



Digital Safety

How to build a digital safety culture for the whole school community

Essential reading for:

School leaders, DSLs, Governors and anyone with an interest and/or responsibility for school-wide student safeguarding.





Contents

About this document..... 3

1.0 Why a Culture and Why The Whole School Community?..... 4

2.0 Impact and Benefits..... 7

3.0 Building a Digital Safety Culture..... 8

 3.1 Technology components..... 8

 3.2 Stakeholder components..... 11

4.0 Implementation – Technology Partner v Vendor..... 14

5.0 Compliance Refresh 15

Appendices

Book a demo..... 16

Further reading..... 17

About Smoothwall..... 18

References..... 19

About this document

Having a suitable digital safety culture not only maximises student safety but also improves the whole school learning environment. If the digital safety infrastructure is not right, lessons may be held up, necessary resources may be restricted, pupils may become frustrated and go off task and key safeguarding information may be missed. Getting the digital safety culture right optimises school performance:

- The right **web filter** ensures the use of appropriate content while maintaining safety.
- The right **firewall** ensures a safe network.
- The right **monitor** identifies students at risk.
- The right **classroom manager** keeps all students engaged and on task.
- The right **safeguarding record management** helps ensure no child at risk slips through the net.
- The right **digital safety education** ensures all stakeholders have the necessary education and understanding.

In this document, we explore how to create a digital safety culture that's right for your organisation, the different components to consider, and the best approach to implementation.

Essential reading for:

School leaders, DSLs, IT professionals, Governors and anyone with an interest or responsibility for student safeguarding.

If you have any questions about your online safety solutions or online safety in general, please do not hesitate to contact the Smoothwall team.

We'd be happy to help.

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1.0 Why a Culture and Why The Whole School Community?

As we know digital technology has exploded in recent years and now impacts all areas of school and home life. This has created a real opportunity for schools to engage pupils in learning and improve the overall environment for behaviour and outcomes.

Conversely, there has been an alarming rise in self-harm, bullying on online forums, troubling reports of children affected by county lines, gang violence, online grooming, anxiety and depression.

As technology expands so too must the consideration for digital safety - not just in pockets, but across the whole school community.

When a school has a strong digital safety culture everyone understands the dangers and knows their role

in protecting students. This includes school leaders, teachers, staff, parents, governors and students themselves.

A strong digital safety culture can also improve trust in technology and create the opportunity to improve other processes and practices within schools.

These include:

1. Improved safeguarding
2. Improved teaching practices
3. Improved administration processes
4. Improved assessment processes
5. Better educational outcomes

A community approach to digital safety improves performance across the whole school.



1. Improved safeguarding online and offline

Creating a robust digital safety culture can improve safeguarding across your whole school. It can:

- Protect students from accessing, sharing or creating harmful content.
- Help leaders to identify students at risk including mental health or child protection concerns (county lines, self-harm, depression, substance abuse, online grooming, radicalisation).
- Improve the safety and efficiency of safeguarding record management for all stakeholders.

2. Improved teaching practices

- A strong digital safety culture can improve teachers access to digital resources, give students the opportunity to build online resilience, and improve educational outcomes for all.

3. Improved administration processes

- Quicker access to resources can result in less time needed for admin tasks such as lesson preparation and report creation.
- Leadership can tag whole groups of students in digital safeguarding records such as 'child in need', without it being an extensive administration task.

4. Improved assessment processes

- Assessment can become more effective and efficient with tests being easier to manage. Pupils not paying attention or cheating can be easily visible on screen.

5. Better educational outcomes

- Better engagement can optimise pupil progress.
- Issues can be detected quicker, this can improve behaviour in the classroom and create a safer environment.
- Improved safeguarding can help to tackle adverse experiences at an early stage and reduce the overall impact experienced by a student.



When a school has a strong digital safety culture in place, safeguarding of children can be improved and digital resilience can increase.



