

An Avanquest solution at Castle View School Proves Texting Success for Instant Communication with Parents



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The Customer:

Castle View School is a comprehensive school situated on Canvey Island, Essex. The school has 900 pupils, but this is set to rise incrementally to 1200 by 2011 when it will relocate to a new site. Castle View's reputation is built on consistent achievement in all areas of the curriculum. Focus is on traditional values and developing the skills and knowledge for living and working in the 21st century. Castle View prides itself on being a friendly school whose doors are always open to parents and visitors.

The Challenge:

In the UK an estimated 63,000 pupils are missing school each day without permission. In 2005 the government spending watchdog pointed out that truancy rates had not been dented despite the millions of pounds spent on the issue and rates are still increasing. Government initiatives to reduce unauthorised absence mean that schools and Local Authorities are being set demanding targets to improve overall attendance rates. This presents quite a challenge for head teachers who have already spent resources on investigating absences which might have been overlooked a few years ago. Castle View decided a combination of strategies would be the best approach – the appointment of a dedicated Attendance Officer working within the school, computerised lesson registration and a simple, reliable communication channel to parents so they could quickly be notified if their child did not arrive at school. They also wanted to incorporate a reliable instant message facility to remind parents of important events or deadlines.

The Solution:

Because of its popularity with users, texting to parents seemed an obvious choice. Texting is easily accepted and discreet. Parents are able to receive directly a text message at their place of work or when away from home, which is far less alarming than receiving a telephone call from the school. Text messaging is also simple and cost effective.

The text solution chosen by Castle View School was Avanquest's Text Message Server. The software was easy to install and integrates with Castle View's Schools Information System (SIMS). Contact information for parents, including a designated priority mobile phone number is held within SIMS.

Text Message Server is linked to the school's electronic 'registers'. Staff register pupils' attendance at each lesson, with the first period acting as the statutory morning registration. By running a report, the Attendance Office can monitor general attendance at school and also any trends affecting a particular lesson or subject. Parents are immediately notified by text if their child fails to turn up for registration, with a request to contact the school to provide a reason for absence. The text messages are created and sent from the desktop through Text Message Server and delivered directly to the mobile phone. In a similar way parents are informed of consultation evenings and deadlines such as exam entry, option choices and coursework to complement paper based communications which don't always reach the intended recipient.



The Benefits:

Castle View School has successfully reduced its unauthorised absence rate - this includes some parent approved absence - the total opposite of the published governing figures for 2006-7, which, it is stated, show that truancy rates in England are worse than ever.

Notifying parents by text, thus engaging them in the fight against truancy has proved to be a good 'deterrent' to errant pupils. "We shall always have a degree of absence because of illness and unauthorised absence (e.g. we do not generally authorise holiday absence)" said Russell Sullivan, Headteacher at Castle View School.

"However we are confident that general truancy is identified and dealt with; we are delighted with the reduction in 'real' truancy – in a school of 900 pupils 0.5% represents a significant reduction, but a manageable number on which to focus. We all feel that the texting service has had a positive impact. It has also proved an invaluable communication tool that enhances the home school partnership in a number of other important ways."

Russell Sullivan, Headteacher at Castle View School



**Text
Message
Server**