



When You Can See It, You Can Stop It.

The essential role of digital monitoring
in schools and MATs.

**Seven imperatives for success
- and two pitfalls to avoid.**

1. Introduction

The biggest safeguarding risks impacting schools and academies today aren't noticeable with eyes and ears alone.

Because they tend to emerge first, and sometimes only, online. This includes safeguarding concerns like bullying, racism, grooming, self-harm and radicalisation.

Making detection even harder is the fact that the young people vulnerable to these risks are digital natives, often more fluent in technology than the adults tasked with protecting them.

But a setting's ability to detect these risks early is critical:

- ✓ To keep students safe
- ✓ To protect staff workloads
- ✓ To maintain attendance levels
- ✓ To comply with KCSIE

Comprehensive digital risk detection cannot be achieved with web filtering or physical supervision alone. It can only be achieved with the addition of digital monitoring.

This vital safeguarding capability identifies potential risks in what students do, say or share on digital devices and immediately alerts safeguarding staff, with contextual evidence, for a fast and appropriate intervention.



Digital monitoring's early detection capability can be life changing and life saving. It helps prevent risk escalation and all the negative impact that brings.

Yet despite the mountains of evidence on digital monitoring's critical impact, some schools and academies still lack effective provision or indeed, any provision at all.

This paper outlines the key considerations safeguarders need to understand in order to make the informed decisions that are right for them.

2. Monitoring is a crucial component of any effective safeguarding strategy

When safeguarding risks go unnoticed, it impacts:



Student wellbeing:

Online risks escalate quickly, and can cause significant emotional, social and even physical harm.



DSL workload:

The longer risks are able to develop unchecked, the more work is required of DSLs when they are eventually able to intervene.



Attendance levels:

Left unsupported, vulnerable students often begin to disengage in class and may eventually stop attending school altogether.

Digital monitoring is key to early detection and early detection is key to KSCIE compliance.


Keeping Children Safe in Education¹ states that it is essential for schools to have appropriate monitoring systems in place and “regularly review their effectiveness.”

It points DSLs to the Filtering and Monitoring Standards² - additional statutory guidance that clarifies: “For monitoring to be effective it must pick up incidents that are of concern urgently (...) allowing you to take prompt action.”

Schools and academies that lack effective monitoring will find it very difficult to demonstrate urgent risk detection, beyond web searching, and, by extension, will struggle to fulfil their statutory obligations.

¹ Keeping Children Safe in Education, *Department for Education, 2025*

² Filtering and Monitoring Standards for Schools and Colleges, *Department for Education, 2022*



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Filtering and Monitoring Standards for Schools and Colleges, *Department for Education, 2022*

3. Digital monitoring and early risk detection: What the evidence tells us

In 2024, Smoothwall Monitor alerted DSLs across the UK to students in need of a rapid intervention...

These risks were detected in what the students were doing, saying or sharing online. Without digital monitoring they quite likely could have gone unnoticed, or noticed too late.

Monitor identified:

A student facing a serious risk
- **every 2 minutes**

A student suspected to be involved in a serious cyberbullying, bullying or violent incident - **every 5 minutes**

A student suspected to be involved in a serious sexual incident - **every 17 minutes**

A student facing a very serious risk to health or life - **every 41 minutes**

A student involved in a suspected terrorism alert - **every 2 hours**

A student suspected to be involved in a serious grooming incident - **every 3.5 hours**

Schools and academies cannot afford to miss these warning signs by relying on ineffective methods such as eyes and ears alone, or filtering, to identify risks in online behaviour.

Real-time, accurate monitoring changes lives and saves lives.



4. Where schools fall short of early risk detection

There are two pitfalls that may prevent schools and academies from achieving early risk detection.

1. Overreliance on web filter logs

Web filters prevent students accessing harmful content and report on harmful or inappropriate search activity. This is a vital safety function. However they do not identify risks based on what students do, say or share on websites or beyond the web browser.

For example, filters cannot see offensive messages sent by email, malicious intentions shared in a word document, or cries for help typed into a slide, and then quickly deleted. They cannot detect sexually inappropriate conversations on a social channel, suicide ideation with a chatbot or CSAM imagery shared on a forum.

DSLs relying on filtering will miss huge swathes of the digital landscape where risks are regularly detected. They must also rely on IT colleagues for reports and interpretation, as web logs can be technical and complex.

The result: Many risks go undetected and unaddressed; risks that are identified through a student's online search behaviour lack the context needed for fast and appropriate intervention; IT Teams need to pull the reports, which are often complex, resulting in stress all round and a slow response, or inability to see or respond at all.

2. In-house moderated monitoring

Risks detected by monitoring can contain false positives. Therefore a layer of moderation is needed.

