Optus Digital Thumbprint Program

Impact Report 2021

Contents

Foreword

Since 2013, Optus Digital Thumbprint has provided relevant, impactful workshops and support materials to enable young people to participate safely online, with the tools they need for positive, responsible and authentic experiences. As a behavioural change program, our aim is to achieve measurable change in student attitudes toward digital safety and an increase in positive behaviours such as help-seeking actions.

This Impact Report outlines key findings from evaluation undertaken in 2021 and observed trends over the years the program has been in operation. Digital Thumbprint continues to provide a comprehensive offering for teachers and students, when they need it most. The program is delivered nationally in both metropolitan and regional locations, and has been endorsed by the e-Safety Commissioner as a Trusted eSafety Provider.

Our support for parents and families has also grown with new workshops, vlogs, and articles all designed to provide opportunity and tips for healthy conversations on digital safety.

Providing continued and relevant support to young people & educators

Our evaluation results demonstrate that the program continues to provide crucial support to young Australians, teachers and parents in not only increasing awareness of digital citizenship topics, but also promoting important behaviours and skills relevant in keeping young Australians safe online.

Digital citizenship education has been redefined

The education landscape has shifted in response to COVID-19 and redefined the way that Australian students interact with their educators and peers. The sudden, and in some cases sustained, disruption to school life brought new challenges and amplified existing ones for teachers and their students, most notably regarding a significant increase in time spent online.

To respond to this new reality, Digital Thumbprint has transitioned to an enhanced digital delivery model, with virtual facilitator-led delivery and teacher-led digital interactive workshops. As we enter the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, this blended delivery model ensures teachers and students across Australia can remain connected to critical digital education should they be in the classroom or remote learning.

The important role of parents

With many students swapping the classroom for the kitchen table, parents became an even more important part of young peoples' digital education. Not only did they serve as everyday support for technical issues and discipline to online learning schedules, parents increasingly encountered the reality of young people engaging with technology throughout the day. Many parents found this challenging and Optus sought to support them through Digital Thumbprint's interactive parent workshops and vlogs to increase digital literacy. Parents were supported to navigate privacy settings in popular apps, understand what games their young people were engaging in, and even learn language that is common online to help them to facilitate safe and open discussions at home.

Helen Maisano
Director - Group Sustainability
OPTUS

Snapshot - Digital Thumbprint **impact** in 2021

Digital Thumbprint is helping students to participate safely and authentically online through five key topic areas.
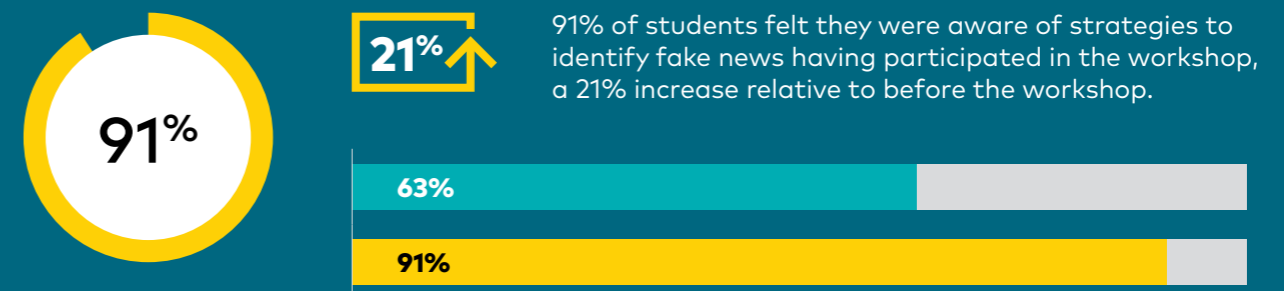
Digital Discernment & Fake News – helping young people identify and combat "fake news"

91%

21% ↑

91% of students felt they were aware of strategies to identify fake news having participated in the workshop, a 21% increase relative to before the workshop.

63%

91%

Cyber Security – helping keep students' information secure

96%

17% ↑

Almost 20% more students knew how to keep their personal data secure after attending a Cyber Security workshop.

79%

96%

Digital Identity – linking young people's online behaviour to real-life outcomes

95%

21% ↑

After the workshop, 95% of students understood the importance of their personal brand for future job opportunities, a 21% increase from before the workshop.

74%

95%

Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online – building understanding and awareness of online abuse

100%

Every teacher who observed the Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships workshop believed that their students better understood how to identify cyberbullying and image-based abuse.

Digital Balance – empowering students to take back control of screen time

86%

23% ↑

Following the workshop, students were 23% more likely to feel in control of their use of technology.

64%

86%
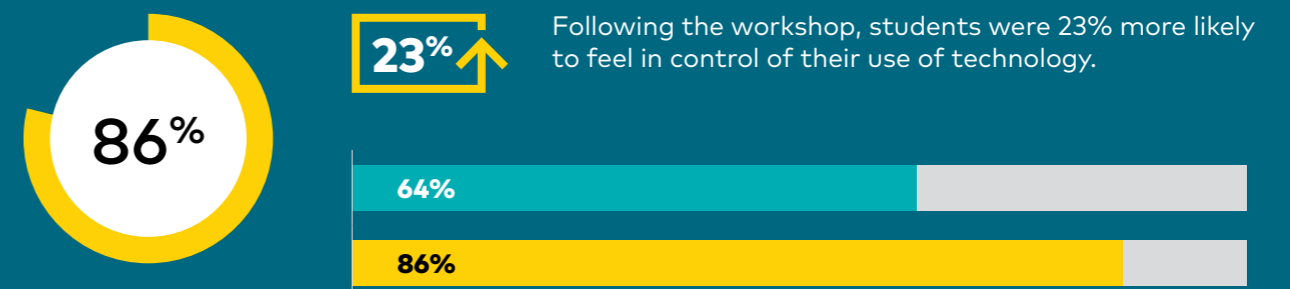
Glendenning Public School, NSW

As a result of the program:

87%

Of students indicated that they would be more likely to check the strength of their passwords for their accounts as a result of the Digital Thumbprint program

82%

Of teachers indicated that their students would be more likely to take actions to secure their personal data as a result of the Digital Thumbprint program

81%

Of students felt that the content of the workshops was relevant to them right away or in the next few years (33% increase since 2019, pre COVID-19)

100%

Of teachers indicated that the content of the teacher-led digital workshops will be relevant to their students right away

73%

Of teachers felt that their students had raised topics covered in the teacher-led workshops either in class or informally with their peers

Key challenges in the digital world

Digital Thumbprint has been delivering digital citizenship education since 2013, with the digital landscape evolving considerably over this time. Young people today engage in an increasingly complicated digital world, presented with the challenges of fake news, unexpected virality, technology overuse, unsafe gaming practices and privacy and harassment concerns; all of which were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This contrasts with a range of positive impacts associated with increased connectivity, ability to engage and interact in novel ways and improved ability to access information and educational resources. While these challenges remain and more are introduced, the importance of equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and constructive attitude towards digital citizenship is where Digital Thumbprint can help now, more than ever.

How has COVID-19 and increased time spent online affected young people?

- Searches for "Being safe on the internet" rose by 21% for children aged 5 to 12 from 2019 to 2020 during COVID-19 restrictions.[1]

- 2 in 5 young people had a negative experience online from March 2020 to September 2020. This included being contacted by a stranger, being sent inappropriate or unwanted content and being deliberately excluded from events and social groups.[2]

- In 2020–2021, there was a 35% increase in the number of serious cyberbullying complaints to the eSafety Commissioner, 78% being from young Australians aged 13 to 17.[3]

- Image-based abuse complaints have tripled from 2018. The vast majority of these complaints relate to sexual extortion.[3,4]

- There was a 55% increase in searches for "sexting" and a 39% increase in searches for "cyberbullying" for teens aged 13 to 18 from 2020 to 2021.[1]

Fake news

Top stories

Koalas are functionally extinct
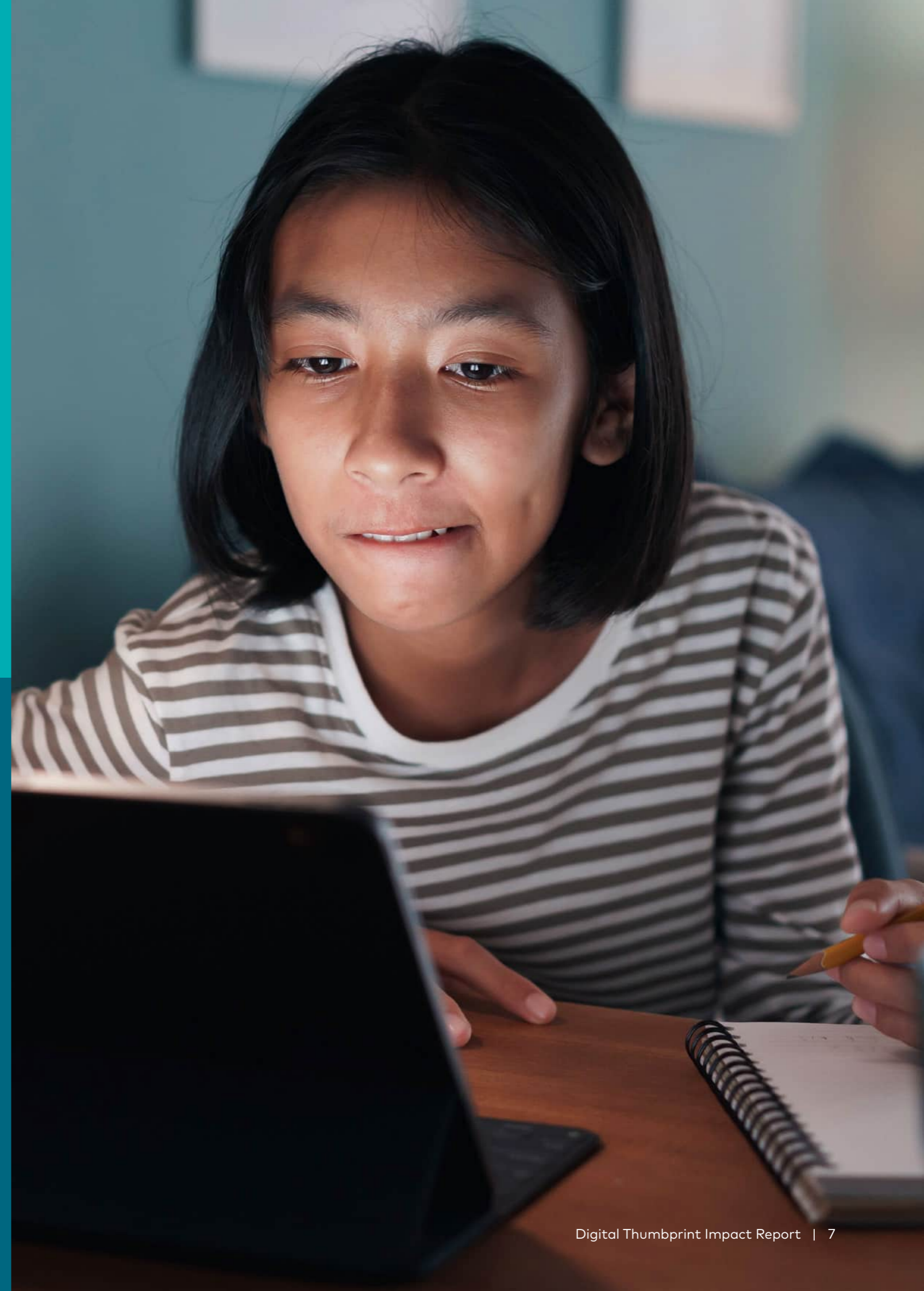
64% of young people feel they are ill equipped to tell fake news from real news stories.[5]

