



A 21st Century School

As part of Kent's Private Finance Initiative scheme The North School, in Ashford, is in a desirable position. It has been transformed into an architect's vision of a 21st century school, with colourful windows, light and airy spaces and of course, an enviable amount of new technology. The journey to this exciting new beginning was not an easy one as the new school was built around the original buildings that were later refurbished. The staff and students worked and played in what can only be described as a building site.

On 6th February the building and refurbishment works were complete and the students and staff moved fully into their new accommodation. The refurbishment of the original 1930's sections makes the most of these beautiful buildings that now sit alongside their modern counterparts.

Working in this new environment is very exciting and made easier through the school's extensive use of ICT and its SIMS Management Information System (MIS). By utilising the attendance and behaviour features, teachers ensured the building works caused minimum disruption to the students and their lessons.

As a high school, in a two tier system, The North School is going from strength to strength. In 2004, it was the most improved school in England and by 2007 achieved the highest value added in its Ashford cluster of secondary schools, placing The North School in the top 9% of schools in the country at KS4 and the top 1% at KS3. In 2006, Ofsted described the school as: "A good school that successfully balances high academic aspirations with a deep commitment to the care of every individual student."

Improving attendance

Despite the improvements, The North School is not without its challenges. It is one of those schools monitored by the DCSF, as over 10% of its students are absent for more than 10% of the time. As the school makes improvements to these statistics the DCSF is lowering its boundaries, now at 9% of students, and The North School's figures continue to be monitored six times per year.

"SIMS gives us the power to monitor each and every child throughout their school day, allowing us to channel support when and where it is needed."

Jean Gazet, Deputy Headteacher,
The North School

Deputy Headteacher, Jean Gazet comments: "Overall our attendance is good but this can mask poor attendance for a significant minority of students. We remind students how important attendance is to their academic success with posters listing how attendance directly relates to the number of GCSE passes they can expect."

Save time with a single solution

Since September 2006, attendance at The North School has been monitored through the SIMS Attendance and Lesson Register features. Prior to this the school used an alternative attendance solution. When asked why the school moved to the SIMS solution the reasons are clear:

"As a school our aim is to bring systems together and not spread them out; we don't want to have lots of different databases. We used a different product for attendance and because the two databases weren't always synchronised, getting reliable and accurate attendance figures was extremely time consuming. The time freed up by Lesson Register allows us to track students far more closely and thus improve attendance. We purchase SIMS and support from the LA EIS team so it was also easier to put all of our support under one umbrella. Using Lesson Register has also saved us over £5,000 per annum on what we were paying for support with the other product."

Jean continues to explain the benefits:

Simplifying registration for teachers

"For teachers, taking the register couldn't be simpler. All they have to do is click onto their timetable from the SIMS homepage and the register opens. Retrieving information from SIMS is so quick and easy and we can soon spot when patterns are developing in a child's attendance. Attendance history is brilliant and so useful when we are writing reports. It's great that we can now add attendance to Assessment Manager."

Empowering teachers

"All staff now use the notes function in Lesson Register to add reasons for lateness and absence. Teaching staff can see if a pupil has been late to another lesson in the day. We can run a SIMS report that prints out all of these notes and share them with parents, students and EWOs. This is very powerful."

Improving behaviour

"We also use the Behaviour Management and Achievement features of SIMS, again this supports meetings with students and parents. We really like the look of the electronic report cards and are planning their introduction as the next development.

An electronic report card means the students can't lose it and community assistants and other staff can monitor a pupil throughout the day and ask to see them if there is an issue, rather than waiting until the end of the day to find out. This will be a quick and easy feature to introduce with clear benefits."

A structure to support attendance

"This is a really easy system to use and the figures are reliable. The notes function is really useful and these comments are used in multi agency reports and in-school meetings."

**Doreen Bayley, Attendance Officer,
The North School**

As all schools know, software is only part of the answer when improving a school and The North School has a comprehensive support system in place to help its students attend. Attendance Officer, Doreen Bayley, manages a team of nine attendance assistants that are attached to specific

year groups. The attendance assistants telephone home, every morning, helping to build relationships with the families.

The school operates a system of eight learning communities each with one tutor group from each year. Community assistants work closely with students in lessons and to support their attendance. When issues with attendance arise, the community assistant takes over and may visit the pupil's family.

What has been the impact?

The impact of using SIMS is clear and significant.

GCSE			
Year	5A*-C	Contextual Value Added KS2-4	Unauthorised Absence
2006	48%	1003.7	2.3%
2007	51	1032.5	1.3%



The future

"To further support attendance we plan to purchase PDAs for attendance staff to monitor students around the school, such as at the school gate or on school trips.

Our next plan is to make SIMS available to parents, over the internet, through the SIMS Learning Gateway; this will really help with parental engagement and they can see any issues before they are raised."

Find out more

For further information, schools supported by their local authority should contact their local support team and schools supported directly by Capita Children's Services should contact us on 01234 832100

For further information about The North School please visit their website www.north.kent.sch.uk