2.0 Impact and Benefits

Impact	Strong digital safety culture	Weak digital safety culture
Efficient safeguarding record management	Digital safeguarding records improve efficiency. Alerts and staff actions are tracked so that no pupil slips through the net. Firewall and filtering provide safer access with monitoring picking up any safeguarding concerns.	Paper safeguarding records are difficult to update and create reports. Follow up could be missed by busy staff. Actions are harder to track. Dangerous or inappropriate online access or actions may occur, and safeguarding concerns may be missed.
Minimising hidden risks	Bullying, mental health concerns and safeguarding risks shown through digital behaviour are identified through digital monitoring.	Digital signs of bullying, mental health concerns and safeguarding risks are not identified or lost by ineffective monitoring.
Better outcomes in the digital classroom	Effective digital classroom management keeps pupils on task and improves behaviour. Pupils off task can be quickly identified and re-engaged.	Difficult for teachers to monitor students off task without classroom management. Poor behaviour created by restricted digital resources/inappropriate resources.
Financial gains	Using a combined digital safety solution reduces cost.	Components in isolation can raise cost.
Reducing teacher workload	Safe, comprehensive internet access and reduces workload by minimising paper-based admin tasks.	Poor firewall and filtering leads to lack of confidence in access to resources and student safety. Staff avoid using digital solutions making a heavier workload.
School group tracking	Digital safeguarding records enable school leaders to easily tag student groups with the option of integrated tags from MIS such as SEN and FSM.	Paper safeguarding records make tracking school groups an extensive paper work exercise in collating data.
Improved digital safety awareness	Pupils build resilience to online challenges through wide access and online safety embedded in lessons.	Pupils have a poor understanding of the reality of online challenges with limited online access.
IT time saving	Digital safety systems are easy to operate and manage. Time is saved for other IT needs.	Constant IT input is needed with safety systems letting down IT infrastructure.

3.0 Building a Digital Safety Culture

3.1 Technology components

A good digital safety culture combines a number of separate but complimentary technology components. There are six elements to consider.

Acquiring them from the same provider will ensure they harmonise in the most cost and time efficient way.



1. Web filtering

A school needs wide access to online resources but with peace of mind that the content filtering will keep school systems and pupils protected.

URL blocklist-only filtering can cause frustrating overblocking in the classroom. An advanced content-aware filter will work in real-time to avoid this and will allow a granular approach so that pupils can access the right resources depending on their age or subjects studied.

2. Firewall

Fundamental to a digital safety culture is enabling safe network access. A firewall checks all activity going in and out. It's the front-line defence for web and non-web threats and is a virtual equivalent to your school safety perimeter fence.

Protecting from malware and cyber-attacks, a firewall designed to combine with a content-aware filter can provide optimum protection. Schools benefit from using firewalls designed for education as they support the specific access needs required by schools.

3. Active monitoring

Effective digital monitoring gives schools the confidence that any digital signals showing child protection or mental health concerns are picked up using keystroke and screen content monitoring.

This can help detect issues immediately and an early intervention strategy can be adopted. A good solution

will monitor on and offline and be able to analyse actions such as online chats, Word documents, emails etc rather than just static web pages.

An optimal monitoring system will respond in real-time. It will have an intuitive dashboard showing all information surrounding a capture, including the severity of the issue and give clear evidence through a detailed description or screenshot.

A managed monitoring option uses a mixture of AI and human specialists to ensure that false positives are removed. It reduces the admin required by schools and maximises risk protection.

4. Classroom management

Classroom Management systems allow for a more productive digital learning environment. Any students off-task are highlighted, and teachers can have whole class control at the touch of a button.

Real-time on-screen monitoring allows teachers to easily check pupil engagement and online safety. With remote access to students they can see and remove any tabs that shouldn't be open. Evidence screenshots of activity can also be useful for behaviour management.

An advanced classroom management solution will have an intuitive, user friendly interface. It will not be overcomplicate with too many functions, and will have easy log-on options including Google Classroom.



5. Safeguarding record management

Digital safeguarding records keep all relevant staff in the loop, remind them of actions that need to be followed up and make it much more difficult for an at risk student to slip through the net.

Good solutions will provide real-time, secure access so that staff are easily able to record concerns about their pupils. They help to ensure that concerns are tracked by showing clear chronologies and enabling alerts and reminders to be created. Easy reports can be created for individual students which are then instantly shareable securely with outside organisations such as the Local Authority.

