Smoothwall Insights



Setting the New Standard for Digital Monitoring in UK Education

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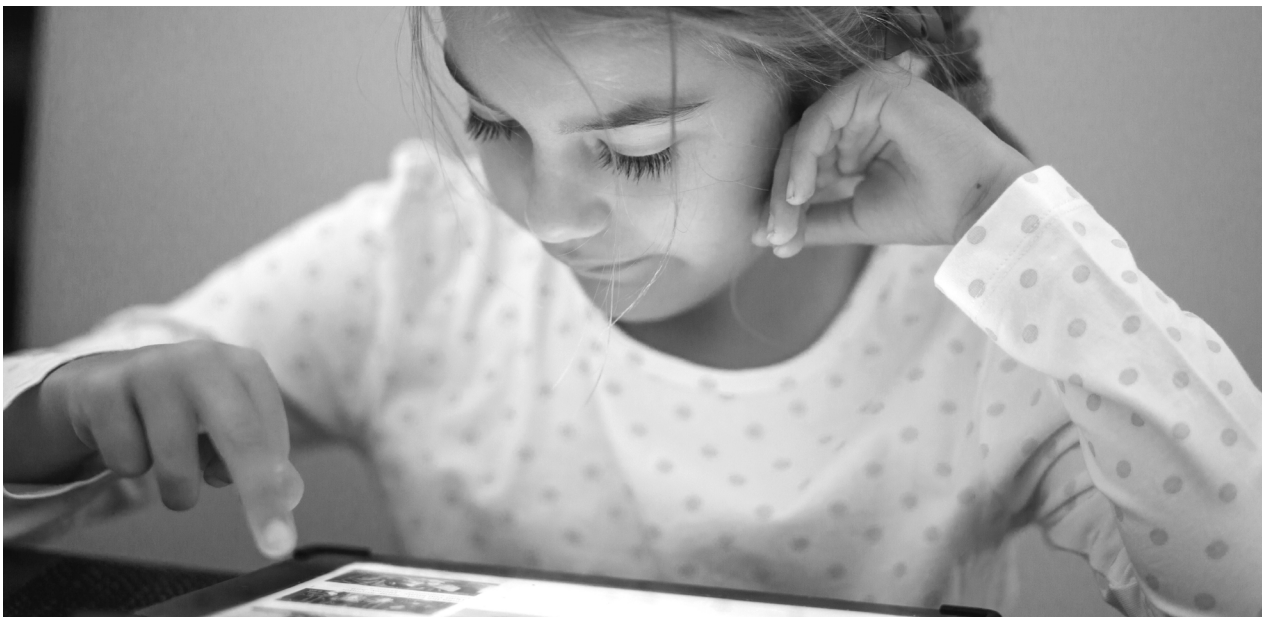
Introduction

In our rapidly evolving digital landscape, the internet continues to open up a world of boundless knowledge, learning and connectivity for students. Yet, alongside its benefits, a troubling reality looms.



Recent research and headline news indicates that student safety and wellbeing is at crisis levels - inextricably linked to the surge in negative online behaviours and interactions that place our children and young people at serious risk.

Amidst these challenges, digital monitoring solutions have entered the stage, heralding a new era in digital safeguarding.

This guide delves into the pressing need for 'appropriate' digital monitoring in UK schools, colleges and MATs.

It highlights the exceptional capabilities of Smoothwall Monitor, unveiling why it's not just a solution, but sets a new standard - providing schools with the latest technology to create a safer online environment for students and peace of mind for DSLs.

Essential reading for: Heads/Principals, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Governors, Proprietors, and anyone interested in, or responsible for safeguarding compliance within a school, college or MAT

1.0 The Tipping Point

Gone are the days when it was deemed satisfactory to monitor students using 'eyes and ears' or 'physical monitoring' alone. The risks children and young people were exposed to were arguably fewer, smart devices were in shorter circulation and remote learning was less commonplace.

Fast forward to the present, and the weight of responsibility placed on school safeguarders to keep up with the pace and scale of online risks has reached a tipping point. DSLs find themselves grappling with a dynamic digital landscape, fraught with an upward trend in inherent dangers for students to encounter online - including grooming, cyberbullying, self-harm and suicide ideation (but to name a few).

