# A new world of learning

Doing schoolwork in the 21st century has fundamentally changed.

Advances in computing and the internet have driven wide-ranging societal change in the way we work, play, and understand the world around us. In order to prepare our children for the realities of today's world – including the workplace and further education – classrooms and school education have necessarily had to evolve.

Educational programs and services are increasingly delivered online. Schoolwork is both done and submitted online. Preparing assignments and presentations happens online. As does researching and managing information.

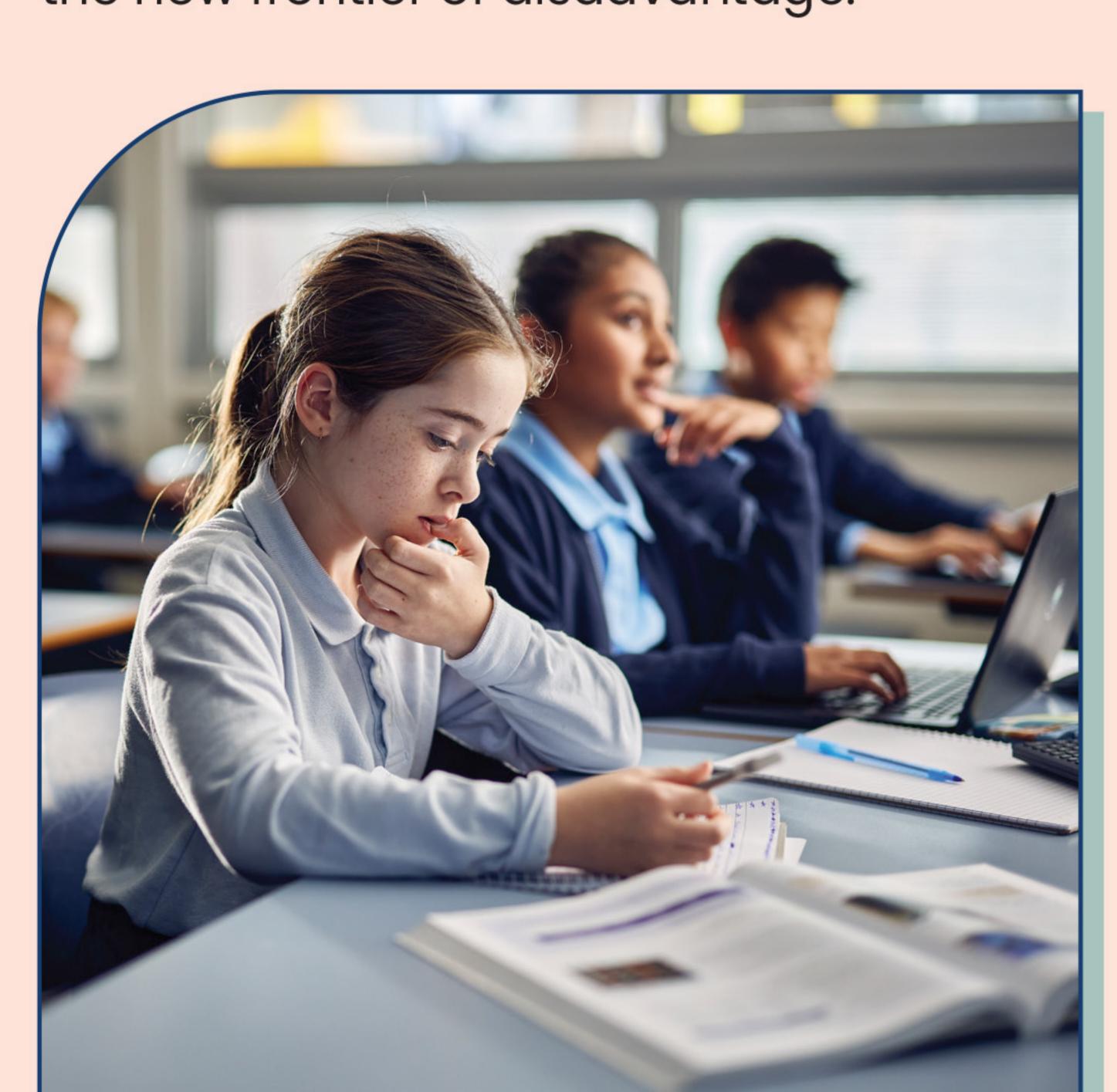
To fully participate in class, do their homework and assignments, and make the most of their schooling, it is essential students today have access to a digital device, the internet, and digital literacy skills.