A quality digital safeguard record solution will also enable schools to carry out advanced functions including school group tagging and will have a clear dashboard to see an overview of all safeguarding information. Online safety concerns should also be linked from digital monitoring directly into the central safeguarding dashboard.

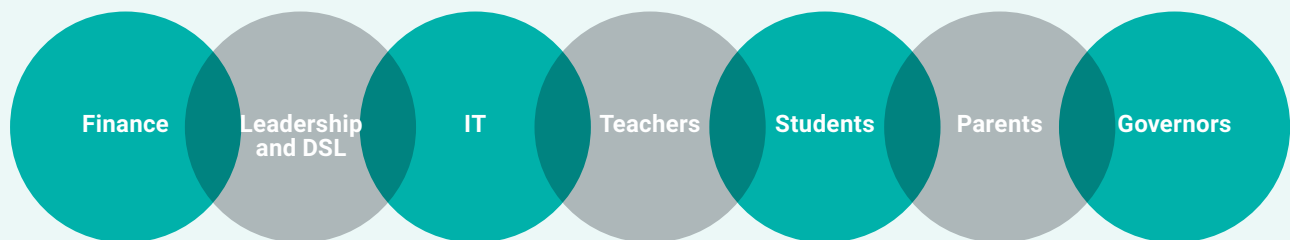
6. Training and education

Training and education are an essential aspect of online safety. With different trends and changes in technology, it's important for all stakeholders to stay up to date with the latest risks. When everyone has an awareness and understanding, it is easier for a safer digital environment to be created:

- Parents and teachers need to understand the risks pupils face.
- Leadership and governors need to be aware of risks, the appropriate training required for staff and what systems schools should have in place.
- IT staff need to understand how to create a safe network using the right systems and infrastructure.
- Pupils need to be aware of risks and build resilience in staying safe in the digital space.

Smoothwall recognise the importance of this and have partnered with National Online Safety who provide digital safety training and classroom resources for the whole school community.

3.2 Stakeholder components



Finance - Affordability vs risk

Finance needs to be able to balance affordability against risk. Some schools may benefit from a digital safety system in which they can keep staff input to a minimum whereas other schools may have complex needs and require on-site physical hardware, more on-site staff and full monitoring control.

Securing a strong safety culture will vary in deployment depending on an organisation's needs. With differing options available, a digital safety partner can offer a tailored approach, and the most economical solution can be found.

School leadership – Safety and compliance

Leadership need confidence in efficient, digital safety systems that protect their pupils, staff and IT while meeting regulatory requirements. They will want to ensure that online safety education is effective and that their students are becoming resilient in the online environment.

While building a strong digital safety culture, they will take care not to negatively impact on school IT infrastructure.

DSL – Maximum protection, without adding to workload

As the DSL role continues to grow, online safety must be manageable alongside other responsibilities. DSLs require solutions that are effective but also time efficient. They need peace of mind that the online space is protected without wasting management hours trawling through endless, unsorted digital monitoring alerts.

DSLs need access to information quickly. A strong digital safety culture will have digital monitoring and digital safeguarding that works in real-time. If a student is showing major signs of a safeguarding concern, a DSL will want to know about it instantly. If they need access to safeguarding information to follow up concerns, they need to be able to see relevant information rapidly, create immediate reports and be able to share them with relevant third parties securely. Loss in time can negatively affect outcomes.

It's important to choose digital safety systems that are easy and intuitive. Some schools may select a managed digital monitoring approach so that the DSL's workload is reduced, and peace of mind created by knowing digital activity is always being monitored.



IT staff – Network protection vs workload

For a digital safety culture to be effective, it needs to be manageable for staff. Digital safety systems need to be easy to implement and easy to operate. They require flexibility in approach to meet differing IT environments.

Using a combined solution keeps things streamlined for IT staff and speeds up implementation.

With so many other demands on IT, having an intuitive system that isn't going to slow down work-flow is essential.

Teachers – Focus on teaching

Digital monitoring works as a safeguarding safety-net so that teachers can focus on teaching. IT should be a time saver that speeds up, not hinders workloads.