Social media also continues to play a part. Platforms such as Snapchat, WhatsApp and TikTok have all become hubs for negative interactions. Troublingly, a study by Young Minds found that 66% of young people reported that social media adversely affects their mental health.

Because of this, the need for efficient and effective support is more crucial than ever for DSLs to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those students in their care.

> "Almost three in ten children aged 8-17 yrs have experienced someone being nasty or hurtful to them via online apps or platforms."
>
> Ofcom Report 2023

2.0 The Growing Demand for Digital Monitoring

Since it first appeared several years ago, digital monitoring has become **a vital tool** in a DSLs arsenal.

Schools now recognise that in order to meet Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2023 guidance (section 41), their organisation should have 'appropriate filtering and monitoring in place.' The latest KCSIE guidance also signposts schools to the DfE's filtering and monitoring technical standards, which states that; 'filtering and monitoring are both important parts of safeguarding pupils and staff from potentially harmful and inappropriate online material.'
An effective digital monitoring solution should equip DSLs with an extra pair of virtual eyes and ears, making invisible risks, visible, and alerting them to any student in harm's way, across all school devices.

2.1 Isn't web filtering enough?

Whilst web filtering is an essential tool for shielding students from harmful and inappropriate online content, it can fall short in revealing the broader context of students' interactions. Digital monitoring goes beyond content blocking. It alerts designated staff when a student's digital behaviour suggests they are at risk. It provides vital contextual information including causative factors.

To further explore the difference between web filtering and digital monitoring, read our guide: 'Bridging the Language Gap'.

2.2 Not all monitoring solutions are created equal

By now, schools may have already identified certain gaps within their safeguarding provision and are looking for more information about which digital monitoring solutions are available on the market. However, it's important to understand that not all monitoring solutions offer the same level of reliability and capability. The easiest way to assess which type of monitoring solution is right for an organisation, is by way of comparison.

Our whitepaper 'A Complete Guide to Digital Monitoring for Schools' delves into the different types of digital monitoring available, allowing schools to make an informed decision on which solution best aligns with their needs. This whitepaper is also available for colleges and MATs.



3.0 Setting the New Standard for Digital Monitoring in UK Education

With a steadfast commitment to serving UK schools, colleges and MATs for over 20 years, Smoothwall has continuously adapted and evolved, leading the way in student digital safety.





In more recent years, our collaborative efforts with schools have been instrumental in refining and perfecting digital monitoring technology, forging a powerful partnership aimed at enhancing student safety and wellbeing.

Through a journey of continuous learning and adaptation, we have distilled our experience into eight comprehensive standards which schools can readily adopt. These standards empower schools to navigate the complex landscape of digital safety and student wellbeing with confidence, whilst avoiding the most common pitfalls and challenges.

By embracing these standards, schools can anticipate cost savings, expedited identification of vulnerable, at-risk students and a safer, more nurturing digital environment where students can thrive.

Every 2 minutes a child suspected to be at serious risk is identified.

Smoothwall Monitor Statistics 2023

3.1 Smoothwall's 8 standards for digital monitoring excellence

1. Meet legislation
2. 24/7/365 human moderation
3. Offline monitoring
4. Comprehensive reporting
5. Scalability
6. Integration into record management systems
7. Timely deployment
8. 24/7 support

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1. Meet legislation

It is essential for schools to implement a monitoring strategy that not only ensures the online safety of their students, but complies with statutory obligations.

According to the UK Safer Internet Centre's (UKSIC) 'Appropriate Monitoring for Schools' May 2023 guide, schools, colleges and MATs should 'be satisfied that their monitoring strategy or system (including keywords if using technical monitoring services) at least covers the following categories: illegal, bullying, child sexual exploitation, self-harm, pornography, gambling, violence, suicide, discrimination, drugs/substance abuse and extremism.'

They should also consider how their monitoring system integrates with their policies and should satisfy themselves to the extent that their monitoring strategy meets the required principles - a full list of the principles can be found here.

Compliance with these obligations can help schools identify any safeguarding and wellbeing issues at an early stage, creating a safer learning environment. Additionally, substantial evidence gathered through monitoring can serve as a compelling demonstration of a school's commitment to safeguarding students; a positive and contributing factor when it comes to Ofsted inspections.

