Digital Monitoring for Designated Safeguarding Leads

Your Key Questions Answered

In this guide: We answer the questions consistently asked by DSLs in relation to digital monitoring and the Smoothwall Monitor solution

smoothwall®
by Qoria

About this Document

This document has been produced by Smoothwall's Online Safeguarding Experts to help DSLs better understand digital monitoring and decide whether it should be a part of their schools safeguarding provision.

Collating the questions consistently asked by DSLs across the UK, we explain what digital monitoring is, how it works, and the vital role it plays in supporting DSLs with their safeguarding responsibilities.

1. Why do we need digital monitoring?

Although the eyes and ears of teachers have always been and continue to be a vital part of student safeguarding, this method alone will not help schools identify those students who may be suffering in silence or who may not realise they are in danger, such as those being groomed.

Not all children experiencing difficulties speak up or manifest any outward signs of distress. They can often choose not to confide in an adult if they are feeling scared, or uncomfortable, and if they can't find the words or don't want to cause a fuss. In the case of grooming or radicalisation children may not even realise they are in danger.

As classrooms continue to shift onto virtual learning platforms, spotting unusual behaviour or anything out of the ordinary is harder than ever before.

The good news is a vulnerable child can often be spotted through their digital behaviour. And this is where digital monitoring comes in.

In the last 12 months alone Smoothwall Monitor alerted DSLs to pupils facing an immediate risk to health or life every 45 minutes. These are children their schools believe without digital monitoring, and through no one's fault, could have gone unnoticed, or noticed too late.

2. How does it work?

The words a pupil types, the websites they visit, the online conversations they have, the images they share, can all reveal risks that cannot be seen with eyes and ears alone.

Digital monitoring sits on the student device and flags any signs of risk.

With Smoothwall Monitor, this monitoring happens in real time. When a risk is detected, a screenshot is taken and AI (or Artificial Intelligence) grades the risk. Low risks go to the dashboard for the DSL to view next time they log in.

Higher risks go to our team of highly trained human moderators to assess their severity. If they are deemed genuinely serious they will contact your school by email or, in the case of a possible risk to health or life, by phone 24/7. That means your school has a dedicated, highly skilled virtual and human team, looking for invisible risks and protecting your students, round the clock.

3. What's the difference between web filtering and digital monitoring?

Web filtering and monitoring work hand in hand when it comes to protecting pupils online.

Where web filtering is designed to block pupils from being able to access and view inappropriate content on the internet, digital monitoring analyses screen views and any keystrokes the child makes into a device to search for any risks.

Whether a user types into a browser, Microsoft document, or a social media platform, digital monitoring will capture the word/s even if they are immediately deleted, or never submitted or sent.

4. Who in the school is responsible for the management of monitoring?

In most school settings the IT team will deploy monitoring and the Designated Safeguarding Lead or safeguarding team, will manage it thereafter.

5 What does real-time monitoring mean?

Real-time monitoring refers to the action of capturing and alerting a pupil's activity as and when it happens. This allows school DSLs and safeguarding teams to intervene at the earliest point and ensure appropriate support is provided.

It also enables DSLs to understand any key trends in online behaviour amongst students, which can then be used to inform and educate specific year groups or on a whole-school level.

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6. What does human moderation mean?

Human moderation refers to a team of analyst's who grade and decide on the severity of any alerts captured by a digital monitoring solution.

With Smoothwall Monitor, when a risk level is high, the school's DSL is immediately notified in person so that they can intervene at an early stage. Lower-level alerts are sent to the monitoring portal for DSLs to view and manage later.

Human Moderator's also remove any further false positives which Artificial Intelligence (AI) alone may not have picked up. This saves DSLs valuable time not having to trawl through multiple reports.

Human moderated monitoring is ideal for schools whose DSL is juggling other responsibilities and needs that little extra help.

With Smoothwall Monitor, Moderators work around the clock 24/7/365, to ensure schools are immediately notified of any urgent concerns or risk to life. This gives DSLs piece of mind that should a student become at risk; they will be informed straight away.

7. How much information can Moderators see on a student?

Smoothwall Moderators are able to see any screenshots and text which the student has viewed or typed into a device, which have resulted in an alert.

Alongside this Moderators also have access to a limited amount of information including the student's username (which in most cases is not the student's name in the interest of privacy), and your organisation type, whether that be primary or secondary for example.

Should a Moderator need to escalate a concern, only then will they be able to view the chosen contact information you have provided.

8. Is digital monitoring needed for Ofsted?

In line with government legislation, Ofsted now asks you to provide evidence of appropriate monitoring.

