

Too many Australian students don't have the basic technology they need for school—here are 5 ways to fix this

December 4 2024, by Azadeh Dastyari



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

We often assume Australian students are great with technology and have access to a computer, reliable internet and adequate data.

But this is not necessarily the case, despite the importance of technology to our lives.

In [our research](#) released today, we surveyed 445 New South Wales school teachers and staff. They told us significant numbers of students are missing out on the basic technology and skills they need for their education.

What is 'digital inclusion'

Digital inclusion means everyone can access and can use [digital technology](#) fairly and equally.

A [growing body of research](#) shows digital inequality can mirror social inequality. Marginalized and under-served communities, such as [Indigenous peoples](#), those from [lower socioeconomic](#) and [non-English speaking backgrounds](#), are often also digitally excluded.

Students need to have an appropriate device to work on—such as a laptop or computer, fast internet and adequate data. They also need to have the skills to use this technology and technical support if they need it.

International [research shows those](#) who do not have proper access to technology cannot fully participate in their schooling and are at risk of falling behind their peers. So, digital exclusion can have serious consequences for children and young people's education.

Our research

Concerns about some students not having access to technology [are not new](#). But the pandemic and online learning [highlighted the issue](#).

Although we are now out of lockdown, lack of access to technology remains a problem for many students.

To better understand the situation, in 2023 we surveyed 445 NSW teachers, principals and support staff to gauge their concerns about digital exclusion before, during and after the pandemic. The responses came from primary and high schools in both public and private sectors.

We were particularly interested in Western Sydney due to concerns raised by local service providers. We also gathered responses from other parts of Sydney and regional NSW.

What we found

We found during [school closures](#), extra resources (such as laptops and dongles) were provided to students who needed them. However, much of this support ended after the lockdowns.

With rising costs of living, school staff told us many students now have less access to the technology they need than before the pandemic. This is despite schools increasingly relying on it for learning.

There was a stark divide between responses from teachers in government schools and [private schools](#).

When asked if they believed technology provided by schools for students to take home was adequate, only 46% of government school teachers said yes, compared to 96% of non-government teachers.

There was also a geographical difference. Only 25% of teachers in Western Sydney thought school provisions were adequate, compared to 36% in regional NSW and 76% in the rest of Sydney.

Not enough resources at home

Many teachers also identified issues with students access to technology outside of school. Asked if students had adequate access to devices for learning at home, only 32% of teachers from Western Sydney said yes, compared to 39% in regional NSW and 59% in the rest of Sydney.

Many students also relied solely on mobile phones to complete their schoolwork at home, even though these devices are not suitable for most educational tasks. This included 37% of students in Western Sydney, 25% in regional NSW and 17% in other parts of Sydney.

Asked if they thought students had adequate technical support at home: 10% of teachers from Western Sydney said yes, compared to 5% in regional NSW and 24% for the rest of Sydney.

School staff also told us very few students from groups we know to be vulnerable to digital exclusion had the technology they needed. Asked if students had sufficient access, could afford and adequately use the technology they needed for their education, they estimated this was the case for:

- 19% of asylum seeker and refugee students
- 28% of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds
- 30% of Indigenous students
- 34% of students from non-English speaking backgrounds and "students with physical disabilities"
- 36% of "students with special needs".

How can we improve digital access for students?

Our research also outlines five ways we can improve students' access to

the technology they need for their education and life beyond school.

1. Do not assume students are digitally included: schools need to recognize many students may not have devices, internet at home or skills when planning lessons and activities

2. Meet students' digital needs: schools should review "Bring Your Own Device" policies to ensure they don't disadvantage students. Governments may need to provide more funding so all students have access to the technology they need

3. Teach digital literacy in schools: develop school-specific resources, including materials in [different languages](#) and partner with local organizations to help parents support their children's learning

4. Invest in community infrastructure: provide areas of high need with free and safe public Wi-Fi and create "device banks" to lend equipment to students in need

5. Schools and researchers need to work together to collect better information: so they can better understand the problem and find solutions.

If we allow this level of digital exclusion to persist, the consequences could be serious for individual students, our economy and society. If we make changes now, we can ensure all students have the tools they need to navigate an increasingly digital world.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Too many Australian students don't have the basic technology they need for school—here are 5 ways to fix this (2024, December 4) retrieved 4 October 2025 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-12-australian-students-dont-basic-technology.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.