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## **Communication made easier: St Swithun's in Winchester looked to Schoolcomms for the answer**

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Communicating with parents is not always as easy as it should be but with the added complication of many of them living overseas, St Swithun's in Winchester looked to technology for the answer. As an independent school, with boarders from the UK and abroad, communicating with parents was mainly done through the post, an expensive, slow and often unreliable method.

SIMS Manager Graham Reed explains how Schoolcomms is meeting their needs: "Some of our parents live overseas which causes delays when sending whole school communications. Like all schools we like to keep channels of communication open with parents and using Schoolcomms means there are no delays in them receiving messages. The system is really flexible and we can either email, text or for those who prefer a hard copy, the system will print letters. We have found that all of our registered parents prefer electronic communication."

### **Supporting teachers**

Many pupils have extra music lessons that the parents pay for in addition to the school fees. Up to 40 music teachers are now using Schoolcomms to send requests, information and bills. This is working really well and was easy to set up via a user defined group in SIMS.

### **Communicating with pupils**

During the school holidays we use Schoolcomms to communicate with the overseas pupils and are considering using the texting facility to communicate with boarding pupils when they are off site during term time.

### **Communicating with parents**

Our boarding staff send their newsletters and all bulk mailings via email. This has proven very successful with parents and in some years 100% of them have signed up to be contacted in this way. Parents can also respond by email or SMS; this is opening up two way communication with them. Data is kept up-to-date by integrating with the SIMS system.

### **Supporting emergencies**

We realised how useful Schoolcomms is in an emergency when we had so much snow recently. Parents found the text message facility especially useful during this time.

*"I wanted to congratulate you and thank you on behalf of the school. The 'snow hell' was made so much easier due to Schoolcomms. I have no idea how else we could have contacted our parents so easily. I know my headmistress is happy and so are our parents!!"*



## **Easy registration for parents**

Parents can be registered for Schoolcomms either from their details held within SIMS or via signing up to the Schoolcomms website. Once they are registered it is their responsibility to keep these details up-to-date. The school can regularly review this information to ensure that all records in SIMS are correct.

## **Promoting Schoolcomms**

Part of the success of the system has been through its high profile. Schoolcomms is promoted in all letters and at every open day.

## **Is anything communicated by post?**

We still communicate legal documents and application forms by post. It is important that those families that do not have email or a mobile phone are not excluded. For each message, those not linked are listed so that paper copies of the letter can be given only to those that need them.

## **Future developments**

As Schoolcomms is going so well our next plan is to develop its use with the PE department, they can then use it to contact their sports teams; this will be very powerful. This is one of the more exciting projects we have introduced; over 95% of our parents are signed up to Schoolcomms. The benefits are clear and measurable and we are working with parents much more efficiently. We intend to work on the number of parents who ask for email only mailings to significantly reduce our postage costs, and to keep up with 21<sup>st</sup> Century communication.

Graham Reed, SIMS Manager, St Swithun's School