Only **1 in 5** young Australians report having been taught strategies during the past year to help them discern whether news stories are true and can be trusted.[5]

46% of young people who get news stories from social media say they give very little or no attention to the source of news stories found online.[5]
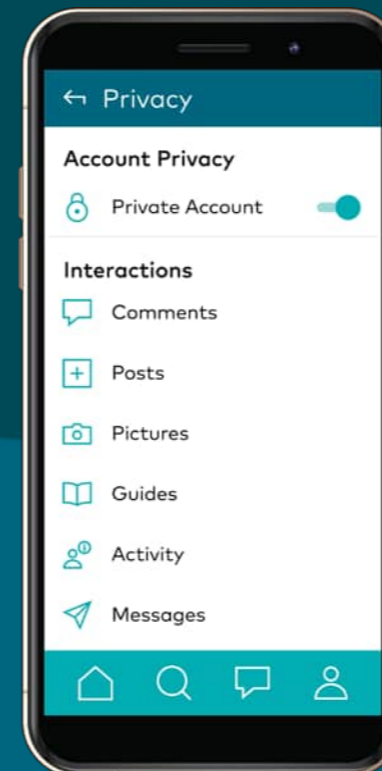
Balancing **screen time**

52% of parents with young children and **68%** of those with teens think their children spend too much time online.[7]

63% of parents report their children spend too much time playing games.[7]

Social media **and employment**

82% of employers are influenced by a job candidate's social media presence.[6]

Bullying in **gaming**

17% of young Australian gamers have been victims of in-game bullying, representing more than 200,000 young Australians.[8]

Security **and privacy**

Privacy

Account Privacy

Private Account

Interactions

Comments

Posts

Pictures

Guides

Activity

Messages

¾ of teens wanted more online safety information from trusted channels.[2]

Almost **5 in 10** young people want information on how to support a friend who is in trouble.[8]

4/10 want to know how to block someone using privacy and safety features.[8]

4/10 want to know how to report negative experiences online.[8]

About the program

Optus Digital Thumbprint provides free, curriculum-aligned workshops, digital learning materials and online resources that teach young people to participate safely online, equipping them with the tools they need for positive, responsible and authentic experiences. Program modalities include professionally facilitated workshops in school or virtually, and teacher-led digital interactives. The Digital Thumbprint program has been endorsed by the e-Safety Commissioner as a Trusted eSafety Provider, with over 470,000 students participating in the program since its inception in 2013.

Digital Thumbprint also has a strong presence in regional Australia, supporting students in these communities to safely navigate the digital world, and provides valuable resources to parents and teachers in these areas. Digital Thumbprint has visited over 71,000 students in regional areas alone and is committed to ensuring that this important program is accessible to all Australian communities and fit for purpose with support from local groups. All schools also benefit from access to the teacher-led workshops, empowering local teachers with the resources and support to run their own engaging digital citizenship lessons.

In addition to the behaviourally focused experiences for students, Digital Thumbprint provides a range of resources for teachers, parents and caregivers, enabling support from those closest, to assist young people with making safe, informed decisions online.

Years 3 – 4

- Digital interactive lessons targeting personal security and safe gaming online.

Years 5 – 12

- Teacher-led digital workshops covering Cyber Security (Years 3 – 12) and Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online, Digital Discernment & Fake News, Digital Identity and Digital Balance (Years 5 – 12).
- Facilitator-led workshops delivered face-to-face or via virtual platforms.

Teachers

- Access to a range of online resource and lesson plans, to assist with holistically encouraging safe and positive digital practices for Australian students.

Parents

- Parent & Caregiver sessions run both face-to-face in local communities and virtually over digital platforms.
- Access to a range of online conversation guides, videos and supporting information on our website.

Core design principles

- Move beyond providing only knowledge: Our program recognises that it is not enough to simply teach students about the digital world. We must give them the skills, confidence and motivation to change the way they behave, interact and connect online.
- Teach students about what is relevant to them: Digital Thumbprint addresses five key topic areas – cybersecurity, cyberbullying and respectful relationships online, digital discernment and fake news, digital identity and digital balance. These topics have been defined in line with leading research into digital citizenship and the key issues facing young people online.
- Drive Australian Curriculum outcomes: Topic areas are explored in curriculum-aligned workshops designed for Years 3 – 12, with content and delivery tailored to the appropriate age group. Digital Thumbprint is delivered either by professional facilitators or classroom teachers using the digital interactives.
- Embedding the youth voice in program design: Through facilitated classroom discussions, focus groups and student surveys we're proud to have been trusted by students across Australia, who have shared their feedback, insights and stories of impact.