They also need an effective classroom management system that will give total control and confidence over the digital classroom. They need wide access to resources so that they can teach innovative lessons without needing a plan B due to access failure or overblocking.

Teachers timetables are often congested so an easy way to raise a concern if they are unable to see a DSL in person is always useful. Secure, digital safeguarding records ensure that concerns can be quickly inserted and shared with the relevant staff. This reduces delays in follow up and stop key information being lost.

Students – Protection and resilience

Fundamentally, students need to be safe in the school digital environment. They need to be protected from harmful content and communication through effective firewall, filtering and monitoring.

Students will benefit from an internet that is not locked down so that they can build resilience in a safe environment. By being able to explore age-appropriate exciting resources that meet real-world requirements, they will become more understanding of the online space. Knowledge is power, and lack of understanding creates vulnerability. A granular content filter and a clear acceptable-use-policy will train students to understand consequences and act responsibly online.

An effective digital safety culture will also help to identify students with cause for concern. Those with hidden issues may be picked up through digital monitoring activity. If they've tried to visit a concerning website or had a concerning online conversation, schools need to know about it.

Parents – Awareness and understanding

Parental awareness and understanding are key to creating a robust safety culture. They need to be aware of the online risks faced by students.

In many schools, a misuse of ICT can result in students ending up in isolation for the day. When a student disputes what has happened, a good system will be able to show clear digital monitoring evidence to parents through a screenshot or detailed description.

Governors and proprietors – Online safety processes, procedures and training

Governors need to see that schools have a strong digital safety culture with adequate processes and procedures for online safety.

They need to ensure filtering and monitoring are in place and that the school implements all other necessary online and digital safety requirements for their organisation.

They should check online safety training is given to all staff at induction and continues to be regularly updated. Being able to cover all online safety aspects through one digital safety partner can help create a streamlined digital safety approach.



4.0 Implementation – Technology Partner v Vendor

Planning a digital safety culture may seem daunting but it can be simplified with the help of a digital safety partner. Whereas a product vendor will provide individual solutions, a technology partner will review your IT infrastructure and current safeguarding provision and suggest a combined solution that is right for you.

A combined solution ensures that all the different components work effectively together and create maximum protection.

Digital safety partner

Experts in digital safety in education. Understand school needs and necessary compliance.

Committed to finding a whole solution for you.

Optimum savings and value can be achieved by creating one combined digital safety solution.

Can look at the big picture rather than an isolated viewpoint. Will give you a full solution with components that work together and complement each other.

Actively research the needs of schools through an advisory board and customer workshops.

Provides resources to help keep up to date in compliance and online safety.

Streamlined implementation through using one provider and one customer support.

Product vendor

Often looks at solutions through a product mindset rather than the needs required in education. May not be aware of UK compliance.

May not offer a varied solution depending on your individual requirements.

Often has limited quality-value solutions because of product driven approach. Will offer digital safety components in isolation.

May not understand how the other components in online safety will impact on their solution and how their solution might impact on other components.

Lacks a two-way relationship with schools to understand needs.

Cannot help with access to staff training and online safety resources.

Implementation may take several support centres and problem solving across products.

