Michael Ginty, former head of global security for Uber, used to spend his days thinking about how to keep the ride-hailing company’s facilities and staff safe as it opened new offices and angered taxi drivers in hundreds of cities around the world.

This week, the former military special agent is starting a new job protecting far smaller charges. He has left Uber to figure out how to protect primary school children at Altschool, a venture-capital backed start-up opening new schools in the San Francisco area that integrate technology into the curriculum.

Many start-ups operate on the theory of ‘move fast and break things’, and companies like Uber have had run-ins with safety, as some drivers have assaulted passengers or had accidents. This is very different from companies which work with children, because they have zero margin for error. But founders and investors say they can use their expertise with new kinds of tech to minimise their risks.

“There is a misinterpretation that you need to have these metal detectors, high gates, security guards,” said Mr Ginty, who focused on physical security for Uber’s facilities, not its cybersecurity strategy. “It kind of restricts you from being able to interact with the outside world and locks you in."

His goal as Altschool’s head of safety, he says, is to figure out novel ways to use technology to protect kids. US schools have had a spate of security issues recently — from shootings by both outsiders and students, as well as children with learning disabilities leaving campus — and he thinks that Altschool can be a model for rethinking how schools keep kids safe.

He is not the only one at a new start-up trying to use technology to protect kids.

Shuddle, launched last year in a few Bay Area districts, is a ride-hailing app made specifically for parents who need a driver to shuttle their kids around. It was founded by Nick Allen, who had previously co-founded ride-hailing app Sidecar, an Uber and Lyft rival. At Sidecar, he realised parents were hailing rides for their kids, even though the company’s system was not built with unaccompanied minors in mind.

So at Shuddle, the drivers are all experienced childcare providers, and (coincidentally) all women, says Mr Allen. The app adds software made by another start-up, Zendrive, onto drivers’ phones to track every movement of their car, from whether the driver stops short to whether she used the phone while driving. Bad drivers get fired. Parents can also track their children in real-time via the app.

Most parents use it to drop kids at school or drive them to after-school sports practice. A few divorced parents, said Mr Allen, have been using it to drop kids off for visitation with the other parent so the two do not have to talk to each other.

At Altschool, Mr Ginty is looking to build an app that would let parents modify the list of people authorised to pick up their kids from school and let the school notify parents in case of emergencies. He’s looking at ways to develop new security and camera systems that can let teachers “know who’s in the building at all times and what their purpose is,” he says.

He’s also looking at wearables so kids can’t get lost on field trips or leave school unnoticed, he says.

One commonality among the start-ups focused on kid-friendly tech is that many of their engineers and investors are parents themselves — a sharp divergence from the common stereotype of Silicon Valley as a place where 20-something bros build apps for other 20-something bros.

Mr Ginty discovered Altschool while looking for a place to send his two young kids.

“The plan is absolutely for them to go to Altschool, so I have a very vested interest in getting this right,” says Mr Ginty.

The boyish Mr Allen does not have children, but the majority of his board members are women, many of them working moms — a
rarity in the male-dominated Silicon Valley.

One early investor, Trae Vassallo, is a former partner at VC firm Kleiner Perkins and a working mother of three. She is an experienced hardware investor — she also invested in Nest, the smart home thermostat and smoke detector company bought by Google — and had been on the look out for companies that use technology to transform home and family life.

When she heard of Shuddle, she said, she immediately emailed Mr Allen.

“I said a) Can I invest and b) Can I be a beta tester for you?” she said.