Research by Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Deloitte Access Economics (2021) tells us that **87% of jobs require digital literacy skills**<sup>1</sup>, so it's vital for their future prospects that we can support more young people to develop their digital skills and problem-solving abilities.

## A new frontier of disadvantage

One in six Australian children and young people is living in poverty.<sup>2</sup> Because of this many do not have access to the digital essentials they need to participate fully at school. This is digital inequality, the new frontier of disadvantage.



The consequences for children are serious, as they struggle to keep up with their peers, their self-confidence can suffer and they risk disengaging with school altogether.

Digital inequality can impact a child's ability to fully participate in their education. This puts their future learning and employment opportunities at risk.

The consequences for children who are excluded by poverty from digital access, are likely to translate into lost opportunities and restricted options for work, education, and social inclusion.

All children deserve access to the digital essentials that allow them to engage fully in their schoolwork, do their homework and assignments, and make the most of their schooling.



Our families who have received Digital Learning Essentials found the following:



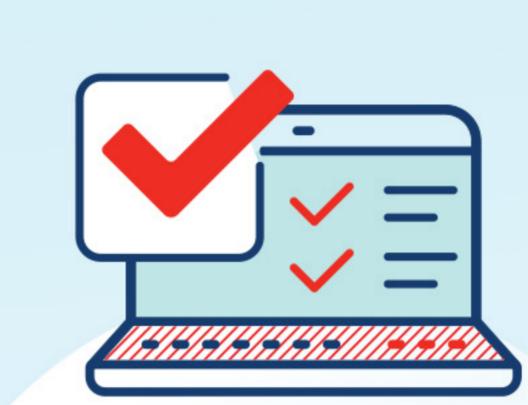
97%

of parents said
having a laptop and
internet has helped
their children's
education<sup>5</sup>



810/6

of parents said their children's computer skills have improved<sup>5</sup>



80%

of parents said their children's ability to do schoolwork has improved<sup>5</sup>

Our Digital Learning Essentials program is a powerful new pillar of support that complements our learning and mentoring programs and scholarship, aimed to equip students with the tools they need to learn today and change tomorrow.

Please donate to help children access the digital learning tools they need to make the most of their schooling and fulfil their potential.



