

Safeguarding Visibility, Scale & Consistent Practice: A Framework for Multi-Academy Trusts

Briefing No. 2



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Safeguarding in Multi-Academy Trusts has entered a new phase. As Trusts grow, the challenge is no longer whether safeguarding policies exist, but whether leaders can evidence that safeguarding is **effective, consistent and responsive** across the entire organisation.

Here we examine how traditional, school-by-school safeguarding models struggle to scale within MATs. Fragmented systems place increasing pressure on Designated Safeguarding Leads, create differing standards of protection, and expose Trusts to reputational and regulatory risk, even when individual schools are acting in good faith.

At Trust level, safeguarding has become a governance issue. Boards, CEOs and Accounting Officers are expected to demonstrate that safeguarding risks, including online safety and digital harm, are actively managed, reviewed and assured, not simply delegated.

This paper makes the case for a strategic shift: from safeguarding as a set of local activities, to safeguarding as a Trust-wide assurance discipline. This includes consistent filtering and monitoring standards, clear escalation pathways, central oversight, and board-ready evidence that statutory duties are being met.

Within this framework, digital safeguarding infrastructure becomes a safeguarding control, not an IT function. Assurance-first models enable Trusts to protect children more effectively, support DSLs more sustainably, and give leaders confidence that safeguarding responsibilities are being discharged at scale.

[Find out more](#)

01133 222 333 • info@schoolsbb.co.uk

This concise framework is a practical, leadership-level guide MATs can use to align digital safeguarding across all academies. It focuses on Trust-wide visibility, consistency and assurance, and is designed as a discussion and planning aid rather than a technical specification.

1

Digital Safeguarding - A Trust-Level Issue

Recent KCSiE updates strengthen expectations for senior leaders to understand, oversee and evidence how filtering and monitoring operate in practice.

For MATs, this elevates safeguarding from a school-by-school setup to a Trust-wide governance and assurance responsibility: consistent standards, clear accountability, and demonstrable impact across every academy.

2

The MAT Safeguarding Challenge

- Variability in filtering & monitoring configurations between academies, leading to inconsistent protection and gaps in oversight
- Unclear roles and responsibilities across Trust leadership, DSLs and IT, making it harder to act quickly and evidence assurance
- Risk signals emerging outside traditional web filtering (e.g. keystrokes, screen content, offline work), requiring proactive monitoring
- Audit and inspection pressure to evidence regular review, proportionality and effectiveness.

3

What “Good” Looks Like at Trust Level

- Clear ownership: named senior leader and governor responsible for filtering & monitoring, with DSL and IT collaboration
- Consistency: Trust-wide standards with age-appropriate local flexibility
- Proactive risk identification: monitoring that complements filtering to highlight early indicators of harm
- Evidence-led practice: scheduled reviews, documented decisions, and usable reports for governors and inspectors

The Four Pillars of a Trust-Wide Safeguarding Framework



Visibility

- Trust-level dashboards and reports showing alerts, trends and risk patterns across all academies
- Contextual evidence with alerts to support proportionate responses by DSLs and leaders



Consistency

- Central policy governance with school-level configuration for age/phase needs
- Standardised escalation and incident management pathways Trust-wide



Proactivity

- Real-time, human-moderated monitoring to support early intervention
- Monitoring of online and offline activity (e.g. Google Workspace, Office 365, documents) to detect indicators filtering alone may miss



Assurance & Evidence

- Annual (or more frequent) effectiveness reviews of filtering & monitoring with recorded outcomes
- Audit-ready logs and documented decision-making to satisfy governance and inspection needs



5

Roles & Responsibilities Across the Trust

- Trust Board/Governors: seek assurance that standards are met; receive regular reports and challenge where needed
- Executive Leadership (CEO/COO): ensure governance, resources and risk management align with safeguarding obligations
- Director of Safeguarding/Trust DSL Lead: oversee practice, review alerts and trends, coordinate training and escalation
- Head of IT & Network Teams: manage technical controls, implement policy decisions, maintain availability and integrity of systems
- School-level DSLs: triage alerts, act on concerns, record actions and feed insights to Trust leadership

6

Initiating the Framework (How Technology Enables the Model)

Many MATs choose to initiate this framework through an integrated approach that combines filtering, proactive monitoring and incident management to deliver visibility, consistency and assurance at scale.

- Granular, centrally managed web filtering with age-appropriate local adjustments
- Real-time monitoring of behaviour and screen content, with 24/7/365 human moderation to prioritise genuine risk
- Unified incident management and Trust-wide reporting to evidence effectiveness and support inspection

7

Leadership Self-Assessment Questions

Can we evidence (today) that filtering and monitoring are effective in every academy?

Do we have Trust-wide visibility of alerts, trends and emerging risks, with clear escalation?

Are DSLs supported with contextual information and proportionate alerts that reduce false positives?

Do our reviews include annual effectiveness checks at a minimum?

Could we demonstrate our approach confidently to governors and inspectors tomorrow?

8

How Schools Broadband Partner with MATs

- We provide strategic design sessions to align Trust governance, roles and workflows to DfE standards
- We provide UK-based implementation and dedicated on-going support for consistent policies, alerting and reporting across all academies
- We continually review and adapt our technology to evolving KCSiE expectations





Continue the conversation

If these challenges reflect what your Trust is navigating, now is the right time to have a conversation with our Strategic Director for MATs.

Schools Broadband works with MAT leaders to support strategic thinking around growth, consolidation, safeguarding, cyber security and Trust-wide assurance. We can help you explore how assurance-led digital infrastructure and security services can support stronger oversight, greater consistency and long-term resilience across your Trust.

Get in touch to arrange a conversation with our Strategic Director for MATs.

Find out more. Call or email:

01133 222 333

info@schoolsbbroadband.co.uk

www.schoolsbbroadband.co.uk

Find us on LinkedIn:



References

- KCSiE 2025/2026 updates on filtering/monitoring and leadership oversight
- DfE Filtering & Monitoring Standards (roles, reviews, responsibilities)
- Schools Broadband guidance on implementing standards and evidencing effectiveness
- Smoothwall Monitor capabilities: real-time alerts, human moderation, contextual evidence
- Filtering & monitoring review and audit considerations



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