



Facility – Safety and security through Facility ePortal St Benedict's Catholic School and Performing Arts College

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Chris Reynolds, head of St Benedict's Catholic School and Performing Arts College, Derby

Instant access to reliable information is not just important in day-to-day administration, as the head of a Derby school discovered when one of his students went missing.

Chris Reynolds, head of St Benedict's Catholic School and Performing Arts College was at home late one night when he received a call from Derby police. A child was missing and they wanted him to check school records to see if there was any information there that might help.

“I was just about to put on my coat and drive to school when I realised that I could reach the information through ePortal from home,” he said. He logged on to his PC, pulled up the records and found an event recorded on Facility that gave a clue to the child's whereabouts.

With the extra information police were able to track down the child who was soon returned home, safe and well. “I don't live near school so it would have taken at least 40 minutes to drive to Derby then more time to find the information. The child was home and safe in far less time than it would have taken using conventional systems,” Chris said.



The incident is just one example of how Facility has helped St Benedict's in the years since it was installed. The school was the very first in the UK to use the product. Chris said: "We were unhappy with the system we were using and, in spite of what various companies said, other products would not do what we needed. I wanted a fully integrated database with single entry and multiple uses. Facility is the only one."

Parents are extremely impressed with the system because it has improved the range and quality of information available to them. Planning parents' consultation evenings used to involve a great deal of effort but gain just over 40 per cent attendance so the school decided to change its approach with consultation sessions based around tutor groups. "Very quickly it became apparent that it would work only if tutors had high quality information about the students. This is where Facility came into its own for us."

Staff had instant access to details of targets, attendance, events, assessments, reports, exam results and personal information so they had more time to talk to parents and keep them well informed about everything to do with their child. Attendance at parents' evenings is now more than 80 per cent. "It has become a quality event serving many purposes, not least providing real dialogue between a member of staff and a parent about the whole child. Facility has been at the core of this," Chris added.

Having accurate and immediate information also helps with the school's role as a centre for sight impaired and severely physically impaired learners. The whole school is totally accessible to all and students are fully integrated for the majority of their time at St Benedict's, although there are some dedicated areas for the centre's members if they feel the need to be away from the mainstream.

Having easy access to information about students' special needs helps the school achieve its aim of improving the experience of learning for children who might otherwise feel isolated or excluded. St Benedict's is the gold standard for accessibility.

The school has around 1600 students aged 11 –19 and is already a performing arts specialist but there is currently a pilot study under way for 14 to 19s in a bid to create a second specialism in engineering. Based on a US scheme written by top industrialists and universities, the curriculum aims to provide the next generation of innovative engineers. It covers biomedics, aerospace and digital electronics as well as mainstream engineering. The scheme is entirely web-based and St Benedict's is the only UK school currently allowed to operate it.

It is part of the school's policy of looking for new ways to educate its students that will benefit every individual. "Working in the spirit of being a specialist school means looking out for new ways, better ways and being willing to take risks and live on the edge," Chris said.

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