

CASE STUDY: Flakefleet flies as absences hit an all time low

School: Flakefleet Primary, Lancashire

Flakefleet Primary School caters for learners aged between 3 to 11 years and is located in the seaside town of Fleetwood in Lancashire, where the student population is 358. The school believes that a successful learning experience is achieved by engaging the individual with their school, education and by fostering strong parental interactions. The school aims to encourage qualities such as pride, determination and self-reliance in its students.

Background

In 2007, Flakefleet Primary School had missed attendance targets for five to six years prior. A key action from the last Ofsted report stated “Improve the attendance of the small minority of persistent absentees to increase their rates of progress and so raise their attainment”. The school set about meeting this challenge. It is now recognised as having the most improved attendance rate in the area (7% to 0.2% persistent absence). The school’s Head Teacher, Mike Barnes, maintains that a contributing factor to the school’s improvement is its use of Groupcall Xporter and in particular, implementation of Groupcall Messenger. Xporter provides authorities with an automated solution to securely collect data from schools or other institutions and deliver it to a chosen location. Messenger is a parental communication system which enables schools to send a text, email or voice message in any language to a parent or guardian’s mobile phone or landlines, providing information regarding absences and general parental communications.



The challenges and tackling them

When he took on the role of Head Teacher, Mike quickly identified poor attendance as one of the most pressing challenges and his inaugural task would be to set about uncovering the source of the problem then rectifying it immediately. Discovering why so many students were absent at any given time was paramount to progress, yet proved difficult to determine. Government statistics show that the school is located in an area of social deprivation, where parental engagement can be significantly low. Traditional methods of calling parents or guardians following daily registration to establish why students were absent proved futile. Mike explained; “Overwhelmingly, my administrative staff frequently reported hearing the following automated telephone response: ‘This phone does not accept incoming calls’. Ultimately, we needed to source and implement an effective parental communication system that would encourage parental involvement, be simple to integrate, improve efficiencies and provide cost savings – no small feat.”

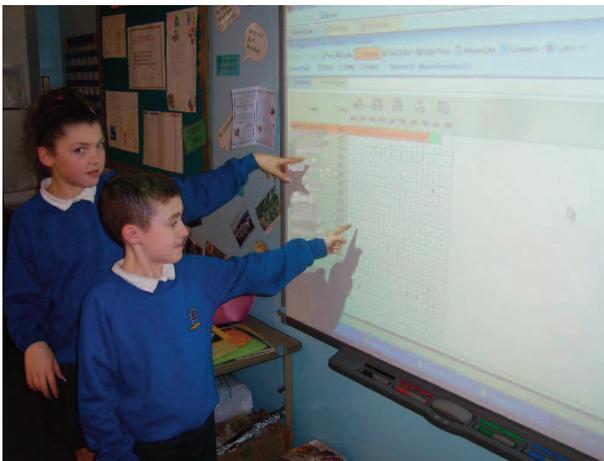
Solution

Following a successful trial installation period, Flakefleet Primary School signed up to Groupcall Messenger and Groupcall Xporter, both of which complemented the school’s overall Management Information System (MIS). The school was one of the first schools in Lancashire to electronically register their children. All teachers were given access to the application and began the simple process of registering each student on electronic whiteboards in the classroom every morning. Registration is taken at 8.55am and by 9.00am, Mike has a comprehensive and extensive list of all students who are in attendance and those who are not.

Via Messenger, a text message or email is distributed to the parents or guardians of any students who are absent and the school's appointed Learning Mentor monitors all replies received. "The training we received from the Groupcall team was extensive and carried out in such a way that everyone could understand the technology and more importantly see the benefit of it. The response we have had to Messenger has been phenomenal. We have found that parents or guardians are much more likely to respond to a text message and detail why their child is absent, than they are to take a call from us. It is indicative of the world we live in – text messages are far more commonplace as a means of communication especially amongst a younger generation of parents. The information they submit in the form of text message replies allows us to create informative and detailed graphs which identify recurring problems and determine if an intervention is required," stated Mike. Flakefleet Primary School uses Xporter to distribute key information such as newly enrolled student information and changes to existing contact details, into various programmes including MLS, Sleuth (a behavioural tracking system) and Midas (Salford Software with the Local Authority). "Xporter has vastly reduced our workload. Information updates such as inputting new student details, need only be carried out once and on one system. From there it is systematically deposited into all the other relevant systems," added Mike.

Counting the benefits

Since implementing Messenger, the school has reported numerous benefits; most notably in that it now exceeds the school attendance targets that have been set. The students have also benefitted directly from Mike's interactive approach to using Messenger. They are encouraged to individually register themselves in class each day and daily attendance records are displayed on the whiteboard for all to see. The school also rewards the best individual



attendance records in assembly every week, where those with the highest attendance receive a small prize. Mike commented: "At the end of the year, all students with a 100% attendance record are treated to a larger prize, such as a day out to the cinema. In this way Messenger provides an opportunity to instill a sense of pride in each student. Furthermore, teachers can also contact parents directly to inform them that their child has done particularly well in a lesson or activity, which stimulates parent-child conversation by introducing channels of positive feedback."

Parents of young students are also reassured when leaving children at school for the first time as Messenger allows teachers to send them regular text messages or email updates, outlining how they are settling in or alerting them to any problems.

Always looking forward

"The improvement in parent-teacher relationships is hugely evident and it seems to have boosted a real sense of community spirit within the school so, needless to say, we are extremely impressed with Messenger," stated Mike. Earlier this month, Groupcall launched a new 'App' called Emerge, enabling the user to have an up-to-the-minute copy of their MIS data instantly and securely in the palm of their hand. Groupcall Emerge can be used on an iPod touch or an iPhone/iPad with 3G connectivity. In addition to registration, student information including timetables, attendance and behavioural data can also be accessed wherever the teacher is located without the need to rely on a desktop PC. In an emergency situation, such as a fire drill where the school system is down, off-line or access to the school is restricted, Emerge continues to deliver instant access to staff and student information. "Our goal is to eventually have each of our teachers equipped with Emerge here at Flakefleet Primary School, and I strongly believe that we will see it introduced into every school in the UK over the next five to eight years," concluded Mike.

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