In the case of human-moderated monitoring, such as Smoothwall Monitor, AI technology does the first review of the alert to eliminate obvious false positives. If the alert is not discarded at this point it is graded from a low risk 1 through to a very high risk 5. Those graded 1 and 2 are recorded in a dashboard for the DSL to review at their convenience. Alerts graded 3 to 5 go to a human moderator for a trained review of the alert and its context. At this point if the DSL needs to see it, they will be emailed. If they need to see it immediately, they will be phoned.

All this happens within minutes of the risk occurring. The DSL can get on with their many other tasks, safe in the knowledge that if a risk happens in a student's digital life and it needs their attention, they will be immediately notified.

With non-human moderated monitoring, the DSL is responsible for doing the sifting and sorting of alerts themselves - from the start.

These systems tend not to distinguish between high-risk and low-risk alerts, so DSLs must manually assess each one and try to determine which need their attention and which don't. This wastes time and delays response. It's also incredibly stressful for the DSL and their team.

Without a fully trained and sufficiently resourced human moderation team, in-house moderated monitoring is not recommended for effective safeguarding.

The result: Alert fatigue; important risks are buried beneath false positives; DSLs operate without confidence or efficiency.



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5. The seven imperatives for digital monitoring success

These seven imperatives define what effective monitoring must deliver if schools and academies are to safeguard students, protect DSL workloads, maintain attendance levels, and stay compliant.



Know instantly when you are needed

The earliest signs of bullying, grooming, radicalisation or suicide ideation often appear only in the digital space. If your system can't surface those signals and bring them to your attention fast, you'll miss them — and the consequences could be catastrophic, for both students and the setting.



Protect students everywhere they learn

Safeguarding doesn't stop at the school gate or the web browser. Students use devices at home, on public Wi-Fi, and offline. Your monitoring must follow the device, not the network, ensuring that risk detection travels with the student wherever learning takes place.



Act in minutes, not days

Online risks escalate fast. A hostile message, a dangerous plan, or a cry for help typed into a chatbot can move from minor to serious within hours. Monitoring that detects and escalates alerts in real time allows DSLs to step in before any damage is done.



Never leave students unsupported

Risks don't wait for school hours. Neither can you. A monitoring solution with 24/7 human moderation ensures no cry for help goes unseen, no high-risk alert is missed, and DSLs aren't left carrying the impossible burden of being everywhere at once.



Cut through the noise

Drowning in false positives isn't just frustrating — it's dangerous. The more time you spend sifting through irrelevant alerts, the greater the chance you'll miss a real one. Monitoring must filter out the noise and surface only what matters, ranked by severity, so no genuine risk gets lost.



Get the full picture across all sites

Your safeguarding provision needs to be able to expand and contract quickly as your organisation evolves. A monitoring system that is easily deployed and scalable, allowing you to see data across schools and sites, provides DSLs and MAT leaders with key insights and ensures all students receive the same protection.



Respond with accuracy, not guesswork

Every alert should come with the evidence you need — screenshots, context, timelines — so you can act decisively and defend your decisions. Without this, you're left second-guessing, delaying interventions, and operating without the proof that leadership, parents, and inspectors demand.

6. The time to act is now

Digital monitoring is no longer optional. It is a statutory expectation, a moral obligation, and a practical necessity for schools and MATs.

The evidence is clear: risks are emerging faster, in more hidden digital spaces, and with greater consequences for students and settings alike.

Every week of delay leaves students unprotected, compliance unmet, and DSL workloads expanding. The question is not whether to implement monitoring, but whether you can afford not to.

Schools and MATs that act now are not only protecting their students — they are demonstrating leadership, strengthening compliance and safeguarding the future stability of their institutions. Those that don't risk being left behind, with consequences that are difficult to recover from.

The time to act is now.



About Smoothwall Monitor

Smoothwall Monitor has been developed to address the safeguarding realities facing schools today. It delivers against all seven imperatives, providing DSLs with a monitoring solution that is both compliant and practical in the education environment.

Trusted by thousands of UK schools and MATs, Smoothwall Monitor provides the clarity, speed and assurance DSLs need to detect risks early, protect student wellbeing, and maintain institutional stability.

Contact Us

Contact us today for an informal walkthrough of how it works. We can answer your questions and even put you in touch with other schools and MATs to learn their experiences of transforming safeguarding with Monitor.

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smoothwall[®]
by Qoria

Smoothwall is the leading provider of digital safeguarding solutions in UK education. For more information, visit our website or get in touch with our team of experts.

Find out more
www.smoothwall.com

Qoria

Smoothwall is part of Qoria, a global technology company, dedicated to keeping children safe and well in their digital lives. We harness the power of connection to close the gaps that children fall through, and to seamlessly support them on all sides - at school, at home and everywhere in between.

Find out more
www.qoria.com