

ST JOHN'S PRIMARY BIOMETRIC CASE STUDY



St John's Primary School in Alloa was the first in Scotland to launch with our biometric system

Background

Ian McNicol, Head Teacher at St John's Primary School in Alloa, wanted to reduce the time and energy his team spent managing dinner money. Collecting cash and giving change, creating and updating records of planned consumption and actual uptake, keeping track of credits and ensuring the proper allocation of free meal entitlements, all added up to a cumbersome affair, sapping resource not only in the administration office, but also in the classroom, where it intruded on the teaching process.

Feeling that 21st century technology ought to be able to provide a solution, he set about defining his objectives and seeking a way forward. The process and resource issues were well defined, but it was also felt that any investment in technology and change should produce an outcome which not only tackled the salient problems, but also used technology to the maximum. The solution needed to be "slick and fast, and provide a high level of security, building trust with both children and parents."

Finding a solution

After some investigation, cashless catering presented itself as a possible solution and CRB, the UK market leader, emerged as a potential provider. After checking our credentials Ian decided to invite CRB Solutions in, to see what we had to offer. Although CRB Solutions has a very strong presence and reputation in both Secondary and Primary Schools across Scotland, and has thoroughly proven biometric solutions in Secondary Schools in many English authority regions, biometric solutions in Primary Schools were rare. So it was a brave and exciting decision to go for a biometric Primary School System; the first in Scotland and one of the first across the UK.

Preparing for launch

It was essential that all stakeholders, parents in particular, should have the opportunity to interrogate the school, to share their views and, in some cases, their concerns. A consultation process commenced with staff, pupils, parents and the school board. Plans were openly outlined, questions answered and respondents' views were listened to, and fed back into the planning process. With the benefit of all this intelligence, a special information letter was drafted and sent out, not as a 'fait accompli' but as an 'invitation to discuss'. Phonecalls and questions were expected, and the school resolved that they would be dealt with positively and openly, and that any questions that could not be answered immediately would be referred to the CRB Solutions for subsequent clarification. In particular the school were able to satisfy concerns regarding the security of using the particular biometric solution incorporated into the system.



At the end of the consultation process, all pupils were totally positive and keen to use it. Six parents sought clarification and assurance about the use of biometrics but, even though it was made clear that there were alternatives available, only 2 have declined to use biometrics.

The outcome

After the launch of the system Ian McNicol shared his experience with the Cashless Catering User Group and declared that "It has been a totally positive experience." There were no complaints at all from pupils, and staff are very happy with the system. Many parents have declared their delight at being able to send in any amount, and to pay larger lump sums if they wish to do so. Cash collection is much easier and credits are easy to track and administer because records of payments, free meal entitlements and who has had a meal, are all automated. Reminder letters can be automatically triggered when a child's balance starts to run low.

To assist the kitchen in planning meal quantities, teachers still spend a few seconds taking a head count of children planning to take a meal that day. But this only needs to be a single figure. Without the need to have a precise record of which individuals are planning to have a meal, they now find that the business of teaching starts 20 minutes earlier every day.

The system also supports the school's healthy eating agenda, enabling them to monitor individual pupil choices, and also to make these available to parents. Catering and Local Authority personnel are also interested in generalised reports of consumption.

With Cashless Catering becoming so predominant in High Schools, the system also prepares the Primary School children for future use of the technology. Contrary to some prior concerns, all pupils were able to use the biometric readers. For some, a little training and patience was required until they fully got the hang of it but, although alternative account activation methods are available, for younger children or those that could not adjust to the system, these have proved to be unnecessary. In fact the queue passes through very quickly.

Mr. McNicol closed with "St John's would like to thank everyone at CRB Solutions. We couldn't have done it without you!"

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