Failure to comply can place student wellbeing at risk, disrupt education, damage the school's reputation and in some cases, lead to legal consequences.

2. 24/7/365 human moderation

Whether you choose to moderate internally or have an external provider do it for you, 24/7/365 human moderation cannot be overstated. In fact, when it comes to the detection of safeguarding incidents beyond the school premises and outside of regular school hours, it's crucial. According to Smoothwall's own data, in the last 12 months 92,964 incidents were recorded within this parameter, some of which resulted in a telephone call to a DSL for immediate intervention.

We know that schools rarely have the time or capacity to thoroughly analyse the amount of digital content students encounter. Human moderators possess a unique advantage, often monitoring risks up and down the country and around the world. This broader perspective enables them to identify emerging new trends and potential dangers that individual schools might overlook.

3. 24/7 device monitoring

With an increasing number of students now taking school devices home, extending protection beyond school hours is paramount. Monitoring devices 24/7 provides an extra robust safety net for schools. Schools who adopt this method gain the reassurance that even during non-school hours, they can detect and respond to any serious safeguarding incidents or concerning student online activity, before it's too late. It's a proactive approach, enabling schools to be well-informed and prepared to take immediate action should a serious incident occur.

Without it, schools simply risk overlooking critical safeguarding and wellbeing issues that could emerge, leaving students unprotected and vulnerable to harm.

4. None-web browser monitoring

Smoothwall's own research tells us that 1 in 3 monitoring alerts happen offline. Whether it's a Microsoft document, chat platform or gaming app, more and more students are using these platforms as a way to circumvent monitoring, or worse still, use them as a cry for help. School's who do not monitor offline applications could be missing vital information which would suggest a student is in urgent need of care and support.

5. Comprehensive reporting

Comprehensive reporting is an indispensable asset for schools when it comes to monitoring students' activities. In fact, it has multiple purposes. It plays a pivotal role in meeting regulatory requirements, providing schools with the evidence needed for assessments by bodies such as Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). It also helps to reduce the reliance on IT support, granting DSLs the autonomy to access critical reports independently. This not only streamlines the monitoring process, but also enables DSLs to swiftly identify and respond to potential issues.

Furthermore, it goes beyond compliance. By aggregating and analysing data over time, DSLs can spot any concerning trends and patterns in student behaviour. This invaluable insight not only aids safeguarding, but also helps to inform educational strategies - a function used particularly well across MATs.

Experience tells us that schools who have a more standard type of reporting risk compromising the overall effectiveness of their safeguarding efforts. Suffering from a level of data blindness, schools and their DSLs can miss valuable insights and patterns of student behaviour, which in return, can impede the ability to provide support and safeguarding education to students. Moreover, it can result in operational inefficiencies. DSLs can become dependent on IT support for generating ad-hoc reports, placing a burden on already overstretched workloads and diverting resources away from other essential tasks.



1 in 3 safeguarding alerts come from outside of the web browser.

Smoothwall Monitor Statistics 2023

5. Scalability

Our extensive experience collaborating with MATs and multi-site organisations tells us that scalability isn't a nice to have, it's a necessity. As the number of sites within a trust grows, so do the risks,and so does the need for technologies such as digital monitoring.

In 2022, the Department for Education set out a new initiative for all schools across the UK to be in, or in the process of joining a trust, by 2030. This mandate has only intensified the requirement for MATs to adopt a strategic approach which allows them to streamline digital monitoring technology across multiple school sites, in a timely and effective way, and with minimum impact on their network.

Choosing a solution which offers a multi-tenant view can help. Not only can it enable MATs to facilitate swift and convenient data sharing among DSLs and other key stakeholders, but it also acts as a formidable barrier against unauthorised access to sensitive information, helping to preserve data integrity and security.

Additionally, it allows for the exchange of educational insights and best practices, contributing towards a more effective learning environment across the whole trust. The repercussions of not harnessing scalability can be profound and far-reaching. Without the capacity to scale, schools risk losing out on key information and intelligence across their trust, potentially leading to operational inefficiencies, compliance issues and an unnecessary drain on resources.

