

AI has entered the classroom - but is it the solution for overworked teachers?

Schools across the UK are trialling the use of deepfake teachers and even employing remote staff to deliver lessons hundreds of miles away from the classroom. It comes as the use of AI is becoming increasingly prevalent in schools. The government says AI has the power to transform education, and improve teacher workload, particularly around admin for teachers. The BBC has spoken to teachers, school leaders and unions who seem divided on what the future of the UK's classrooms should look like.

Emily Cooke is a maths teacher at The Valley Leadership Academy in Lancashire, which has hired a virtual maths teacher - a decision Mrs Cooke is strongly against. "Will your virtual teacher be there to dance with you at prom, hug your mum during results day, or high-five you in the corridor because they know you won the match last night?" she says. Mrs Cooke says: "As a parent, as a teacher, I don't think that teacher-student relationship, which is so important, can be formed or replicated over a screen."

The school told the BBC that its approach is a "win-win", where "pupils benefit from lessons delivered by an outstanding specialist teacher online" who is supported in the classroom by a second teacher.

Mr Ierston believes clever use of AI can help to free up teachers' time to focus on building students' character, leadership and resilience. Teachers there can already use its AI system to mark assessments and mock exams, which they say is more accurate. Director of AI at the trust, Benjamin Barker, says the AI technology can identify gaps in students' learning and help teachers to plan future lessons.

After marking, the AI deepfake will produce a bespoke feedback video for each child. The technology is due to be trialled this year, before getting feedback from staff, students and parents. Using AI "as a leveller" will make sure every child gets "personalised tuition", with the teacher in the room making sure they understand, Mr Ierston says. Having a deepfake will be "completely voluntary for teachers", he adds.

"What we're not trying to do is replace teachers," says Mr Ierston. "We're trying to use technology - things that have got a bad reputation - and see how it can be used to benefit society. "That's the future." Deepfakes will also be used to help absent pupils catch up from home, or to translate parent messages into the 46 languages spoken across the schools.

Technology, screens and AI in the classroom are divisive topics, particularly among parents. "I think it's fair to say that parents are deeply sceptical about AI," says Frank Young, chief policy officer of charity Parentkind, a national charity that aims to give parents a voice in education. Just 12% think AI should be used in the classroom, according to its annual survey results, which over 5,000 parents responded to in April this year. "But I think we can get there if parents are provided with reassurance over how this AI will be used and how it will benefit the children," Mr Young says.