



Extra Educational Benefits from Facility Alston Primary School

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Lloyd Hopkins, Assistant Headteacher
Alston Primary School

When Alston Primary School in Birmingham adopted Facility CMIS to manage its data it expected administration improvements – but it had no idea that there would be extra benefits for its youngest pupils' reading skills.

The school uses Facility to carry out daily registration and in its nursery and reception classes pupils point out their names on an interactive whiteboard as their teachers mark them as present. As a result, their grasp of letters and ability to recognise their names happens much faster than with conventional registration methods.

“It works well and teachers do it because it's a novel way to do registration. It has helped with the early years letter recognition and name recognition,” said Assistant Headteacher Lloyd Hopkins. The school uses Facility ePortal for registration and the clear layout and simple type face make it particularly easy for the children to read.



Registering through ePortal has brought other bonuses to the school as well. Since its introduction, attendance has risen by five per cent thanks to the immediate and accurate information it produces. The school used to enter attendance data into its computers only once a week so staff faced a lengthy search through paperwork to find up to date information at other times.

Lloyd said: “Now we have real time responses, we know who’s in and who isn’t in instantly. We can pick up trends or any issues and it allows us to manage attendance properly. Since we have been doing it the attendance has gone up five per cent. It’s not the sole reason but it has helped us to manage things.”

High Standard Ofsted

The school achieved a very good Ofsted report after its last inspection and in particular was praised for its IT standards, but pupils perform well throughout the subjects, in spite of many coming from families who do not have English as a first language.

Lloyd said: “We are proud of the fact that we have a broad range of ethnic backgrounds who all perform at the same high levels. There is no boy-girl issue here either, both do equally well.”

Facility played a large part in proving those standards for the inspector. “Facility was an invaluable resource during Ofsted in terms of information access. It was all available quickly and easily whether we needed figures on attendance, performance or any other aspect of the school,” Lloyd added.

It will also play a large part in future inspections because Alston is in the process of introducing Facility School Self Review. There has been an initial planning meeting to decide which parts should be accessible to which staff and how to allocate the time and resources that future inspection preparations will need.

Staff have already undergone initial training and they will be given a whole day to carry out their first self review session. Lloyd believes that, with practice, the reviews will become faster. “The self review program will enable all the members of staff, from lunchtime supervisors to the head, to contribute to self evaluation and the school action plan. We are not rushing straight in. We want everything in place to make sure we are ready to go. The first time staff have to complete it they will get the full day. It will take less time than that after it is established,” he said.

Open to parents

Another plan for the near future is to open up the pupil data to parents through Facility ePortal. ePortal is already used when teachers carry out pupil assessment because all of the important data is available together. The system is very effective in defining individual needs, particularly for gifted and talented children, Lloyd explained. Soon parents will have access to all the information, including learning targets, from home or work through the Internet.

The scheme will be launched with the help a small group of parents who will try it out before it is made available to the whole school. Lloyd said: "We shall do a trial first with a group of parents who have the time to give us adequate feedback about how we have set it up. We are prepared to do it because of the confidence we have in ePortal but we need the feedback to ensure we've got it right before we open it up to the rest. Ultimately, of course, it will benefit parents who don't have much time because they will be able to reach the information easily."

Keeping parents well informed has already become easier thanks to ePortal. Alston is a large school with more than 720 pupils, including its nursery class. It is housed in large premises so communication was not always so easy. Teachers faced a long walk to the central office in order to check any details about a pupil. Thanks to Facility ePortal staff can now reach what they need straight away through the PCs in each classroom.

Lloyd said: "Teachers have access to all the necessary information quickly without the need to visit the office. In a big school that's a huge advantage. If they are talking to a parent, for example, they can get what they need straight away."

Other functions

The school also uses Facility to manage its accounts and Lloyd praised the Facility Finance for Schools package. "The financial side is much improved. It's a lot easier to understand than it was. It's clear and all the info you need is there in one easy step. Printed reports are straightforward and you can be confident that you can reach the information you need in a way that you need it."

Award winning school

The school is an award winner in many ways with a Chartermark for its leadership and management and the Naacemmark for its ICT, among others. Staff attribute some of that success to Facility's part in managing data. "We have a very positive and outward looking approach to education and technical development. The advantages of Facility are its reliability, its flexibility and the fact that it is truly integrated.

"You can look at the accounting system at the same time as looking at staff records or the children's needs. Facility allows us to implement our ideas. Because the system is so flexible it allows you to look positively at the future and keeps things moving forward," Lloyd said.

Serco

Winchester House
Stephensons Way
Wyvern Business Park
Derby DE21 6BF

T 0870 046 8865 (Sales)
T 0870 046 8861 (Support)
F 01332 660111
E enquiries@sercolearning.com
www.facility.co.uk