6.Integration into record management systems

Our experience working with schools highlights the importance of integration when it comes to student digital safety and overall risk management. Schools who introduce a siloed approach to safeguarding can often find themselves grappling with a myriad of challenges including: missed early warning markers, poor communication and overwhelmed staff. This fragmented approach can result in disjointed data, making it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of student safety and wellbeing.

Schools who choose to prioritise integration between digital monitoring and their existing record management systems can benefit from a significant advantage. It creates a unified ecosystem where information can flow seamlessly between platforms, providing DSLs with a real-time, holistic view of any challenges or issues students may be facing. With this, schools are able to promptly address these concerns and use these insights to make referrals to third party authorities where necessary, whilst elevating school-wide educational strategies.

7. Timely deployment

We know that schools, quite simply, do not have the luxury of time or the resources to squander on prolonged implementation processes. When deployment isn't streamlined, it can have a detrimental impact. For example, lengthy and cumbersome implementation processes, in some cases, can result in DSLs and other safeguarding staff having to spend more time than necessary focussing on the solution. It can also deter stakeholders from fully buying into the solution. The result is often resistance and a slower realisation of the solution's potential benefits.

When deployment is executed with precision and efficiency, the benefits are manifold. A swift and seamless implementation not only minimises disruption, but also fosters a sense of confidence and enthusiasm among stakeholders. In turn, students in need can be spotted much sooner, with schools able demonstrate their commitment to staying ahead of safeguarding challenges and the ever-changing digital landscape.



> Smoothwall Monitor is home to a team of nearly 50 UK-based, DBS-checked, expertly-trained, human moderators, working around the clock, 24/7/365 days a year. No third party moderators. No contractors.”

4.0 About Smoothwall Monitor

Today, our multi-award winning digital monitoring solution, Smoothwall Monitor, stands as a trusted ally for more than 3,000 schools, colleges and MATs, safeguarding over 1 million students across the UK.

Its features and capabilities seamlessly align with the standards set forth in this document, and are highlighted below.

The UK's largest human moderation team

Smoothwall Monitor is home to a team of nearly 50 UK-based, DBS-checked, expertly-trained, human moderators, working around the clock, 24/7/365 days a year. No third party moderators. No contractors.

By seamlessly combining our innovative technology with our dedicated in-house human moderation team, we've established a dynamic synergy that enables us to quickly identify false positives and address urgent risks. If a student types into a browser, digital document, or social media platform anything that suggests they may be at risk, we'll see it; we'll assess it and if it's serious we'll tell you about it, by phone call, within minutes.

Smoothwall's speed of response can, and has, **saved lives.**

Cutting-edge development

To offer schools the most effective digital monitoring solution, Smoothwall Monitor remains at the cutting edge of technology development. As part of our global, agile approach we collaborate closely with our customers, we swiftly respond to meet schools' practical needs, and we monitor and respond to changes in the digital landscape.

Our dedicated product development specialists continuously innovate to address evolving challenges, including staying current with Governance updates like KCSIE and Ofsted, as well as emerging online threats such as new social media trends. Whatever the requirement, we stand ready to respond and develop our technology accordingly.

Comprehensive reporting

Smoothwall Monitor's real-time reporting dashboard offers an intuitive and easily comprehensible overview of captured alerts, enabling DSLs to gain insights on the fly. For MATs, it allows for seamless comparison between schools, revealing any categories of concern and trends in behaviour. Using this information, senior leadership teams (SLTs) and DSLs can assess the number of events within each school and identify where any additional support, including safeguarding education, may be required.

Easily scalable

With vast experience working closely with MATs and multi-site organisations, we fully understand the significance of scalability when it comes to digital monitoring.

We recognise that MAT safeguarding leads may have questions about the resources required and concerns around any additional workload for their already time-poor DSLs. To address these concerns, we've developed a scalable solution that allows MATs to streamline their digital monitoring across multiple school sites, with easy deployment and no impact to the MAT's network. Smoothwall Monitor also offers a multi-tenant view with tailored user policies, facilitating seamless monitoring across an entire trust, providing MATs with the efficiency and control they need.

Seamless integration

At Smoothwall we recognise that digital safeguarding is just one component of a comprehensive safeguarding provision. Our objective is to simplify the integration between your various safeguarding platforms. With Smoothwall Monitor, we eliminate the hassle of manual data entry for school staff, streamlining the process of transferring important details to CPOMS and MyConcern. This not only saves valuable time, but significantly reduces the risk of errors.