Supporting students across Australia

**Program reach –
2021 school year**

53,929
Students

857
Sessions

288
Schools

**Program life
to date**

470,891
Students

Regional only
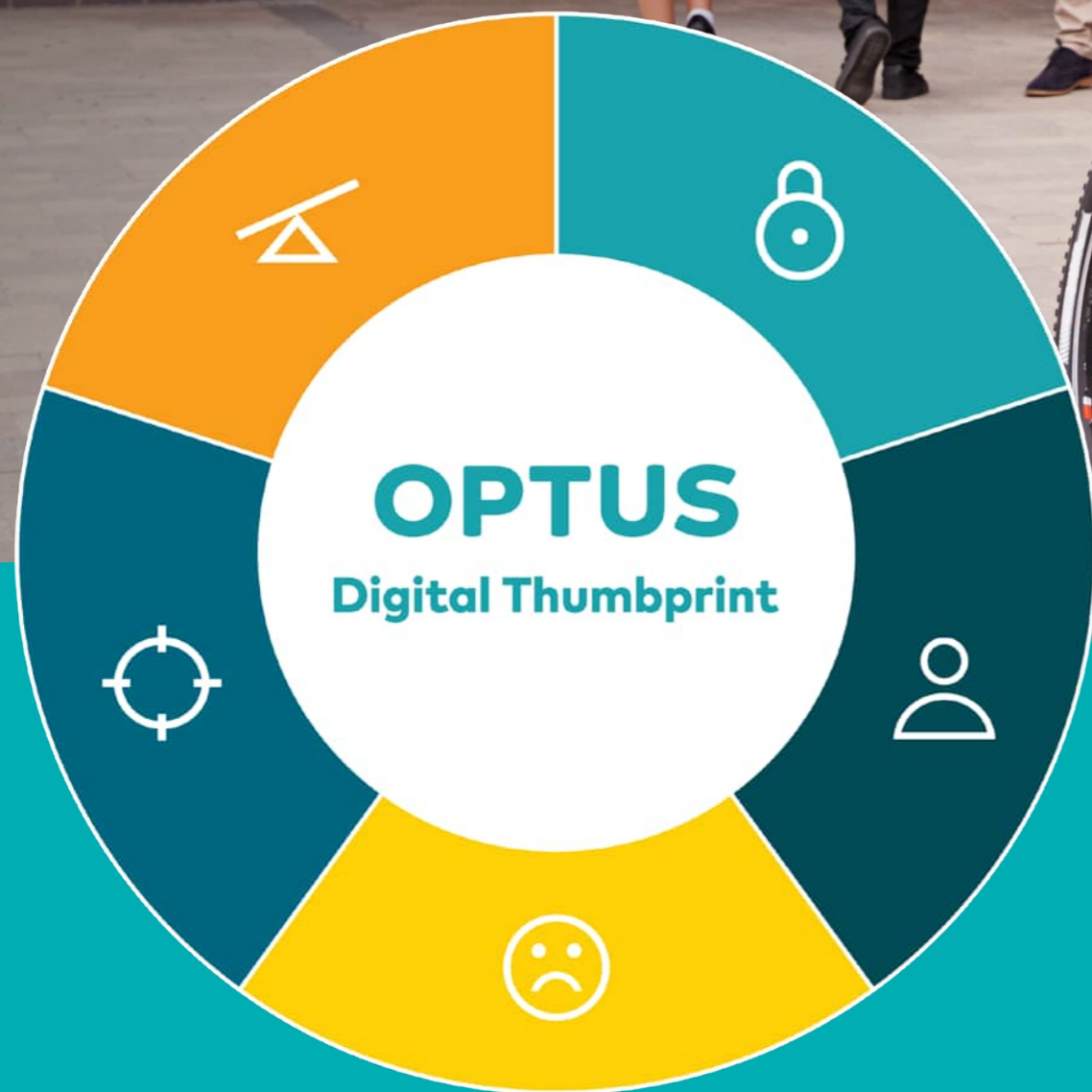
71,111
Students

Overview of workshops

OPTUS
Digital Thumbprint
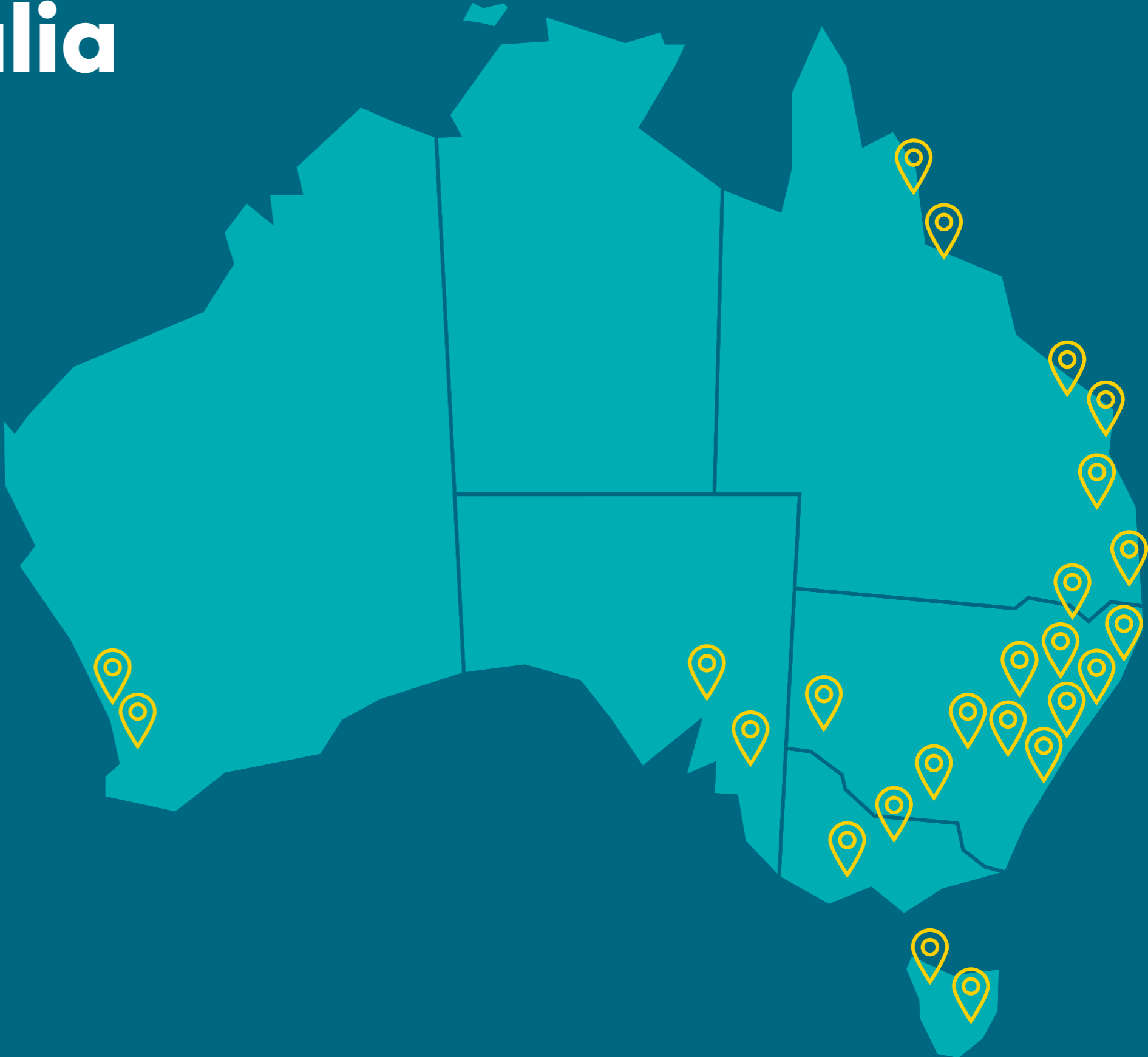
Cyber Security

Through a variety of activities, students develop their skills to create strong passwords, enable privacy settings on social media, and understand just how easily and wide information can spread when shared on the internet. Students begin to understand the power and the danger of what is shared online.

Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online

Students explore the importance of respectful relationships online through compelling scenarios and are asked to consider their impact when interacting online. Young people discuss consent online, image-based abuse, and the tools they have to positively support themselves and their peers.

Digital Discernment & Fake News

In this workshop, students work through scenarios and practice discernment to identify facts and fiction in online media and the impact it can have on our thoughts, actions and emotions.

Digital Identity

This workshop gives students the opportunity to examine their social media profiles and posts through the lens a boss applies in the process of hiring and during employment. Students work through improving their online identity for future success.

Digital Balance

During this workshop, students explore the positive uses of technology on our wellbeing and take steps to improve our digital wellbeing through streamlining what our devices can do for us.

Calrossy Anglican School, NSW

Why we evaluate

At Optus, we strive to provide the most impactful and relevant content possible through Digital Thumbprint. Key to this is our commitment to regularly evaluating our program's impact and identifying areas for program improvement.

Through this evaluation period, we've engaged over 3,500 students and 240 teachers across 58 schools in a range of surveys, focus groups and interviews; with an overview of our evaluation methodology included at the rear of this report. Historically, we have also worked with data collected since 2013 from over 4,400 teachers and over 7,500 students through prior evaluations to better measure the impact of the Digital Thumbprint program over time.

The following sections present both student and teacher data, as well as observed historical trends in relation to the five key workshop topic areas.

The examples below indicate some of the changes observed since the publication of previous impact reports.
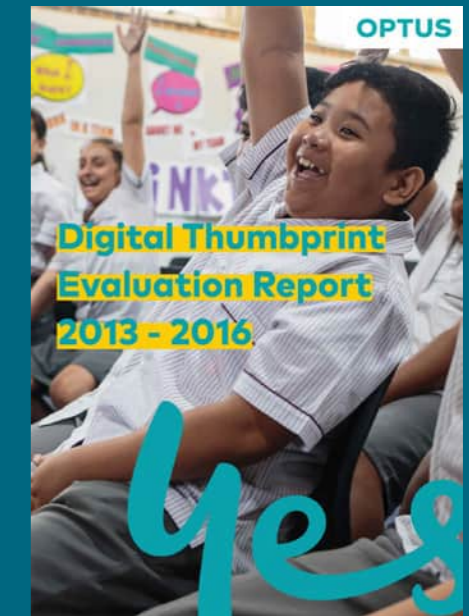
2020 Digital Thumbprint Impact report

91%
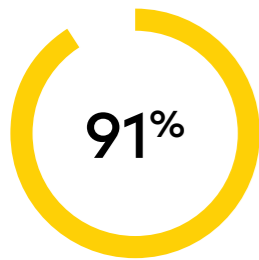
Of students surveyed in 2021 were more likely to check that their social media accounts are presentable when applying for jobs

2020

79%

2021

91%

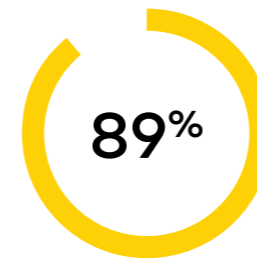**12%** ↗ This represents a 12% increase from 79% in 2020

2020 Digital Citizenship Research report

90%

Of students surveyed in 2021 believed they could control their social media privacy settings after the workshop

2017

58%

2021

90%

32% ↗ This represents a 32% increase from 58% in 2017

2018 Digital Thumbprint Evaluation report

89%

Of teachers surveyed in 2021 felt more confident teaching digital citizenship topics as a result of the workshops

2018

74%

2021

89%

15% ↗ This represents a 15% increase from 74% in 2018

2013-2016 Digital Thumbprint Evaluation report

85%
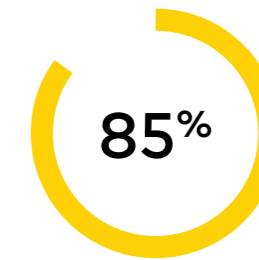
Of students surveyed in 2021 were more likely to try to use social media in a positive way

2015

73%

2021

85%

12% ↗ This represents a 12% increase from 73% in 2015

Cyber Security

About the workshop

The Cyber Security workshop provides students with the skills to create strong passwords, enable privacy settings on social media and helps students to understand the power and danger of what is shared online, with a view to strengthening the online safety of students.

Why this topic is important

Young Australians are increasingly interacting online, whether to partake in their studies or to socialise with friends and family. This growing reliance on digital platforms has brought with it a need to ensure young people are protecting themselves from cyber security risks and ensure their information and wellbeing is safe when online. This is a key consideration for both primary and secondary students, Making this workshop is ideal for students from Years 5 – 8.

Core concepts:

- Consider ways to protect personal information online.

- Explore what happens to online information and how it may be used.

- Examine how to apply appropriate privacy settings on social media and report harmful or inappropriate content.

Keeping students safe online

Through participating in the Cyber Security workshop, students better understand the risks associated with their personal information online and are motivated to take action to keep their personal data secure through strengthening privacy settings.

84%
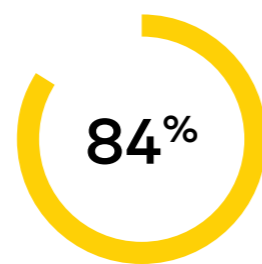
Of students were more likely to check the security of their online data at the conclusion of the workshop

