School computers	Several found school computers confusing, slow or harder to use than their own devices.
Internet issues	Slow or unreliable internet was a recurring problem.
Literacy & typing	A few students said spelling or typing made using technology more difficult.
Learning specific skills	Some mentioned struggling with particular topics such as binary, using software, or finding information.

Overall takeaway

Most respondents don't perceive major barriers, but among those who do, the biggest issues relate to:

- Online safety
- School technology
- Internet reliability
- Confidence with specific digital skills

What do you believe could be implemented to support your use of technology?

Theme	Summary
Unsure / Nothing needed	Most students weren't sure what support they wanted or said they didn't need any.
More teaching	Requests for additional lessons, clearer explanations, and more opportunities to learn digital skills.
Practical support	Help with emails, files, software and everyday digital tasks.
One-to-one support	Some wanted personalised help rather than whole-class teaching.
Online safety education	Requests for more guidance on scams, safe websites and staying secure online.
Better resources	Suggestions included videos, different learning materials and improved school technology.
Teaching quality	A small number specifically mentioned wanting more supportive or effective teaching.

Overall takeaway

Students who asked for support generally wanted **practical, hands-on learning** rather than theoretical lessons. Common requests included:

- More digital skills lessons
- Help with everyday technology
- Better cybersecurity education
- Personalised support where needed

Key Findings

1. Access to technology is strong, but inequalities remain

Smartphone access among participating students is almost universal, demonstrating that most young people have a reliable means of accessing digital services. However, access to devices better suited to education is less consistent. Around one in six students reported no access to a laptop, while over one in three lacked access to a desktop computer. This highlights that internet access alone does not guarantee equal opportunities to develop digital skills or complete technology-based schoolwork.

2. Students are confident with everyday technology but less prepared for professional digital environments

Students expressed high confidence using smartphones and general computer technology, reflecting their familiarity with everyday digital tools. Confidence was noticeably lower when carrying out tasks associated with education and employment, particularly sending emails with attachments. This suggests that schools have an important role in developing workplace-ready digital skills alongside general digital confidence.

3. Cybersecurity awareness is encouraging, but practical resilience requires further development

Most students reported that they could identify scams and felt safe online. However, a significant minority were unsure how to respond if an online account became compromised or how to determine whether a website could be trusted. In addition, many students reported having encountered scams or suspicious online content. These findings indicate that cybersecurity education should increasingly focus on practical decision-making and real-world scenarios rather than awareness alone.

4. Artificial intelligence has become part of students' everyday learning

The overwhelming majority of students have used artificial intelligence tools, with many reporting that they use them to support homework, explain difficult topics and summarise information. Most respondents also believe that AI benefits learning more than it harms it. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into education, schools should continue developing guidance that encourages responsible, ethical and effective use rather than discouraging its adoption.

5. Students value practical digital skills education

While many respondents reported feeling well supported, those requesting additional help consistently favoured practical learning approaches. Students highlighted a desire for more hands-on teaching, clearer explanations, cybersecurity education and personalised support. These findings suggest that practical digital literacy activities may have greater impact than purely theoretical instruction.

Strategic Recommendations

Based on the findings from the 2025/26 pilot, The Refract Foundation recommends that schools consider the following actions:

- Continue embedding digital literacy across the curriculum rather than limiting it to computing lessons.
- Increase opportunities for students to practise professional digital skills, including email communication, file management and collaborative working.
- Deliver regular, scenario-based cybersecurity education covering phishing, scams, password management and account recovery.
- Develop clear guidance on the safe, responsible and effective use of artificial intelligence within learning.
- Identify students experiencing digital disadvantage and provide targeted support where appropriate through device access schemes, additional training or personalised interventions.
- Repeat Census annually to measure progress, evaluate interventions and identify emerging trends over time.

Looking Ahead

This report represents the first Census undertaken by The Refract Foundation. While based on a single pilot school, the findings demonstrate the value of collecting consistent evidence about students' digital experiences, confidence and access to technology.

As we look to expand Census to additional schools, future reports will enable benchmarking across institutions, year-on-year trend analysis and the development of national indicators that help education leaders better understand digital opportunity, digital inclusion and emerging skills gaps.

The Refract Foundation looks forward to continuing this work in partnership with schools to ensure every young person has the knowledge, confidence and opportunities needed to thrive in an increasingly digital society.

Support Our Mission

Refract is entirely youth-led. Your donation helps us deliver programmes, events and resources that empower young people through technology and education. donate.refractfoundation.org

refract
foundation

Last revised by oliver@refractfoundation.org on 09/07/2026.