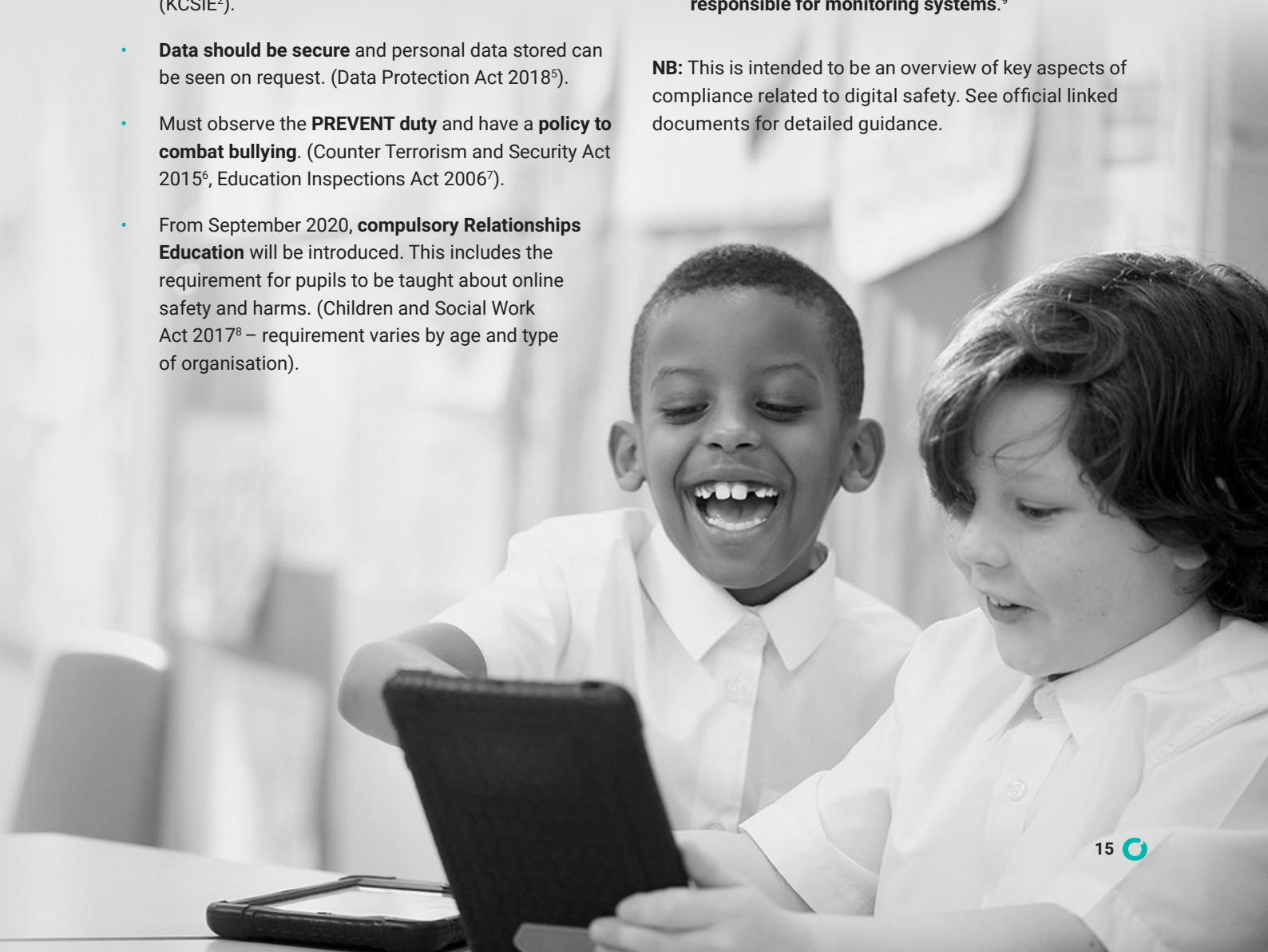


5.0 Compliance Refresh

Key guidance and legislation in relation to digital safety expectations of schools and colleges:

- Should **have appropriate filtering and monitoring** systems and have an effective strategy for social media. (KCSIE², ISS³ and Ofsted guidance⁴).
- Should not provide an online environment that restricts learning through **overblocking**. (KCSIE² and Ofsted guidance⁴)
- **DSLs are responsible for online safety concerns**. (KCSIE²).
- **Data should be secure** and personal data stored can be seen on request. (Data Protection Act 2018⁵).
- Must observe the **PREVENT duty** and have a **policy to combat bullying**. (Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015⁶, Education Inspections Act 2006⁷).
- From September 2020, **compulsory Relationships Education** will be introduced. This includes the requirement for pupils to be taught about online safety and harms. (Children and Social Work Act 2017⁸ – requirement varies by age and type of organisation).
- Schools should successfully **identify students at risk** including child protection and mental health issues. (KCSIE² and Ofsted Guidance⁴).
- **All staff should be sufficiently trained in online safety**. (KCSIE²).
- The UK Safer Internet Centre advises that **school leadership, governors and DSLs should be responsible for monitoring systems**.⁹

NB: This is intended to be an overview of key aspects of compliance related to digital safety. See official linked documents for detailed guidance.