2016

81%

2021

84%

3% ↑ This represents a 3% increase from 81% in 2016
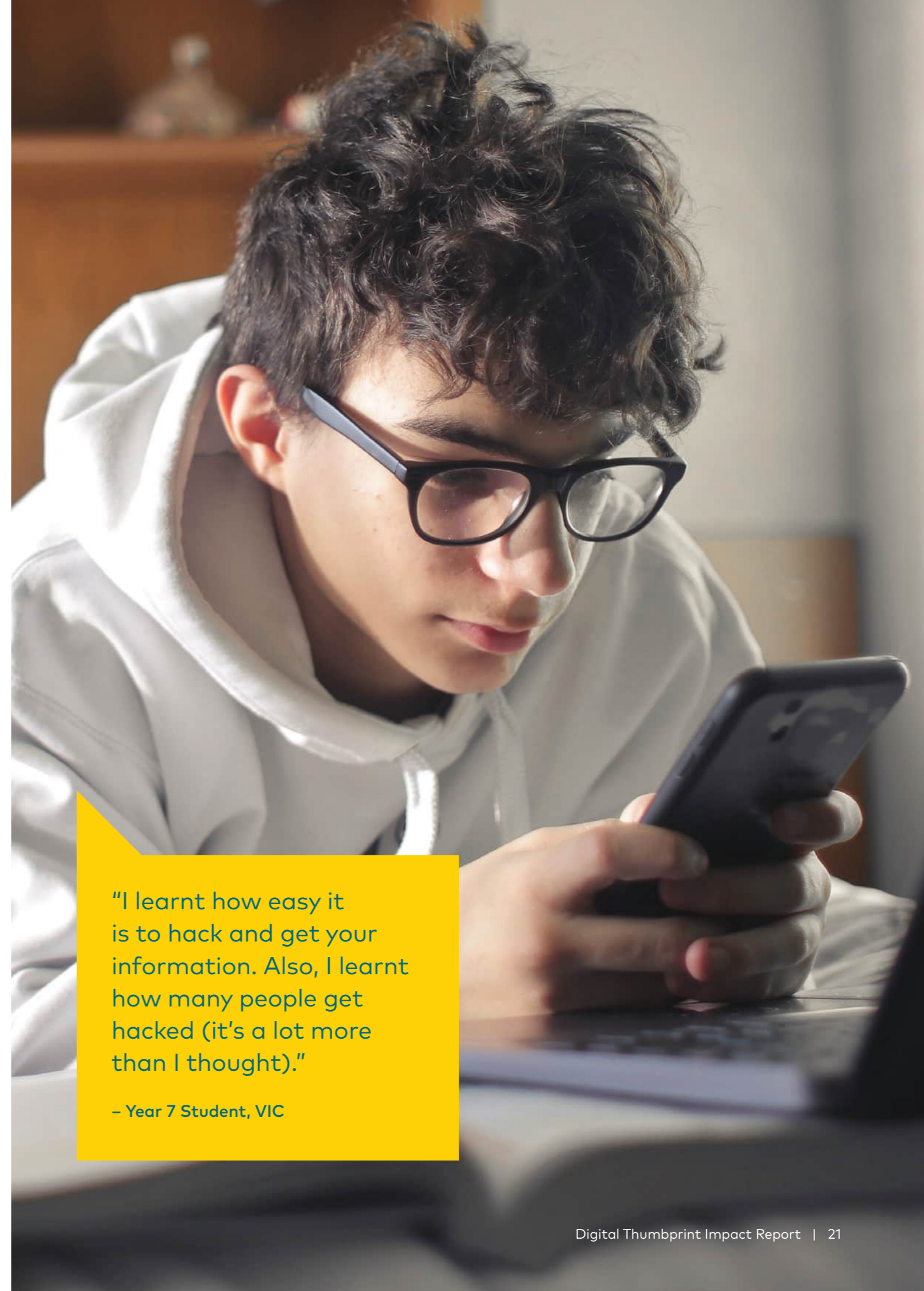
"I learnt how easy it is to hack and get your information. Also, I learnt how many people get hacked (it's a lot more than I thought)."

– Year 7 Student, VIC

Sir Joseph Banks High School, NSW
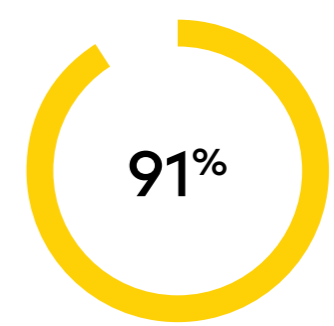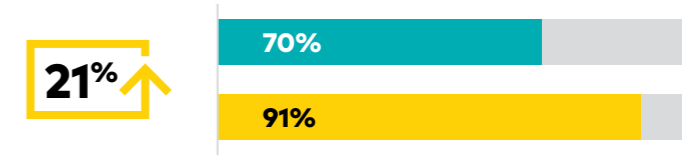
Cyber Security continued...

This workshop is not only increasing understanding; data suggests that the workshop is also positively impacting attitudes and behaviour relating to cyber security.

- 89% of students reported that they would be more careful about what they post online.

- 87% of students stated they were more likely to check the strength of their passwords for their accounts.

- 83% of students learnt new skills relating to setting strong passwords.

As students are accessing social media younger than ever before, the Cyber Security workshop leaves students more informed and motivated to actively manage their online presence and privacy settings.

91%

After the teacher-led digital workshop, 91% of students reported more knowledge of cyber security, a 21% increase relative to before the workshop
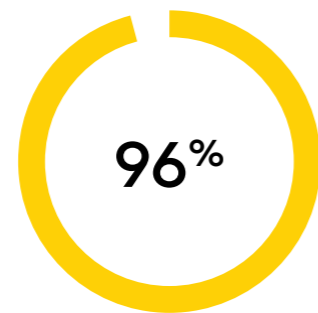
21%

70%

91%

Cyber Security continued...

After the workshop:

Our 2021 data indicates how students are benefiting from an improved understanding of cyber security and privacy concerns after the Cyber Security workshop.
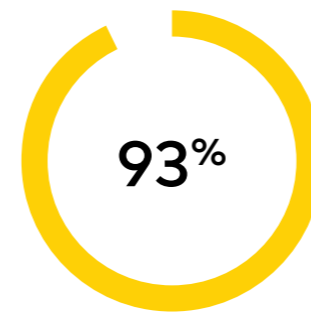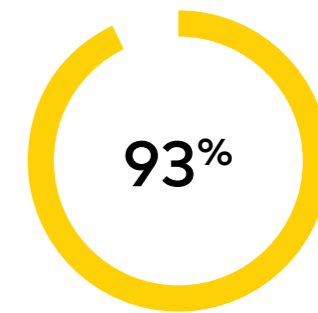
96%

After the workshop, 96% of students reported that they were aware of how to keep their personal data secure online. This is a 17% increase relative to before the workshop

| 79% |
| 96% |

11% ↑ There was a 11% increase in students reporting that they felt safe online

| 69% |
| 80% |

93%

Of students believe that they are able to stay safe online, as a result of the workshop

2018

| 89% |

2021

| 93% |

93%

Of students believe that they can keep their personal data secure, as a result of the workshop

2018

| 88% |

2021

| 93% |

**Sir Joseph Banks High School, NSW**

Cyber Security
continued...

Increasing teacher and parent engagement with cyber security

Our results indicate that the Cyber Security workshop has improved teachers' ability to instruct students on how to keep data secure, with 95% of teachers feeling more confident to teach their students how to stay safe online and 80% more confident to teach digital citizenship topics to their students.

Teachers have noted that students are online more and at younger ages, with the COVID-19 pandemic amplifying teachers' concerns around reduced visibility of device use and associated online security. During this rise in digital engagement for younger students, Digital Thumbprint launched digital workshops for Years 3 and 4 to build foundational cyber security skills, addressing student and teacher needs for basic concepts to support younger students and their remote learning safety.

The Digital Thumbprint article "How to safeguard your child's privacy", was also developed to assist parents as well as teachers with discussing cyber security with young students, and provides walkthroughs of popular app settings and practical strategies to manage content online.

96%
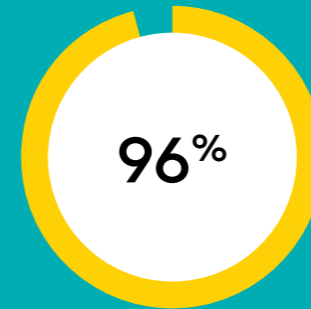
Of teachers agreed that as a result of the workshop their students have learnt new approaches to better secure their data and can better recognise the terms under which personal information is exchanged

"[The most important thing is] making students aware of their personal security settings and how much of an impact that being hacked can have on them."

– Teacher, QLD

"Thank you very much…for this session on Cyber Security. This session was eye opening, informative and interesting. I never knew what half the terms meant, it was like a whole new language."

- Parent

Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships **Online**

About the workshop

The Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online workshop is designed to give students the tools, strategies and insight to have respectful relationships, understand consent and image-based abuse, and support themselves and their peers to manage cyberbullying risks.

"I get that joking around can come across as bullying. I need to think harder about what I say and how I say it."

– Student, NSW

"I learnt how to give support to people facing cyberbullying and understand that it is best to talk to an adult as well."

– Student

Why this topic is important

The volume of cyberbullying cases reported to the eSafety Commissioner increased significantly in 2021. Incidences of image-based abuse (including 'sexting') and grooming have also posed a key challenge for young people, who have noted that it can be both embarrassing and scary to navigate. The Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online workshop helps students to identify image-based abuse and implement help-seeking behaviours to support themselves and their friends.

Core concepts:

- Understand the impact our actions have online.

- Learn strategies to seek help for yourself or others.

- Protecting students from negative online interactions.

Data suggests that after participating in the workshop, students:

- Better understood what cyberbullying actually is.

- Felt empowered to take action if they or their friends experience cyberbullying or image-based abuse.

- Were more likely to be considerate of others when interacting online.

The below increase over time is particularly noteworthy given the proliferation and increased uptake of social media platforms by young people over recent years. It also highlights the value of communicating with students about the impact that their online actions and behaviours can have on their peers with increasing awareness of the impact of online actions since the onset of COVID-19.

80%
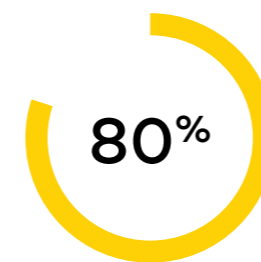
Of students felt they could better manage the impact that they have online

2019

77%

2021

80%

**3%** ↑ This represents a 3% increase from 77% in 2019
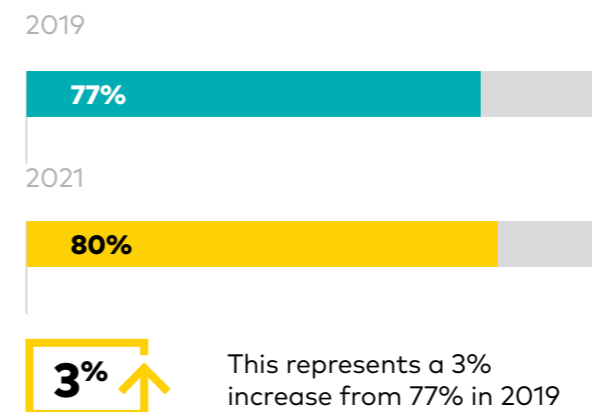
Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online continued...

Building student confidence to combat cyberbullying and image-based abuse

Students were not only better informed about cyberbullying; post-workshop evaluations showed large increases in student confidence in supporting themselves and peers if they are being cyberbullied as compared to before the workshop.

