

Multi Academy Trust goes cashless

More and more schools across the UK are joining Multi Academy Trusts.

Schools are seeing the benefits of working closely together towards a shared goal. Many MATS have the shared processes and systems to gain efficiencies.

This is the case for the Avocet Multi Academy Trust.

What made the Trust decide to go cashless?

Zoe Stewart, the Trust Finance Officer explains why they made the move to online payments: "Security was one of the main factors for us, holding cash on the premises and banking meant our processes were not as secure as we would have liked them to be. This, along with the opportunity to improve the overall effectiveness of administration time amongst staff helped our decision."

There were also other reasons the Trust decided online payments would be better suited to them: "Parents are happier with this option because their child is spending money where intended; they have 24-hour access to their online account and can book school meals or pay for trips whenever they like, it's convenient for them."

How did the Trust select a provider, and why did you choose ParentPay?

"When choosing a provider, it is important to explore options." Zoe continues: "We compared 3 providers and found ParentPay excelled on the options available to our parents. Their system was the only one to offer us a full tablet and mobile responsive option; it also offers cash payments via PayPoint for families unable to access online banking. We needed to ensure that all our parents are able to pay for their child's requirements quickly and easily. ParentPay was the perfect option for parents."

How have you encouraged parents to pay online?

"We have supported parents across the Avocet Multi Academy Trust by placing an Ipad in the reception area of the schools, encouraging any parents requiring help/without online access, to come to the school and log-in with our help. These have remained in place and we are happy to support at all times. The parents understand it is in everyone's interest."

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Objective:

Saving time and increasing uptake across our schools

Solution:

Cashless collection with settlement to a shared central bank account with cross school online sign-on and reporting.

Outcomes:

Improved efficiencies across all our schools



“The cloud based system has proved invaluable for managers to access individual school information from any location.”

Zoe Stewart,
Trust Finance Officer
Avocet Multi Academy Trust

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Benefits the Avocet Multi Academy Trust has realised since going cashless:

Zoe outlined how ParentPay has helped: "The processing of payments via ParentPay and direct settlement to our bank account, combined with the reconciliation reports available in the system, has made the whole process much more efficient for us. It's also an easy process for parents when booking lunches and trips online."

"As a trust, the key benefits have been the more efficient and effective use of admin staff time across all schools. The cloud based system has proved invaluable for managers to access individual school information through ParentPay from any location, which is important as the number of schools in the Trust grows."

Lessons to share with other schools

The Avocet Multi Academy Trust share their advice on how to make a success of going cashless, Zoe states: "As with anything in schools, change can be met with resistance. However, once we recognised the major time savings for the Academy, we knew that it would be of huge benefit to both staff and parents. We gave parents a full-terms notice, guided them through the process with detailed instructions in our weekly newsletters, and of course were always happy to offer our assistance via the school office."

Going cashless checklist

1. Have a clear strategy and sell the benefits to staff and parents: In September, all NEW parents will be required to pay for all school items online. For those that do not have online payment facilities, cash payments will be accepted through PayPoint. Alternatively, from September, ALL parents will be required to pay online or through PayPoint.
2. Raise awareness and interest: Consult with pupils and parents so they know the procedure, use parent evenings, emails and newsletters to let everyone know when and how they can make cashless payments.
3. Have a plan that can deliver your strategy: Central to your plan should be communication with parents and with staff. Where required, ensure that school staff managing ParentPay are confident in using the system.
4. Maximise opportunities: Make paying online attractive to parents e.g. trips/clubs are available to pay for online.
5. Spark action: Consider regular promotions to encourage parents to pay online or through PayPoint e.g. Christmas meal needs to be ordered and paid for online, do not accept cash payments for trips in school etc.
6. Be inclusive and provide for cash-based payers: Not everyone has a bank card/account or ability to pay online, so ensure the school offers a socially inclusive payment option such as PayPoint.
7. Remind parents of their log in credentials to boost uptake: Parents may have forgotten their username/password or misplaced their activation letter. Whatever the reason may be, give them a nudge in the cashless direction: narrow down the non-active users by using the ParentPay Communication Centre, and send them a polite reminder of their log in details.
8. Remember to alert parents when items are due for payment: Providing balance or new payment item updates via SMS and email alerts to parents will help increase uptake and reduce parental debt.

