

CASE STUDY: Multiple uses and a great investment!

School: Rainey Endowed School, Northern Ireland

The Rainey Endowed School, known colloquially as "The Rainey", is a voluntary grammar school in Magherafelt, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland. The school was founded in 1707 by Hugh Rainey, an iron smelter and wealthy merchant in the Magherafelt district. In his will he devoted half of his estate to fund a charity school for 24 boys and wrote "that what I have left may not only be for a generation or two, but that it may be for many not yet born" - the school now has an enrolment of 700 pupils!

Rainey Endowed is held in the highest esteem within County Londonderry and within Northern Ireland itself and is one of the highest academically achieving schools in the Province. The school borders three counties and draws its students from each of County Londonderry, County Antrim and County Tyrone.

Robert M Robinson, Head Teacher at the school says, "We aim to stimulate and challenge the minds of our pupils in order for them to attain the highest academic achievement. Our interest in our pupils is not confined to academic results. We ensure that our pupils acquire life-long skills, which prepare them for the challenges of the future. We also encourage each pupil to develop their personal talents through a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities."

Background

To keep up-to-date with the fast pace ICT and more importantly to ensure communication with their pupil's parents and guardians, Rainey Endowed knew that they had to invest in a parental communication programme. With the school bag post being invariably unreliable and the post being costly and slow, not to mention the time required to produce, print and collate information.



Robert says: "We did a tremendous amount of research before we purchased. We needed a programme that best integrated with our needs and the continued use of SIMS as an MIS system. There were three companies that we considered. One of which seems to spend a lot of money on glossy brochures that were mailed to every school. We felt that this was in conflict with the aims of the product they were marketing. The Senior Management Team were impressed with the content and details of each product on Groupcall's website. However, we also spoke to every school within Northern Ireland that uses Groupcall Messenger and their product came with very high recommendations, so we bought it!" Award-winning Groupcall Messenger is used by more than 2,500 schools, enabling the sending of text, voice or e-mail messages, in multiple languages to parents' mobiles, landlines or computers, providing unauthorised absence-chasing and general parental communication. Messenger reads pupil and attendance information live and in real time from the school's MIS system.

Implementation/installation

"The installation was quick and trouble-free. The Groupcall support team were fantastic to work with and the online training was clear, concise and easily accessible to those who are very IT-literate and those who are not. I used a senior teacher and my secretary. My secretary normally only uses the word processing functions but also found the training and use of the software within SIMS easy to follow."

“Messenger allows us to send emails but the ability to text parents was what particularly attracted us as it is quick, easy to use and the message gets sent instantly.” Robert explains how Messenger has been especially useful in his school:

Inclement weather

It has been unfortunately the case that as a principal I have to make a call if the weather is posing a risk to the safety of my pupils and staff. In the time of the snow I found the process of communicating with others so infinitely better than before when I had reached the decision to close the school. Consider that previously I had to phone some staff



members to begin a cascade of telephone calls to all staff. I would spend time phoning details to local radio stations, the BBC to post on Ceefax and BBC Website in order to inform pupils. Invariably, some children and parents made the journey, having missed all of the above. This time I have the telephone numbers of all parents bar 17. One Groupcall text is sent and the senior teacher has organised a cascade from parents out of this group to call the 17 without mobiles. The second layer of surety we added was to send the Groupcall text in a manner that could be immediately picked up by the school website and connected to Facebook. This was worth the purchase of the software in itself. Not only for the convenience but also the sheer courtesy or thoughtfulness we are seen to give to parents and pupils.

Gathering of textbooks

At the end of term we used to put posters up outside the exam hall and at times send letters home to remind pupils to leave textbooks back. This year we were able to declare a textbook ‘amnesty’ day. Parents were notified by text that their child’s books were required to be returned. The dealing with parents directly was appreciated rather than the previous requests to pupils who often forget, ignore etc... until the point when the school writes a strong letter home. Again, like before, Groupcall messenger is enabling a courteous and inclusive approach with parents.

Small groups

Rainey Endowed is keen on promoting Duke of Edinburgh. Sometimes it is necessary for parents to collect their children after the expeditions. However, guaranteeing a time of arrival back at school is difficult and pupils are not permitted to have mobile phones with them during the trip. Thus we designed groups for the messenger system that correspond to those away. The teacher in charge is able to communicate with the Groupcall messenger administrator and a text is sent directly to parents when the time of collection is decided upon. This is a very simple and perhaps seemingly insignificant example. Our school aim is to be a caring school. This approach once more demonstrates our care for all involved with our school, pupils, staff and parents.

Reporting to parents

We would have good attendance at the set times of the year that we meet parents for interview over the progress of their children. Rather than send a letter via school bag post to remind parents we are now using Groupcall messenger. It is very well received by the parents.

Robert concludes:

“Recently another school was discussing the purchase of Groupcall. I reasoned this with him: if you use it to recall textbooks and as a consequence the school gets 25 texts returned. Then the school has saved 25 x £25 (conservative price for a textbook) = £525. The costs of purchasing the software is almost immediately absorbed. But more than anything it is the cost of the goodwill we get in return. What price would you pay for that?”

We certainly haven’t looked back and are delighted that we made the decision to purchase Groupcall Messenger – a great investment for the school, I can contact my pupil’s parents immediately and it’s great value-for-money!”