93%

16% ⬆ Students were more likely to feel confident taking action if they are being cyberbullied

64%	
81%	
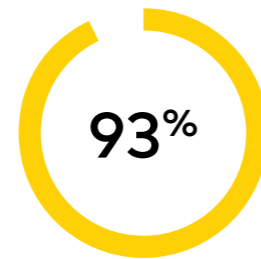
93% of students felt confident in supporting their friends if they are being cyberbullied. This is a 12% increase relative to prior to the workshop

81%	
93%	

The workshop also strongly improved students' understanding of image-based abuse and how to take action to be more responsible online, with 94% of teachers agreeing that the workshop helped their students better understand what image-based abuse is.
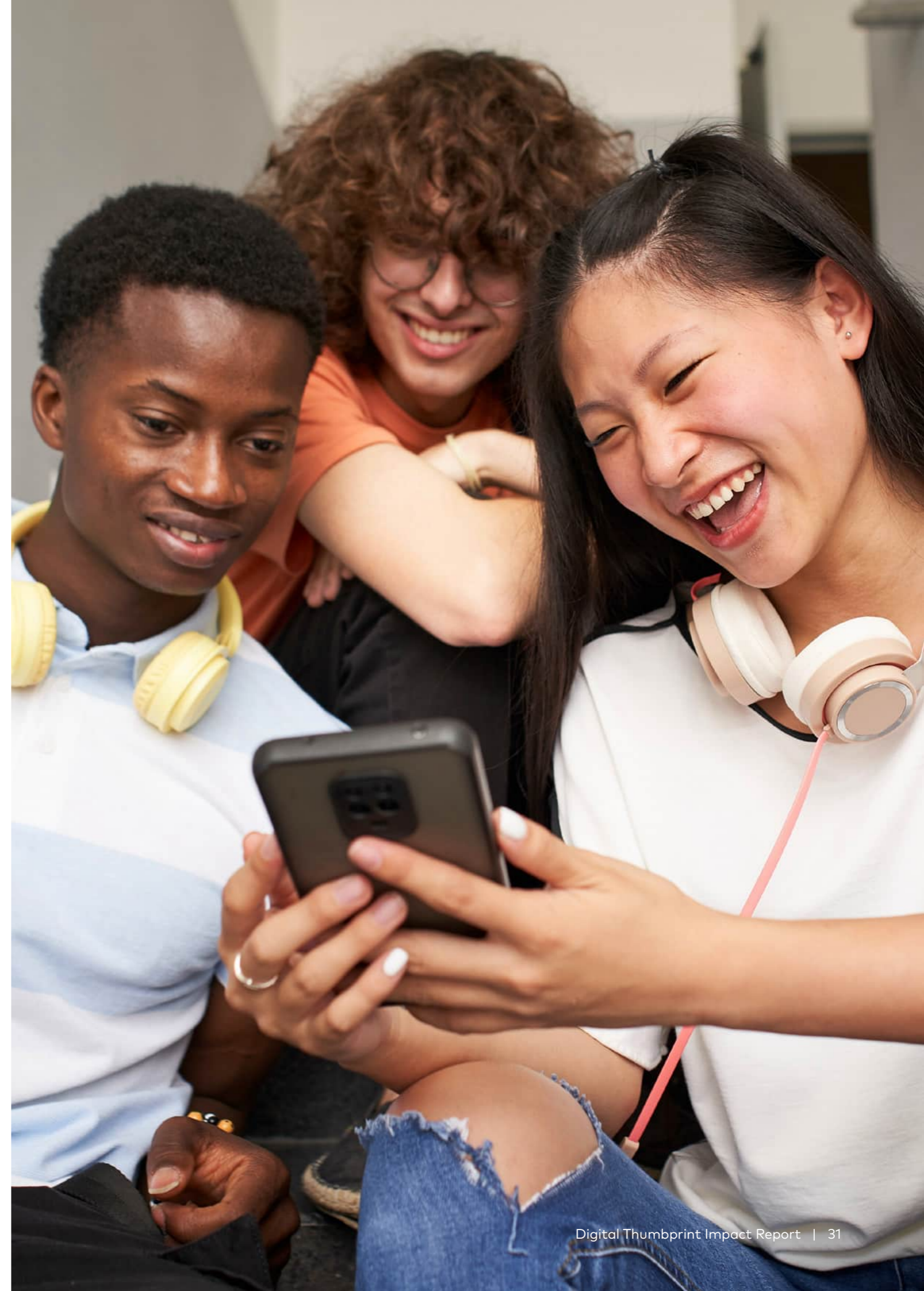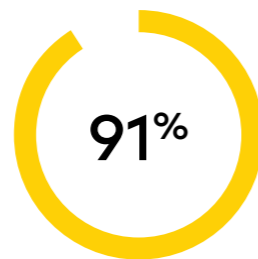
Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online continued...

Promoting help-seeking behaviour

There is also evidence that the Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online workshop is actively promoting help-seeking behaviour:

- 82% of students agreed that they would be more likely to seek help for cyberbullying or image-based abuse for themselves or their friends.

- 84% of students agreed that they could better give support to their friends if they think they need help.

This shows a clear intent to take action when cyberbullying or image-based abuse issues occur and to seek help, whether the student themselves or their friends are experiencing these issues.

91%

After completing the teacher-led digital workshop, 91% of students reported a better understanding of cyberbullying and respectful relationships online

"There is always someone to help you and you don't have to go through negative incidents alone."

– Year 8 Student, NSW

"I learnt that if you are cyberbullied, there are multiple ways to report someone who is bullying."

- Student

Sir Joseph Banks High School, NSW

Helping teachers tackle cyberbullying

Cyberbullying continues to be a major challenge facing young people. Teachers observed that our workshop was a key resource that they have drawn on to address cyberbullying with their students and noted that it armed them with new ways to communicate with students, while providing novel views and perspectives for students to consider.

"We had issues this year so I had to very quickly get on top of it. We had to talk about explicit images and laws around child pornography. [The Cyberbullying workshop] definitely improved my ability to engage with students especially with examples to use that I hadn't thought of before."

– Teacher, NSW

"There were 30 or so incidents where we have had to deal with bullying from sexting. Kids don't want to come to school so it affects their attendance."

– Teacher, NSW

"I could see students who were involved in cyber-bullying incidents taking the information provided on board in a more positive way. They could see the potential for more serious problems which their actions can cause."

– Teacher, VIC

88% of teachers feel more confident to have discussions with their students about the way they behave online. This is an important improvement as students also indicate that they understand the nuances of cyberbullying and image-based abuse now more than ever. 83% of teachers also believe that students are more likely to report cyberbullying - a great indication that today's youth are taking ownership to create safe online spaces.

100%

Every teacher who observed the workshop believed that their students better understood how to identify cyberbullying and image-based abuse

Cyberbullying & Respectful Relationships Online continued...

Support for parents

29% ↗ There was a 29% increase in parents engaging with our online cyberbullying resources in 2021

"The online resources are really good for parents. We can also put them into different aspects of our communications."

– Teacher, NSW

"Thank you also for what the facilitator discussed with the kids, it was a very interesting discussion around the dinner table last night."

– Parent

There was a 29% increase in parents engaging with our online cyberbullying resources in 2021. These resources, along with our workshop for parents, provide definitions of image-based abuse and help them to understand colloquial terms such as 'sexting' or 'nudes'. Parents are also supported to spot the signs of online grooming in their children, and how to engage with both the eSafety Commissioner and the relevant police forces to report instances of image-based abuse or child exploitation.

Parents are also finding support through Digital Thumbprint article such as "TikTok for Parents" which helps them understand this platform including privacy settings and management of harmful content through reporting.

A teacher's perspective

Teachers are a central source of insight into the tangible, day-to-day impacts experienced by their students and colleagues as a result of the Digital Thumbprint workshops. While teacher perspectives are captured throughout this report, the below testimonial provides a longer-form exploration of the value of the Digital Thumbprint workshops for students, teachers and parents, from the perspective of an experienced educator.

The below testimonial was provided by Kerri Simpson from Vermont Secondary College.

Vermont Secondary College Digital Ambassadors, 2022.

"Students over the last 5-10 years have become more aware of what they do online, but it still doesn't mean they actually behave in a safe and respectful manner. I first contacted Digital Thumbprint in 2015 because we had implemented a "Bring Your Own Device" program for junior school, which unfortunately brought with it some challenges around a lack of awareness from students about their impact online. The main issue was a serious rise in bullying – targeted, nasty bullying. Another issue has been privacy; when students first started using devices at school, they would take pictures of teachers and share them online as memes to mock teachers, it was becoming a serious privacy concern.

The feedback on the Digital Thumbprint workshops that we have from students and staff is always positive, since the first time we ran it. When [the facilitator] presents, he's really engaging, he knows how to deal with tough kids and get them involved in the program. An ex-student said it was her favourite activity out of her whole time at Vermont and one thing she got the most out of.

After participating in Digital Thumbprint, our senior students started the digital ambassadors club to support other students and to role model good behaviour. In terms of immediate impact, for example, we notice junior students who participate in Digital Thumbprint immediately change their passwords and discuss the risks they face in terms of privacy, it's great to see.

Student managers also love Digital Thumbprint because it meets and reinforces the need for digital safety curriculum. A Year 8 student manager said that the information is so pertinent for the matters we're dealing with and that it's fantastic that the students have access to the program to expand their understanding as well. The online resources also give student managers some guidelines to work with when discussing online incidents with parents and the program assists with the professional development of our teachers.

It's often assumed that everyone in school knows about digital literacy, but they don't, and the program meets that need for us. Digital Thumbprint helped bridge the gap for teachers – they remark, "I didn't know about that, I didn't think about this." It's had a real impact on staff: we have older staff who struggle but also even younger staff who benefited from it as well.

The online resources are simple and easy to access and understand, so it is easy for me to send to the whole school community, or make available on open nights, both for parents and student managers. We get very positive feedback from the community and they really like the continual message.

Digital Thumbprint is incredibly beneficial and I promote it to other schools. We have tried other workshops which can be incredibly expensive and not accessible for public school. It's really important that it's free as it fills a huge gap that isn't filled by the digital literacy curriculum and we are confident with the high quality of the program. No other programs are comparable on the impact on students, staff and parents as Digital Thumbprint."

95%

Of teachers agreed that the content of the workshops will be relevant to students right away

Vermont Secondary College has been involved with the program since 2015 and participated in 85 workshops. The program has reached 3342 Vermont Secondary College students in that time.

Kerri Simpson
Teacher, Vermont Secondary College

Digital Discernment & Fake News

Concordia Lutheran College, QLD

About the workshop

The Digital Discernment & Fake News workshop explores scenarios for students to practice discerning fact from fiction in online media and to explore the impact that fake media can have on them, their friends and their families. It enables students to exercise judgement and critical thinking when engaging with online media.

Why these topics are important

The increasing availability and prevalence of alternative, unreviewed information sources online has brought with it a range of novel challenges for Australians of all ages to distinguish real from fake news or deceptive online content. To protect students from falling victim to harmful online misinformation, it is essential they develop a critical eye to engaging with such content from a young age. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of young Australians are more worried about the impact of false information and feel worse about news content than in 2019, often citing perceptions of exaggerated and inaccurate reporting as reasons for feeling worse, highlighting the immediate need for digital discernment education.[1]

Core concepts:

- Understand what fake news is and how it impacts our world.

- Report harmful content and practice discernment to stay safe and informed online.