1800 024 069

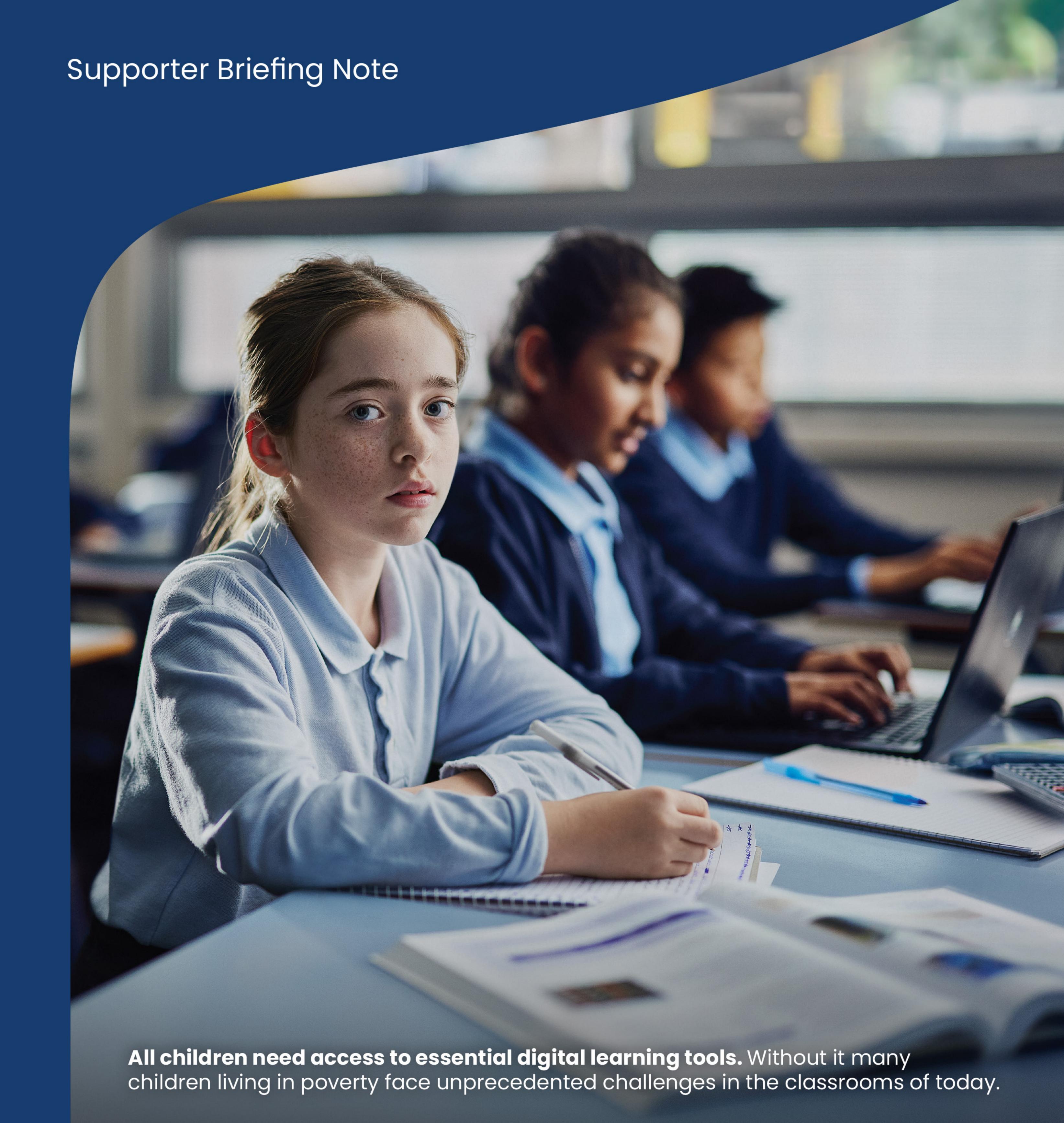


#### References:

- 1. Ready, set, upskill: Effective training for the jobs of tomorrow (2021). RMIT Online and Deloitte Access Economics.
- 2. Poverty in Australia (2020). ACOSS/UNSW Report.
- Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Holcombe-James, I., Ormond-Parker, L., & Ganley, L. (2023). Measuring Australia's Digital
- Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2023. Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.
- 4. The Smith Family Pulse Survey (2022).
- 5. The Smith Family Digital Inclusion Survey with Learning for Life families (2022).



Digital inequality – the new frontier of disadvantage



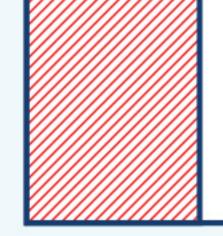
## Australia's Digital Divide

Research led by RMIT University tracks changes in Australia's Digital Inclusion Index, which measures the extent to which Australians: 3

- 1. Have access to digital resources
- 2. Have the ability to utilise those resources, and
- 3. Can afford them.

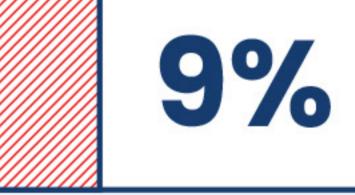
RMIT has identified an alarming digital divide within Australia. Nearly 1 in 4 Australians are considered excluded or highly excluded, with low-income families one of the groups most likely to be impacted.3

