

Kent school goes cashless with online payments

Why St Anselm's Catholic School wanted to go cashless

Three years ago, Sharon Mills at St Anselm's Catholic School decided it was time to look at changing the processes in school surrounding the collecting, counting and reconciling of cash and cheque payments made on a daily basis.

Sharon stated: "Our main goal was to reduce cash and cheque payments made to the school. Since introducing ParentPay, we have successfully managed to achieve this, with approximately 80% of our parents using the system to pay online, meaning we very rarely have to make a trip to the bank now."

How did you decide which provider to introduce?

When choosing an online payment provider, it is important to research which option best suits the school requirements. Sharon explained how this process helped them make their decision: "We looked at several systems to see what they offered before deciding on ParentPay."

Sharon continues: "There were a number of reasons we chose ParentPay, we needed a provider that linked well with our MIS, cashless catering systems and offered the flexibility we needed to add trips and other payment items. We also wanted to use the same system to contact parents and provide updates easily. ParentPay also offers comprehensive support, which is on hand when we need it."

What are the benefits of collecting payments online?

St Anselm's have noticed a number of positive changes since introducing ParentPay. Sharon explains: "Not only has the cash and cheque payments to school reduced by approximately 80%, but our staff like ParentPay because it cuts down the time they need to spend on trips, as reports and payee lists are easily accessible."

Sharon added: "Our parents like paying online too, because it offers a secure way of making payments for their children. They particularly like that they are able to see what their child is eating each day from within their online account."

Sharon has found parents have also benefitted in other ways: "Our parents like that they can receive communications through ParentPay, before we had the system in place, letters didn't always make it home to the parent when given to their child."

From an administrative perspective, Sharon adds: "It is quick and easy to set up payment items, send new item alerts and reminders to parents. If we ever need any help, there has always been a good level of support from ParentPay."

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Objective:

To reduce the volume of cash and cheque payments made to school.

Solution:

Introduce an online payment facility to suit school requirements and link with existing systems.

Outcomes:

Streamlined processes, reduced admin and time spent on associated tasks. Happy parents.



“**Parents like ParentPay because it offers a secure way of making payments**”

Sharon Mills,
Finance Officer,
St Anselm's Catholic School

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How were parents encouraged to get on board?

When introducing something new which will involve parents, it is important to communicate about change early. Sharon outlines how they did this at St Anselm's: "We make it a priority at the beginning of each academic year to send out activation letters to all new students. Any new starters that may join during the year are also issued with their personal activation letter."

Sharon continues: "Regular checks in the system ensure we identify those parents who have not yet activated their account, we then send them a letter to encourage them to log in and pay online."

Lessons to share with other schools

Sharon outlined the importance of clear consistent communication to maximise uptake: "All of our staff are aware they are to send a letter via ParentPay if they need to request payment for uniform, books, non-uniform days and trips."

In addition: "Once I have added the required payment item, I always update parents with a notification the new item has been added and is available to pay for via ParentPay. It is possible to tailor the recipients of the letter; so only those participating in the trip receive it and we can also choose to make the letter available to parents upon logging into their ParentPay account, which is really useful."

“Cash and cheque payments to school have reduced by approximately 80%”

Sharon Mills,
Finance Officer.
St Anselm's Catholic School

Tips on selecting an online payment system

- 1. Business case:** Carry out a cost analysis based on time it takes administrators to collect and manage cash.
- 2. Your final objective:** Ask the supplier/s you're considering to provide evidence of what's realistically achievable.
- 3. Do the maths:** Build a quote comparison between suppliers for the cost of a cashless payment system, and remember to encompass the total cost of ownership; any annual costs; training, support costs and upgrades.
- 4. Provide for cash-based payers:** Does the solution offer socially inclusive payment options such as PayPoint?
- 5. Protect against fraud:** Ensure your chosen system offers a secure Payment Collection Service to avoid the dangers of collecting money from parents' debit and credit cards. Whichever supplier a school uses to collect parents payments should be PCI Compliant.
- 6. Check reporting features:** Ensure your system allows you to record and report on UiFSM, FSM and paid for meals. Broad reporting functionality including income reconciliation, electronic receipts, audit trails and banking reports.
- 7. Remember alerts and reminders:** Providing balance alerts to parents can help reduce the need to chase parental debt; check the system you are procuring offers this facility.
- 8. Find a healthy supplier:** Check the financial stability of your preferred supplier.
- 9. Look to achieve best value:** How fit for purpose the product is, its value and whether the company issues new, free upgrades through an investment in development and support services including training.
- 10. Have a plan:** Consult with pupils and parents so they know what to expect.