

BOOSTING FREE MEALS CASE STUDY



Overview

After overhauling their catering operation and being one of the first schools in the UK to install the Impact Biometric Cashless Catering System (based on fingerprint recognition) Roseberry Sports and Community College in County Durham increased free school meal uptake from below 50% to over 90%. Lynn Hole (Office Manager) concluded that:

"The Impact Biometric Cashless Payment System undoubtedly had a positive Impact on the uptake of school meals in general &, in particular, was a significant contributory factor in the dramatic increase in uptake of Free School Meals, a major priority of the Government's new Standards for Food in Schools."

Background

With a low and declining level of school meal take-up reflecting a general dissatisfaction with the catering service, the School Management Team (galvanised by the forthcoming standards for food & free meal delivery) decided to totally overhaul the dining service.

Lynn Hole led the programme and her first steps were to take the catering in-house and to remove the existing cashless catering operation which was considered to be at breaking point for several reasons: acute problems in maintaining the equipment; problematic account revaluation; time consuming administration; abuse of free meal allowances; and last but not least, the students did not like it.

A full refurbishment of the kitchen and dining halls was planned for Summer 2006 and until an alternative could be found, the school reverted to a cash-based system.

Solution

Karen Dickinson, the newly appointed Catering Manager, had previous experience of Impact from her employment in other local schools and recommended it highly. However, Lynn was keen to explore a cardless solution and, after seeing a demonstration of the recently launched biometric system, installed it as part of a refurbishment of the kitchen and dining areas.



Outcome

The school has been delighted with the decision. The following comments on the benefits of the system, the quantifiable outcomes of the switch, and the final recommendation, are all direct extracts from a review prepared by Lynn Hole:

Benefits

- * A cashless system is an effective anti-bullying tool and a 'cardless' system even more so.
- * No differentiation between paying students and those entitled to Free School Meals.
- * Students are not penalised by having to pay for lost, damaged or stolen cards.
- * An individual daily spend limit can be applied to student accounts if parents so wish.
- * Queuing time (the biggest single complaint of service users) is much reduced.
- * A comprehensive reporting system is available to both the school and the service users.
- * Reward schemes can be incorporated into the system, for healthy eating for example.
- * Multiple applications of biometric system e.g. library management; access control; and registration.

Facts and figures

Uptake of school meals has increased steadily since the school took over the catering service in September 2005. However, a significant increase has taken place since the introduction of Impact in September 2006, particularly in Free School Meal uptake. The system went live on the second week of return to school in September 2006 and the following increases were noted:

Increase in Free School Meal uptake after the introduction of Impact (from a base 353 meals per wk):

- Wk 1 + 48% (158 additional free meals up to 511).
- Wk 2 + 69% (243 additional free meals up to 596).
- Wk 3 + 72% (255 additional free meals up to 608).
- Wk 4 + 78% (276 additional free meals up to 628).
- Wk 5 - 87% (307 additional free meals up to 660).

The average number of Free School Meals taken per day during the Summer term (before the introduction of Impact) was 69, representing 48% of entitlement. By contrast, the average during the Autumn term (after the introduction of Impact) was 121, representing 91% of entitlement. N.B. The quality of school meals was the same for both terms. The kitchen and dining room refurbishment would undoubtedly have had some Impact on the number of meals taken, but I can only conclude that the Impact system must be a significant contributory factor in the increase in uptake of Free School Meals.

SUMMARY

"I would recommend the IMPACT Biometric Cashless Payment System wholeheartedly and without reservation. It is state of the art technology used to provide a truly 'cashless' payment system, which is effective in the extreme".