Appendices

Book a demo

Smoothwall is the UK's leading authority on safeguarding technology for education.

Our expertise and pioneering solutions make us the ideal choice for schools, colleges and multi-academy trusts requiring a credible and an education focussed safeguard provider.

If you have a question about any aspect of online safety in your school please contact us. We'd love to help.

We can arrange online demonstration for any solution at a day and time convenient to you or meet in person.

Contact us on:

Tel: +44 (0)870 1999 500

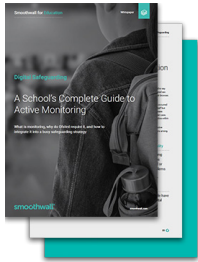
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Further reading



Safeguard Monitoring: A Complete Guide to Active Monitoring for Schools

What is monitoring, why do Ofsted require it, and how can you integrate it into a busy safeguarding strategy.

Available at: <https://smoothwall.com/active-monitoring-schools>



Safeguard Monitoring: How to Prepare Your Case for Funding

A step by step guide for DSLs, Head Teachers, Principals and anyone responsible for ensuring a compliant digital monitoring provision within their School.

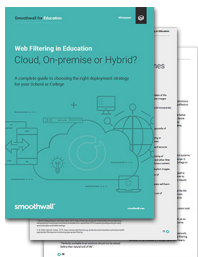
Available at: <https://smoothwall.com/how-to-create-a-case-for-funding>



Benchmarking Your Digital Safeguarding: How to Create an Improvement Strategy for Ofsted

A practical guide for school/college Headteachers, Principals, DSLs and anyone responsible for digital safeguarding in an education setting.

Available at: <https://smoothwall.com/benchmarking-digital-safeguarding-ofsted>



Web Filtering in Education: Cloud, On-premise or Hybrid?

A complete guide designed to give IT Leaders a thorough insight into the deployment options available to best suit their network needs.

Available at: <https://smoothwall.com/web-filtering-deployment>



About Smoothwall

Smoothwall is the leading digital safeguarding solutions provider in UK Education. 10,000 schools, colleges and academies depend on our filtering and monitoring technologies to keep their students safe and their education organisations compliant.

Since our humble beginnings in 2000 we have been dedicated to empowering educational organisations to digitally safeguard the young people in their care.

Our solutions are innovative and pioneering and developed from the ground up to meet and exceed the legislative requirements set out by the Department for Education, as outlined in the Prevent duty and Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Digital safeguarding solutions were historically seen as security products to be selected, deployed and managed by a school/college's ICT department. And while the ownership remains generally true, the meteoric rise in the use of the internet as a vital tool for learning has firmly placed digital safeguarding on the agenda of most educational stakeholders.

Web filters today are not tools for blocking content.

They are a means of improving learning outcomes by enabling students to freely access rich internet content, protected by granular filtering, controls and alerts to ensure any risks and safeguarding issues are quickly and accurately identified.

Schools/colleges favour Smoothwall because of our understanding of this core concept and our pioneering solutions that support it.

Where Smoothwall Filter dynamically analyses content and intelligently blocks harmful content, Smoothwall Monitor is installed onto the school/college's computers where it analyses on-screen content and any keystrokes made. Words or phrases indicating the user may be at risk of harming or being harmed are captured in a screen shot and sent to the DSL for analysis (or the Smoothwall team if it's a managed service).

Behavioural profiling by monitoring words over time provides an added level of vigilance to enable an early stage help intervention.

As digital learning becomes more commonplace in the classroom, so does safeguarding issues such as mental health, cyberbullying, radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and others.

The demands placed on the physical eyes and ears of teachers far exceed their ability to identify all but the most obvious risks, and puts the organisation at odds with both student needs and statutory guidelines.

Smoothwall's robust filtering, firewall, monitoring, classroom management, record keeping provision and e-safety training work in tandem to keep young people safe and your organisation compliant with the legislation, guidelines and recommendations placed upon it.

References

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9. Safer Internet Centre monitoring advice

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