Improving students' ability to spot fake news

Our results demonstrate a notable increase in students understanding of the impact of fake news, the ability to identify it and their awareness of media's influence on opinions. In the context of the increased sophistication of fake news sources, these results emphasise the value of creating dialogue with students around identifying and reporting fake news.

"Being able to identify different types of fake news helped. I've never thought about it much. Now that I can identify it, I can sift through more easily and pick and choose rather than see something for the first time."

– Year 8 Student, NSW

79%
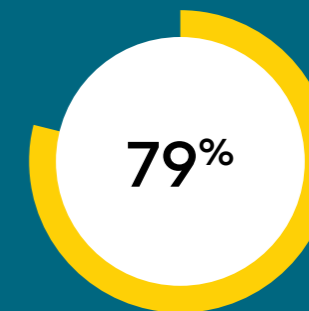
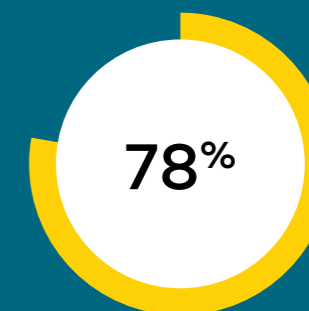Of students now believe they can spot what's fake or misleading online, as a result of the workshop
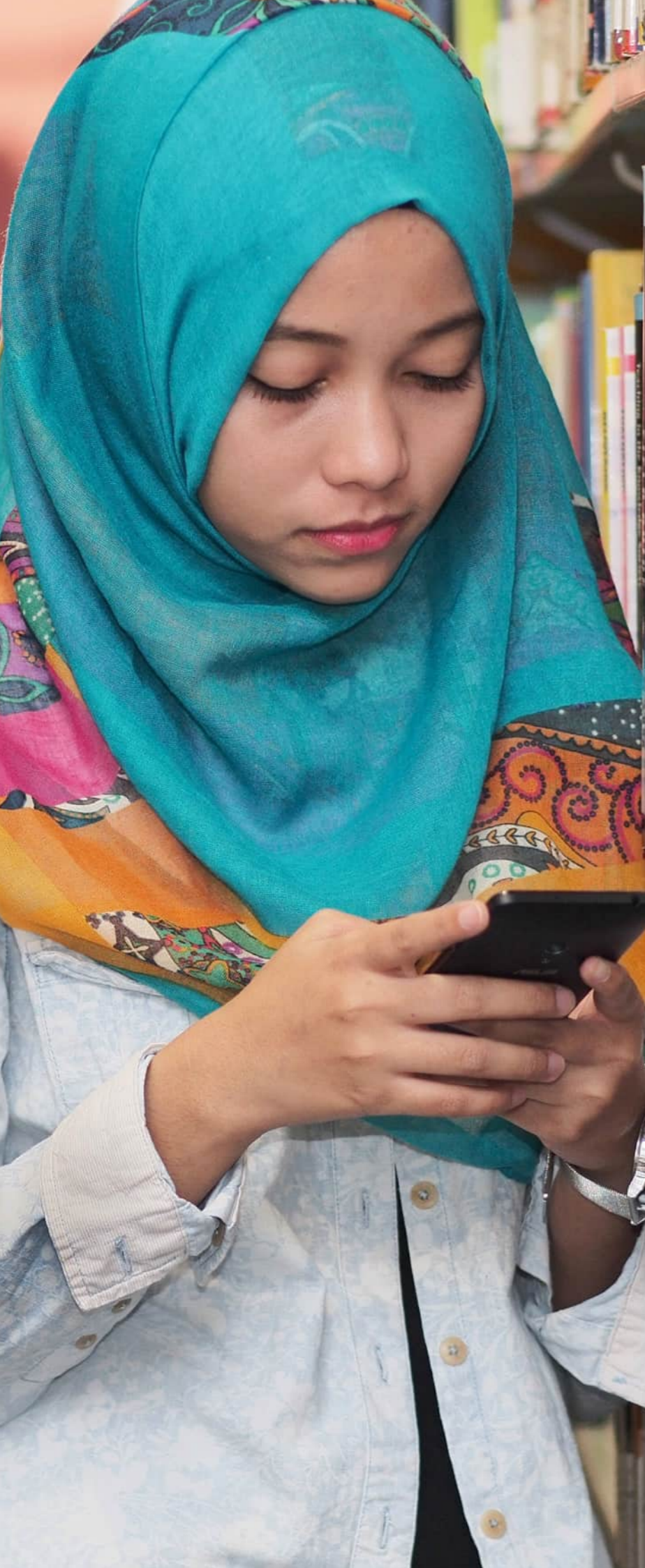
2020
72%

2021
79%

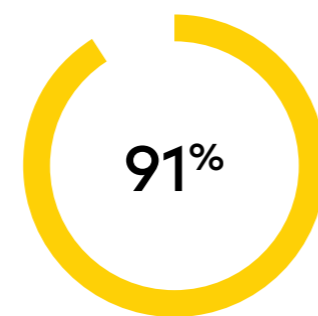7% ↑ This represents a 7% increase from 72% in 2020

78%

Of students felt they had learnt something about the way media tries to influence people online

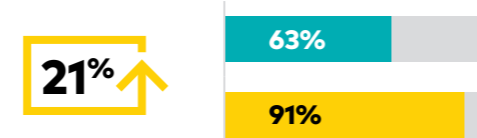# Digital Discernment & Fake News continued...

After the workshop:

The Digital Discernment workshop has improved students' awareness of fake news.

91%

Of students felt they were aware of strategies to identify fake news having participated in the workshop, a 21% increase relative to before the workshop

21% ↑

| 63% |
| 91% |

Empowering students to take action for themselves

With news becoming more accessible and personalised, young people are more knowledgeable around current events than ever before. With this comes the need to critically assess attitudes and intent in how we engage online, with evidence indicating the Digital Discernment workshop has positively impacted students' attitudes, behaviours, and abilities to interpret and act upon real and fake news:

- 78% of students indicated that they were more likely to check if media is real or fake before sharing it;

- 74% of students were more likely to report fake news or misleading information than before the workshop.

82%
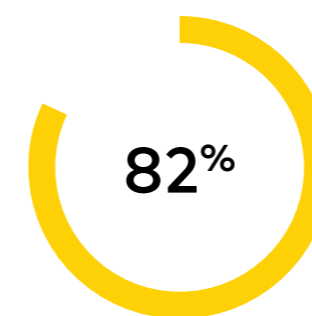
Of students feel they now know how to report fake news and misleading information

"We normally skim through websites and don't really take too much time to think about how reliable it is. It was good to have a wake up call because we forget that things aren't always true with the internet with everything so easy to search."

– Year 8 Student, NSW

Digital Discernment & Fake News continued...

Enabling young people to help protect friends and family from misinformation

Students were also asked about whether they would share what they learnt through the workshop with family and friends. In light of the spread of conspiracies and fake news, students noted that they would help their family and friends identify fake news and check where their information is coming from before sharing it. This aligns with our data showing that a large proportion of students are confident spotting and reporting fake news, following participation in the workshop.

"It's an ongoing train of reading fake news and then sharing it. I need to help my grandparents. I'd tell them that it would be good to check your source and double check."

– Year 8 Student, NSW

81%

After the teacher-led digital workshop, 81% of students reported better understanding fake news and digital discernment

| 74% | |
| 81% | |

7% ⬆ This is a 7% increase relative to before the workshop

Sir Joseph Banks High School, NSW

Digital Discernment & Fake News continued...

## Helping teachers educate on misinformation

Our data revealed that the Digital Discernment & Fake News workshop increased teacher confidence in discussing the management of fake news with students, with the workshop viewed as a useful information source for teachers to utilise.

"[Students] see these things in daily life as jokes (fake news, clickbait etc.), but they do not necessarily know how to discuss them with a critical eye."
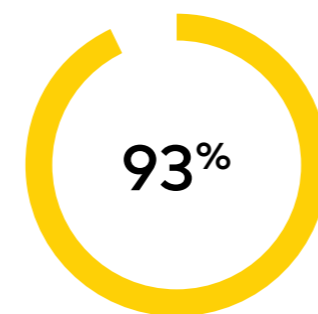
– Teacher, NSW

87%
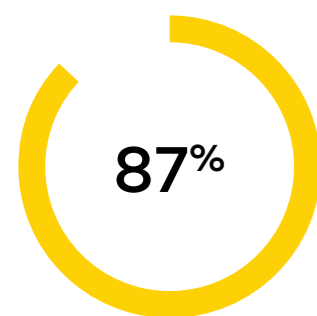
Of teachers felt that their students were well equipped with strategies to identify the influence of media online

80%
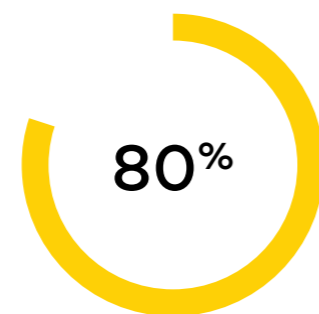
Of teachers believed that their students will be more discerning online

2020

73%

2021

80%

7% ↑ This represents a 7% increase from 73% in 2020

93%

Of teachers reported that their students were more aware of the way media tries to influence people online (including themselves)

2020

89%

2021

93%

4% ↑ This represents a 4% increase from 89% in 2020

After the workshop, 80% of teachers agreed that their students now understood how to report fake news and misleading information. This not only supports the digital literacy of students, but their ability to understand and interpret meaning in contemporary texts, an important cross-curricula skill.

"Today was really empowering. It is good to know there's a website out there that you can report something to."

– Teacher, NSW

Supporting parents

To help parents engage with their children around digital discernment topics, Optus' Digital Citizenship Blog Series includes the post, "Helping young people be discerning digital citizens". This post shares strategies for parents to support their children with discerning the trustworthiness of online information, and contains suggested conversation topics and prompts that parents can explore with their children to help them understand and avoid biased online information sources.

Digital Identity

About the workshop

The Digital Identity workshop teaches students the importance of creating and maintaining a strong digital brand in the context of future job opportunities and employability. The workshop creates opportunities for students to analyse their online identity, whether through social media, or other channels, and identify strategies and tools for improvement.