Where digital monitoring itself isn't a requirement, a technology-based solution can help you meet and exceed Ofsted requirements in a number of ways.
Some of these include:

- Demonstrating far reaching effective arrangements to identify children at risk.

- Identifying children at risk (both the obvious and not so obvious) allowing you to intervene early and provide the appropriate support.

- Highlighting risks and concerns in real-time giving you a comprehensive picture of the risk landscape within your school, which can be used to leverage safeguarding education.

- Provide a full evidence-based picture of the safeguarding provision and communicate effectively to outside agencies to ensure those at risk are identified and receive support at the right time.

9. Is digital monitoring only necessary for older pupils?

No. Digital safety is not just a secondary-only problem. We receive many alerts from primary school settings. There is also an obligation to safeguard staff working in a primary environment, so this should be considered.

10. What's involved in the implementation? Is it quick to set up?

This depends entirely on the vendor. At Smoothwall, installation is simple and straight forward. It can be as easy as flipping a switch, or a simple client download, depending on your current filtering provider.

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With restricted budgets and often complex requirements, keeping up with changing technology can seem challenging. But it's essential in order to meet your statutory obligations around safeguarding.

11. We receive safeguarding alerts from our Smoothwall Filter, what's the difference?

The Safeguarding portal within Smoothwall Filter will only provide an alert based on URLs accessed and any search terms used. It is not human moderated, and won't provide context based analysis, including any screenshots that may show intent. It also doesn't alert you to any risks shown by keystroke activity within non-browser apps such as: Microsoft Word, PowerPoint or Teams.

12. Our safeguarding team is already overstretched. Won't monitoring just add more safety concerns to deal with?

Human moderated digital monitoring is designed to provide maximum protection, without adding to workload. The removal of false positives means DSLs no longer have to waste hours trawling through reports. You can be safe in the knowledge that should an alert be detected, and in some cases escalated, it will be of genuine concern and in need of attention.

13. How much does digital monitoring cost?

Digital monitoring solutions tend to range in price depending on the number of pupils, the quality and range of monitoring, whether it uses real-time risk grading, is moderated by humans or AI, and other factors. With Smoothwall you can also deploy it for no cost for a period of time to learn about it in your own setting
- while protecting pupils.

14. Would I be tied into a contract? How long for?

This varies vendor to vendor. At Smoothwall we provide digital monitoring on a contract basis giving customers flexibility on the length of their contract term. Customers can choose from 1 year, 3 years and 5 year contracts, with cost saving benefits in the long term.

15. How are other schools budgeting for it?

Sources of budget varies from school to school. As the DSL has lead responsibility for online safety under their school safeguarding remit, some schools choose to fund it from their risk / safeguarding budget, whereas others might use their general / ICT fund. If it is a new addition to include in your school budget, you may need to request funding. Smoothwall have written a document to help you prepare a case for funding. You can download it for free at:

https://smoothwall.com/how-to-create-a-case-for-funding

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16. How does digital monitoring fall in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR?

Monitoring is not affected by the Data Protection Act and GDPR. KCSIE 2023 states:

"The Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR do not prevent, or limit, the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children."

17. Would we need to seek parents' permission to monitor their children?

As digital monitoring is only installed onto school owned devices, we understand there is no legal requirement to seek the permission of parents. However, we would encourage schools to make parents aware.

18. Will digital monitoring still work if pupils take devices offsite?

At Smoothwall, our digital monitoring solution works offline as well as online. This means if a child takes home a school device but isn't connected to the internet, the device will continue to be monitored, capturing screenshots and keystrokes. As soon as an internet connection is reestablished, Smoothwall Monitor will send any data through to our team of Moderators to analyse.

19. Can digital monitoring integrate with other digital safety solutions such as filtering or record management?

Yes. With Smoothwall Monitor you can integrate with various record management systems including CPOMS, MyConcern and our very own Smoothwall Record Manager. Any events which are alerted in Smoothwall Monitor will be automatically sent through to the record management system. The combined data then gives DSLs a more holistic view of each child's wellbeing.

20. Why should I consider Smoothwall over other Vendors? Is there a difference?

As well as 24/7/365 human moderation, Smoothwall Monitor has a very simple and intuitive interface where alerts are displayed clearly allowing DSLs and safeguarding teams to easily access data and evaluate concerns. Using single signon, it can be accessed securely, anytime, anywhere, and on any device providing both security and ease of use.

It is real-time. And the use of AI to initially grade risks means that our trained Moderators are looking at the more serious risks not every risk. This keeps them sharp and focused with no risk of 'tired eyes'.

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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.

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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