#### **AUSTRALIAN DIGITAL INCLUSION INDEX 2023<sup>3</sup>**

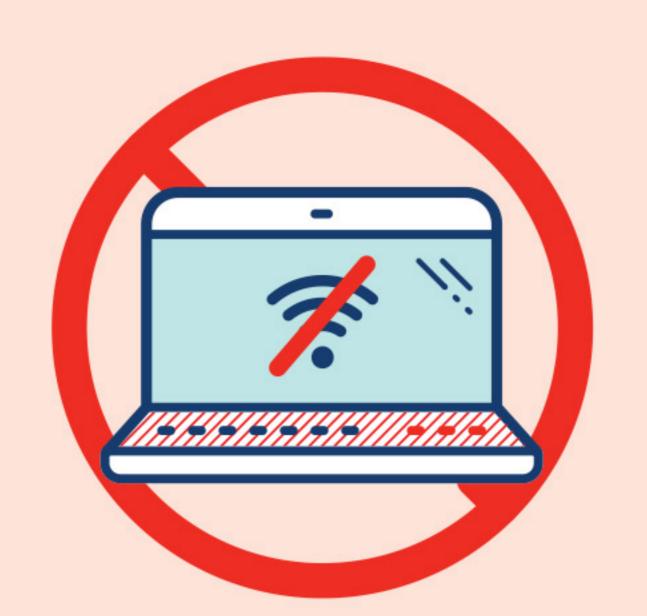


14%

AUSTRALIANS - EXCLUDED



AUSTRALIANS - HIGHLY EXCLUDED



#### ACCESS

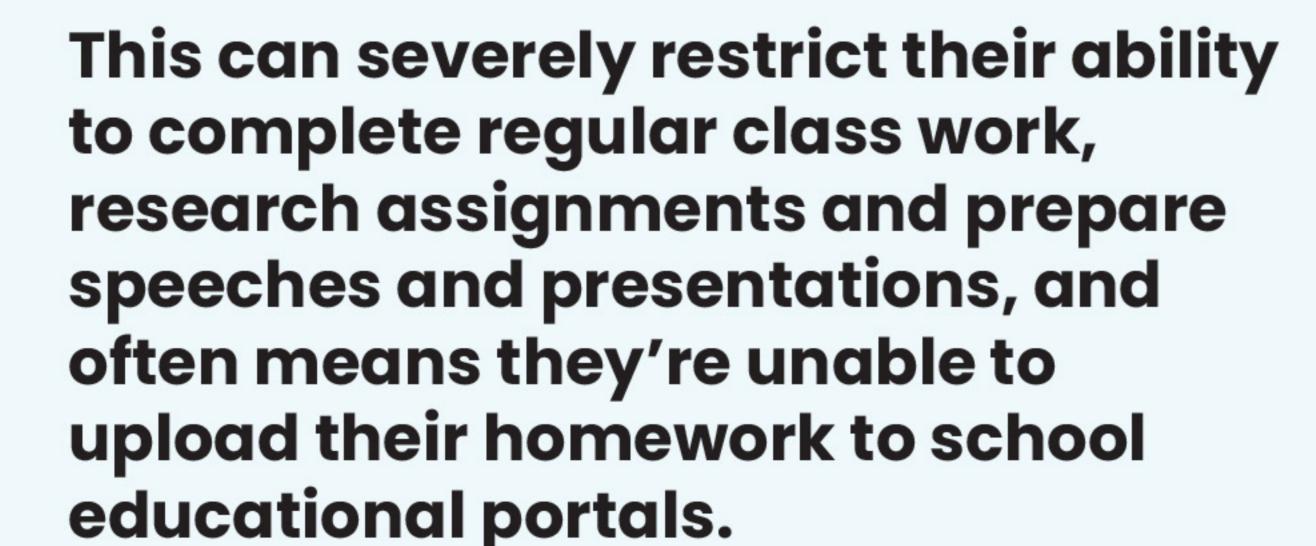
To be considered "digitally included" under this research, people need:

- Access to a suitable device for digital needs,
- A reliable internet connection, and
- A sufficient volume of data.

However, many Australian families living with financial disadvantage do not have this access, with quite a few relying on mobile phones as their sole means of access to all the online services they need, including education-related services.

Without adequate access, students struggle to access necessary program applications and online learning programs they need to do schoolwork.

They are constrained by using inadequate alternatives like mobile phones that are slow, difficult to use, and that do not work for educational programs, including STEM subjects that often require a laptop.



Despite being as hardworking and capable as their peers, their marks often don't reflect their ability simply as a result of the fact that they are digitally excluded.



#### AFFORDABILITY

As the name suggests, this dimension measures peoples' capacity to afford the devices, internet connection and data resources required for all their digital needs.