Why this topic is important

Employers are increasingly checking job candidates' social media accounts prior to making hiring decisions, to form a view on their prospective hire prior to meeting them. A growth in remote forms of work throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic has placed increased emphasis on assessing a candidate's personality and suitability via their social media, whether for formalised employment or more ad-hoc roles such as babysitting or tutoring. For students entering the workforce, there is a need to increase awareness of this practice and build an understanding of the value of a positive online profile when considering employment and reputation.
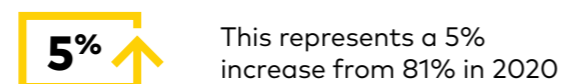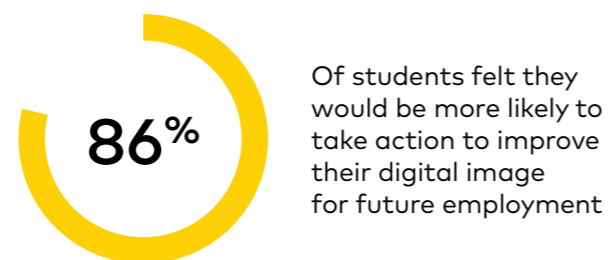
Core concepts

- Investigate ways to create and manage digital brand.

- Examine ways to enhance digital presence.

## Improving students' awareness of online brand

Based on this year's results, the Digital Identity workshop is contributing to positive outcomes for young people by helping to show how building a positive social media presence can impact their current or future employment prospects, with 73% of students in Years 9 and 10 stating they felt their social media profile was important to their future career.

Students are pairing this increased awareness with skill building; our results suggest that students are more motivated to take tangible steps to craft a positive digital identity.

86% Of students felt they would be more likely to take action to improve their digital image for future employment

2020
81%

2021
86%

5% ↑ This represents a 5% increase from 81% in 2020

"You have to be careful about what you post on social media - it could be years down the track, and someone could look at what you have posted on social media and that could affect whether you get a job in the future. Even if you delete something it can still be retraced."
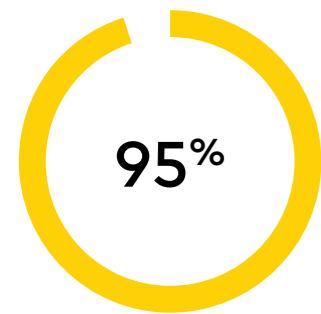
– Year 9 Student, NSW
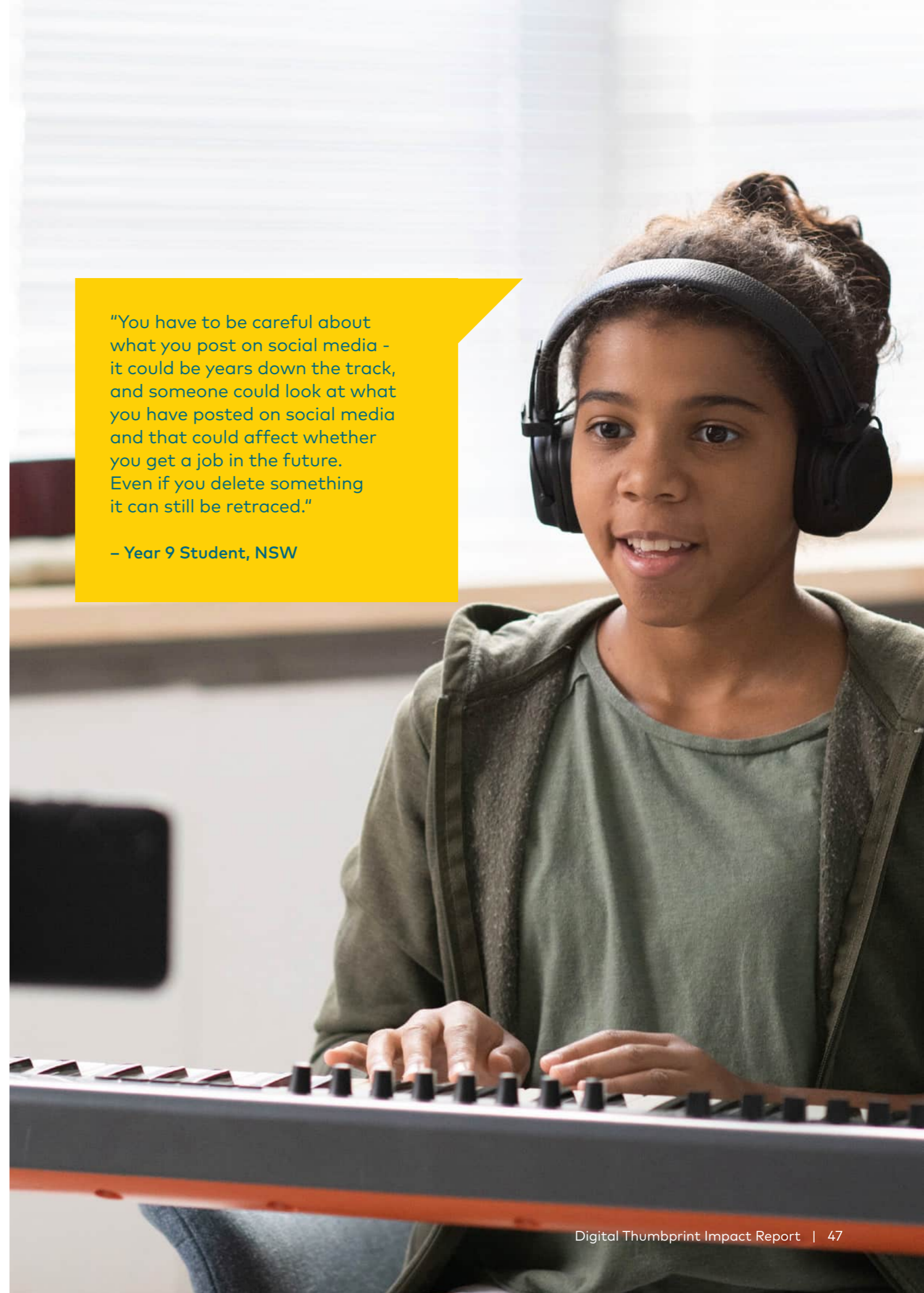
Digital Identity continued...

After the workshop:

The Digital Identity workshop is directly improving student understanding of their personal brand and how this relates to future employment opportunities.

95%

95% of students understood the importance of their personal brand for future job opportunities, a 21% increase from before the workshop

21% ↑	**74%**	
	95%	

87%
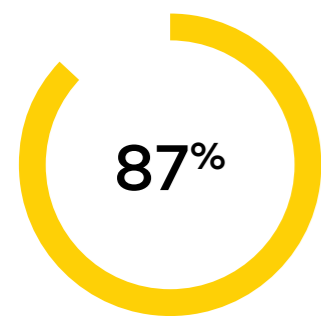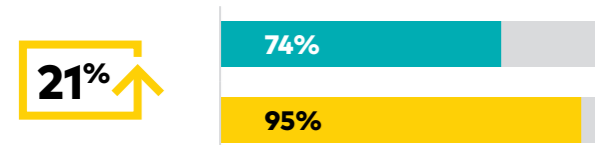
After completing the teacher-led digital workshop, 87% of students reported a better understanding of digital identity
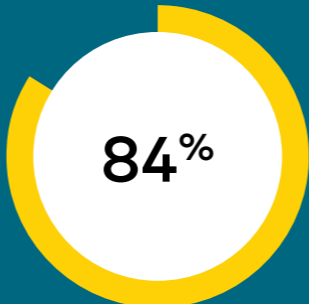
Digital Identity
continued...

Teaching students practical skills to manage their social media

Not only are students more motivated, they also feel more confident that they possess the skills necessary to improve their digital image. This suggests that through workshops like Digital Thumbprint, there is demonstrable value in engaging with students around their digital identity.

80%
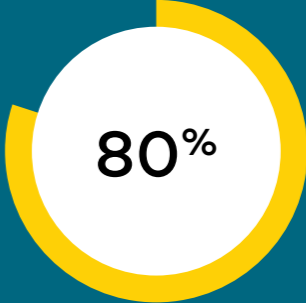
Of students learned strategies in the workshop that can help improve their digital image

84%

Of students felt they can now improve their social media profile for future employment

2020

79%

2021

84%

5% ⬆

This represents a 5% increase from 79% in 2020

Managing one's digital identity is relevant to all users of online spaces. Some of the practical skills that are taught in the workshop include checking that social media accounts are presentable, taking actions such as:

- Examining your own digital thumbprint - googling yourself to see what an employer would see.

- Cleaning your profile by removing untoward content or hiding certain posts.

- Checking which photos you have been tagged in by friends.

These are simple, practical actions that young people can immediately do. Our results suggest that after seeing the workshop, young people are highly motivated to take action to improve their digital identity.

Digital Identity continued...

Creating a space for reflection

An important aspect of Digital Thumbprint workshops is creating space for reflection and discussion. When asked about the impacts of 'going viral' on social media, students quickly come to the conclusion that they need to exercise caution about what they post online. While Digital Identity discusses how posts can be misconstrued and individuals can quickly lose control over their spread, the workshop approaches the two sides of digital fame and also highlights the incredible positive impact one can have when sharing, such as furthering support for human rights causes.

"If something goes viral, people can use it and there are lots of platforms where you can change things that were originally posted and manipulate it, such as Photoshop, that can hinder the intended meaning of the original post and turn the meaning on its head and it can go viral in a way you don't want it to."

— Year 9 Student, NSW

Supporting teachers and parents to communicate about digital image

With limited visibility of students' social media accounts, teachers noted that they can often struggle to support students in building positive online identities. The Digital Identity workshop provides teachers with an independent, credible perspective while creating opportunities for dialogue between teachers and students around online brand. Teachers consider this credibility a crucial aspect of the workshops.

The Digital Citizenship Blog Series post "In an age of filters, are digital ethics still clear?", also discusses the intense curation of digital identities and explores conversations for parents to have with their children to encourage and reward authenticity on social media.

"The kids were able to reflect on how their digital identity can impact future employments and how their image is perceived to others that don't know them. Considering what impacts their posts/images can have on their overall identity, and how it is an issue that never used to be present."

— Teacher, NSW

Digital **Balance**

About the workshop

The Digital Balance workshop explores the positive uses of technology on student wellbeing and supports students to improve their digital wellbeing through streamlining their engagement with devices.

Why the workshop is important

Unable to see their peers face-to-face while under various states of lockdown, students were forced to rely on social media to maintain connection. While social media platforms enabled students to stay in touch, they have also contributed to an increasing dependence on devices and amplified challenges associated with overuse of technology and related impacts on wellbeing.

Core concepts:

- Understand how technology use impacts physical and emotional wellbeing.

- Use technology to stay focused, healthy and efficient in our work and study.