Seamlessly integrating Smoothwall Monitor with a school or college's record management system allows school's to transfer critical data with a single click. By automatically funneling risk data into the chosen record management system, it ensures swift identification of lower-level safeguarding concerns before they escalate into more serious incidents. This integrated approach fosters a more unified and efficient safeguarding process.

Multi-tenant view

Much like all Smoothwall products, Smoothwall Monitor is multi-tenant by design, not by accident. User Roles, data and tenants are created and managed in a way to facilitate fast and convenient sharing with those who need it, whilst preventing unprivileged users from viewing unauthorised information. A particularly useful feature when looking to expand a MAT.

Easy installation

With over 3,000 successful deployments, we've refined our deployment process to ensure schools, colleges, and MATs are up and running within as little as a week. New customers receive a dedicated Customer Success Manager, well-versed in safeguarding, to understand specific requirements and oversee onboarding milestones. We cater to all your safeguarding needs, considering user age, platforms, and access levels. Post-deployment, we provide tailored training sessions that address your unique needs and share best practices drawn from numerous successful deployments. For schools, colleges or MATs who decide to partner with us, our commitment to support doesn't just stop at the point of installation.

Rapid support

We understand that in the rare event of a technical digital monitoring issue arising, a fast resolution is crucial. That's why we have made significant investments in our UK based Smoothwall support team, dedicated to streamlining our support processes and ensuring any issues are promptly resolved. Today, our Customer Success Managers adhere to a stringent Service Level Agreement (SLA). Urgent grade issues receive a response within one hour, while lower grade issues are addressed within two hours. This rapid resolution time ensures that monitoring issues won't add to your to-do list, allowing you to concentrate on other pressing priorities.



5.0 The Smoothwall Monitor Impact

Making invisible risks, **visible.**

Smoothwall Monitor and our team of human moderators find students at serious risk, every minute of every day. These are children who could have gone unnoticed or noticed too late.

Here's a snapshot of what we uncovered in 2023...

Serious Risk = Grade 3-5
Very Serious Risk = Grade 5

Cyberbullying

Every 6 minutes we found a child suspected to be involved in a serious cyberbullying, bullying or violent incident.

Every 2.5 hours we discovered a child suspected to be involved in a very serious cyberbullying, bullying or violent event including a risk to their health or life.

Grooming

Every 4 hours we found a child suspected to be involved in a serious grooming incident.

Every 8 days we found a child suspected to be involved in a very serious grooming event including a risk to their health or life.

Incidents of a cybersexual nature

Every 7 minutes we discovered a child suspected to be involved in a serious sexual incident.

Every 2.5 hours we found a child suspected to be involved in a very serious sexual incident including a risk to their health or life.

6.0 Testimonials

Customer feedback has, and always will be, at the cornerstone of everything we do.

Smoothwall customers trust us to provide cutting-edge technologies that cater to their unique needs and challenges, and help keep their students safer. But don't just take our word for it – hear what our valued customers have to say about their experience with Smoothwall Monitor.

Here's what our customers have to say:

"**Smoothwall Monitor is amazing...** It's the reassurance that you know students are safe, and you know humans are analysing risks and providing human judgement. **It works so seamlessly."**

DSL
Hollywood Primary School

"I can't praise Smoothwall Monitor enough! It's not only made my life a lot easier, but it really does have the **ability to transform lives** because it gives me time to act."

Care, Guidance and Support Manager
King Harold Academy

"In relation to 7 months of stress and pain from a previous provider which failed to deliver what they had stated it would do, Smoothwall Monitor **knocks it out of the park!"**

Operations and Business Manager
Carlton Keighley

Learn More

Are you confident that you could spot a student at risk in their digital lives?

Are you confident you have the best monitoring practices in place for you?

Are you confident that you're meeting the KCSIE and DfE standards for appropriate monitoring?

If the answer is 'no,' or 'I'm not sure,' please contact us for an informal discussion.

To have an open and informal conversation about digital monitoring or learn more about Smoothwall Monitor, please contact us. **We're here to help.**

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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.

Web: www.smoothwall.com
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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