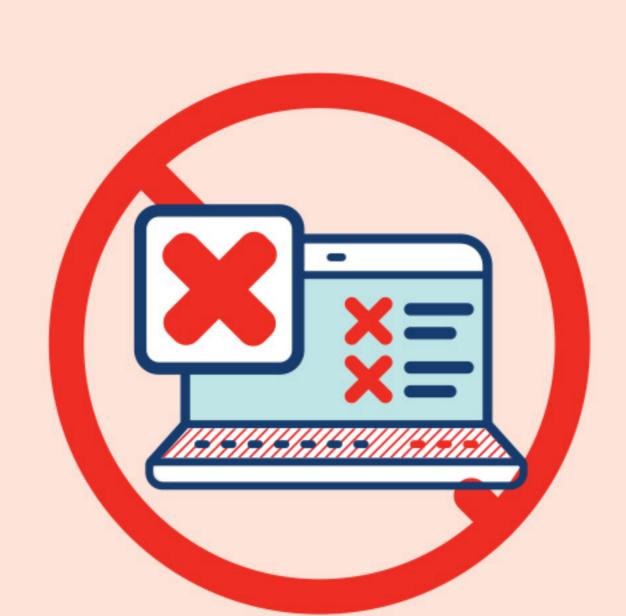
The research reveals that 28% of Australians experience affordability stress, meaning that accessing a quality internet connection and necessary devices would compromise their capacity to pay for other essential household items.3 All families want the best for their children, but with the rising cost of living, many households can't afford digital tools and learning resources, creating an unequal environment in the classroom.



The Smith Family Pulse Survey 2022 revealed:

- 1 in 2 parents said they won't be able to afford the digital devices their children need to do schoolwork.4
- 81% of parents expect the impact of poverty on children to worsen in the next year due to cost of living increases.4

The increase in cost of living pressures are putting these digital resources even further out of reach, making it harder still for families to provide the essentials children need for school.



#### ABILITY

Where students and families have had limited access to digital resources, there is a strong chance they have not had the opportunity to develop the digital literacy skills needed for school and beyond.

This skill gap poses a number of challenges when endeavouring to navigate the online school system and educational services.

Children and parents alike can find it challenging to navigate and understand online school portals, admin and communications. They are unfamiliar with accessing online learning programs used by teachers for homework and classwork, simply because they've not been exposed to digital technology. This severely limits a parent's ability to support their children when they need help with their homework.



This lower level of digital literacy can impact a student's ability to make the most of their schooling in primary and secondary years, but also impacts their confidence to use technology - required for further study and employment.

## Your role in a comprehensive and innovative response

The Smith Family has recognised that addressing digital inequality is a key priority to help give more Australian students the best opportunity to participate fully in learning and the future opportunities it provides.

The Smith Family's teams on the ground have seen a deepening of the digital divide, affecting children's learning and future opportunities. They are continuously assessing the effectiveness of programs and research to drive innovation, ensuring that all Australian children are well-equipped to finish school successfully.

#### Education is a powerful change agent.

Ensuring students have access to all the resources to make the most of their education will help them learn today and change tomorrow. It is imperative to act now to ensure the impact of the digital divide doesn't worsen.

The new Digital Learning Essentials program is a comprehensive, innovative, and end-to-end solution for children facing digital inequality.

### YOUR GIFT WILL HELP SUPPORT A CHILD THROUGH THE NEW DIGITAL LEARNING ESSENTIALS PROGRAM.

#### This program provides:

In the classroom and at home, a reliable

laptop is the foundation of a child's digital

education, providing an essential window

into a world of learning opportunities.

The Smith Family operate in do not

provide laptops to students.

Many schools in the communities that



An education-ready refurbished laptop so they have the tools they need.



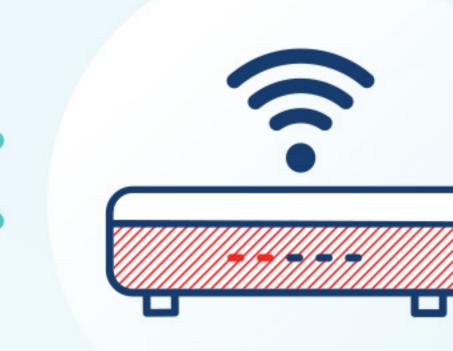
Digital literacy skills and safety support to help make the most of their new tools.

Digital Learning Essentials provides students and families with digital skills support to develop the confidence they need to access and understand the digital school environment, and navigate the internet safely and securely.



Technical support for the child and their family.

This critical part of the program ensures the child's laptop and internet connection is correctly set up, that they and the family can access all the learning programs and school resources they need, as well as providing access to a technical helpline to keep it all working.



Reliable internet access to empower studies and

A car without petrol. A train without tracks. A laptop is almost powerless without the internet. The Digital Learning Essentials program provides families who need it with reliable internet access to enable online learning and research.