"It's important to be online but also having a balance between your online and offline status so that you can look after yourself."

– Year 10 Student, NSW

Helping students to use technology positively

Our Digital Balance workshop is helping students capitalise on the positive aspects of technology, while minimising the potentially harmful effects of overuse. A core aspect of this is empowering students to be considerate and deliberate about how, when and why they engage with technology. Our data suggest that, following the workshop, students were more motivated and confident that they could manage their time on and offline, with 80% of students agreeing that it is important to achieve a balance with their digital life.
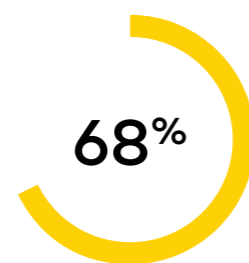
68% Of students believe that as a result of the Digital Balance workshop, they could stay on task when they need to study

2017

55%

2021

68%

13% This represents a 13% increase from 55% in 2017

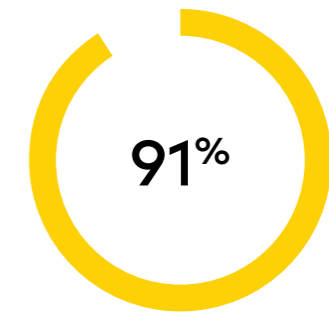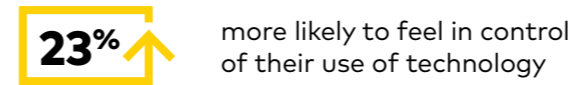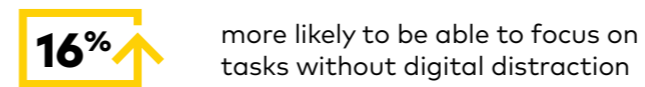**Sir Joseph Banks High School, NSW**

Digital Balance
continued...

Our Know The Signs video also helps teachers, parents and caregivers identify the signs of excessive time spent online.

"It is good to take time away from your phone, especially before bedtime, because it is better for both your mental and physical health."

– Year 10 Student, NSW

"[When studying and learning from home], I lose focus very easily."

– Year 10 Student, NSW

At its core the workshop is engaging with technology in a meaningful way; in other words, how students think and feel about their technology use. Results suggest that Digital Balance is helping young people find this balance through practical skills such as:

- How to optimise devices for the best experience, including digital wellbeing controls such as Optus Pause which empowers families and children to manage screen time.

- Teaching productivity and time management skills to make the most of their screen time.

- Being discerning about using the best platform for the type of communication required (e.g. phone call vs. text).

Through learning these practical skills, students feel more equipped to engage with technology meaningfully (76% agree), stay focused and feel in control of their technology use as a result of the workshop.

After seeing the workshop, students reported clear intent to modify their behaviour to better balance their time online and offline:

16% more likely to be able to focus on tasks without digital distraction

59%

75%

23% more likely to feel in control of their use of technology

64%

86%

91%

After completing the teacher-led digital workshop, 91% of students reported a better understanding of digital balance
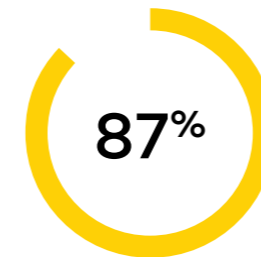
Digital Balance continued...

Strengthening digital wellbeing strategies

Many students also shared that they have now turned on night modes or silenced their devices when sleeping, while others have consciously implemented schedules and blocks from their devices for focused study.

87%

67% of students agreed that because of what they learnt in the Digital Balance workshop, they would be more likely to:

- Analyse their current time on devices.
- Streamline their device to improve their digital wellbeing.

Further, 72% of students felt they had learned strategies to help streamline device use to improve their digital wellbeing. This shows a clear development in students' abilities to assess their device usage and reducing technological distractions when sleeping and studying.

"[I learnt] how to manage my notifications and achieve better quality sleep through reducing screen time before going to sleep."

– Year 11 Student, NSW

"Digital balance can be maintained through several means such as turning on focus or do not disturb modes and putting your phone on greyscale to lessen the vibrant notification."

– Year 10 Student, NSW

Digital Balance continued...

Supporting teachers to promote healthy technology use

Under COVID-19 restrictions, teachers and parents were limited in their ability to observe the level to which students were engaging with their devices, and for what purposes. Through the Digital Balance workshop, teachers noted that they felt increased confidence to talk to students about technology use and overuse, even in a remote environment.

Through participating in the workshop, 64% of teachers believed their students would be more likely to take actions to analyse their current time on devices and 73% of teachers agreed that their students would be more likely to take actions to streamline their device use for best impact.

90% Of teachers felt that their students now know skills to better manage their study

100% All teachers agreed that their students were aware of the importance of having an online and offline balance as a result of the workshop

"[The Digital Balance workshop taught students] the importance of ensuring that there is no digital overuse particularly when it begins to override daily human functions such as sleep."

– Teacher, NSW

"Being addicted to your devices is something that should be covered with multiple year levels. We've really got to use the things you showed us."

– Teacher, NSW

Technology use at home

50% There was a 50% increase in parents engaging with our online screen time resources in 2021

As students relied on technology for both education and socialising at home, parents observed their children's screen time with greater visibility than ever before. This saw a 50% increase in parents engaging with the Digital Thumbprint online screen time resources in 2021, which include resources designed to help parents understand signs of too much time online, and different types of online behaviour. Through these resources, parents are also supported to manage their networks to aid students with meaningfully connecting or creating time offline to support their wellbeing.

Students inform program improvements

Embedding the voice of young people is critical to our program design. We remain committed to improving the program to meet the evolving needs of young people as they participate in an increasingly complex digital world by engaging with student councils and students who have engaged in our program. This occurs through facilitated classroom discussions, focus groups and student surveys where we collect students' feedback, insights and stories of impact.

This information is translated into regular updates to content, participation in further research, constant improvement in delivery and accessibility, and allows Digital Thumbprint to continue to be considered one of the most trusted digital citizenship programs in Australia by our students and teachers.

Below are some of the key themes students shared with us to inform further program improvements:

"I think the workshop was great and taught me so much about being online. I think more people should learn about this and more should use this same workshop."

– Year 5 Student, VIC
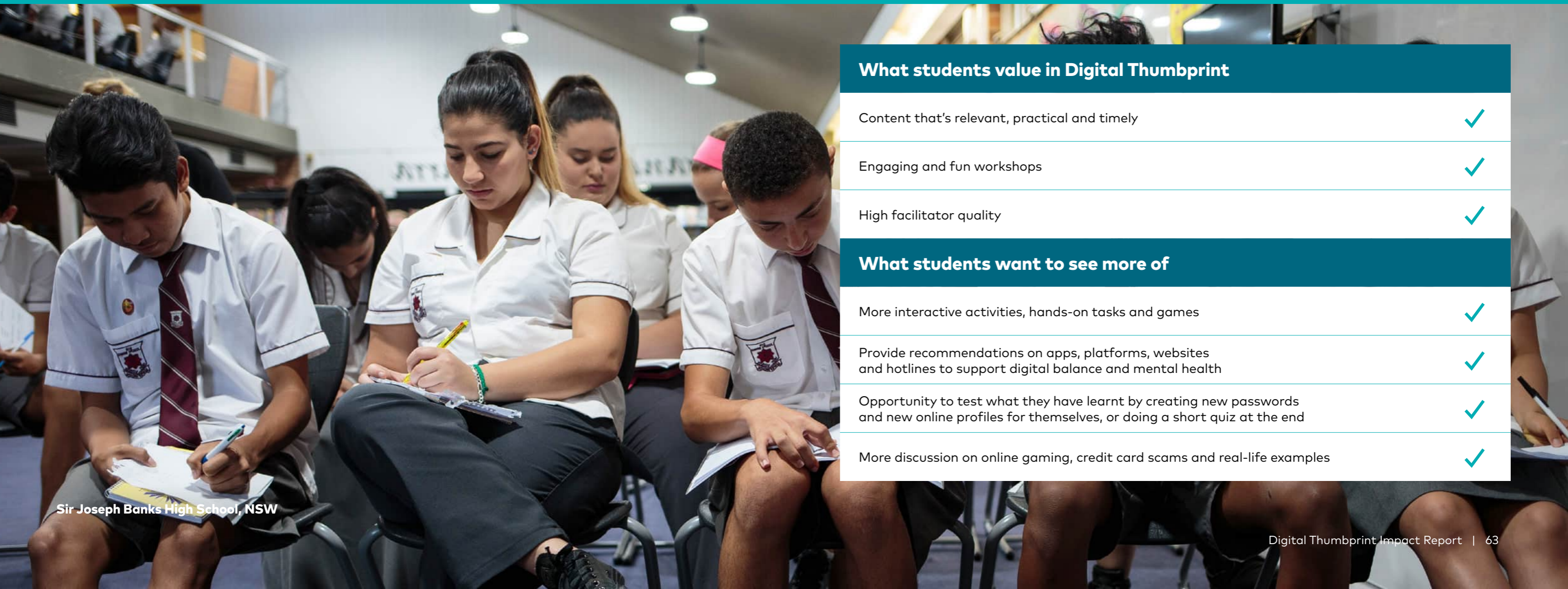
Sir Joseph Banks High School, NSW

What students value in Digital Thumbprint

Content that's relevant, practical and timely	✔
Engaging and fun workshops	✔
High facilitator quality	✔

What students want to see more of

More interactive activities, hands-on tasks and games	✔
Provide recommendations on apps, platforms, websites and hotlines to support digital balance and mental health	✔
Opportunity to test what they have learnt by creating new passwords and new online profiles for themselves, or doing a short quiz at the end	✔
More discussion on online gaming, credit card scams and real-life examples	✔

Overview of **evaluation** methodology

Evaluation of the Digital Thumbprint program

The information in this report has been informed by:

- Detailed surveys of secondary students and their teachers, including a retrospective pre-post assessment to explore the level to which students experienced, and teachers observed, change.

  - These surveys were designed to explore the impact of the program across four domains:

    1. Attitudes
    2. Knowledge
    3. Self-efficacy
    4. Behavioural intent

  - These surveys were completed immediately after the workshops and included opportunities for students to provide written feedback.

- Focus groups with students, designed as a space for students to share their experiences and identify needs to improve the program in future years.

- Interviews and focus groups with teachers to validate information and gain a deeper understanding of the key areas of improvement and vulnerability for students.

Through this evaluation we have heard from over 5,000 students and 240 teachers across over 300 schools.

Sir Joseph Banks High School, NSW

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For more information: