

Simply by changing their approach to on-call and incident response processes, a secondary school in Suffolk is improving staff and student safety, driving up attendance and maximising teaching and learning time in the classroom

Felixstowe School is a secondary school and sixth form with around 1200 students on roll. Formed in 2011 the school joined the Unity Schools Partnership in September 2019 following a disappointing OfSTED result in 2017.

Emma Wilson-Downes was appointed headteacher in October 2019 and has led the school team throughout the deeply challenging events of both 2020 and 2021, whilst at the same time making provision to improve the school by focusing on key areas of student safeguarding, consistent systems, and effective response.

“We also found with our radios there was an issue with disclosure which combined with an inefficient process made it hard for on-call staff to spend time in classrooms with students.”

Historically the school used radios before trying to use Microsoft Teams as their incident response and management tool but found that neither system was fit for purpose in real life scenarios. Response time was slowed and increased staff workload resulted. The systems hindered rather than helped their incident response and safeguarding efforts as they needed somebody to triage and assign the responses.

Emma stated **“We tried Microsoft Teams, but it never made it past testing in SLT. It was really apparent very quickly that it wasn’t going to work. There was so much opportunity for error, such as staff raising an issue to one person or accidentally to all staff instead of the right group and it’s not as easy to be automated”**

“We had a system for students missing lessons, but it needed a person to keep on top of it,” Emma reflected; *“Staff sent an absence alert at the start of a lesson, but the amount of time needed meant we quickly fell behind each day and staff didn’t get timely feedback on action taken.”*



CHALLENGES

Emma admits **“Our biggest challenge was how to coordinate our response quickly and effectively, ensuring the right response teams were alerted and to have a record of what happened without making a large dent in our budget.”**

Reviewing OfSTED recommendations, Emma wanted an on-call response solution that would:

- Speed up response times and efficiency, triaging quickly to the right people
- Help manage attendance and conduct issues
- Enhance and integrate safeguarding provision
- Give on-call staff more time to spend with students across the school
- Reduce time overheads on staff, helping the school use finite resources more effectively

THE SOLUTION

The senior leadership team at Felixstowe School chose teamSOS to manage their on-call response and provide staff with a secure messaging platform. In Emma’s words **“teamSOS gives us a faster response. It cuts out the middleman, so we don’t need somebody co-ordinating responses because it’s already prioritised.”**

OUTCOMES

Felixstowe School have focused their implementation of teamSOS on addressing their specific challenges and added their own incident types and processes. The school handles around 80 operational incidents effectively each day using teamSOS.

There has been an initial focus on student lesson absence and more recently a drive on student behaviour, alongside normal on-call response, crisis management, and day-to-day staff communication and announcements.

Speaking about the cultural impact of teamSOS Emma commented that **“the faster incident tracking and ability to respond quickly and gather more information helped us rapidly identify a specific core group of students missing lessons, which we’ve now been able to address.”**

Most importantly a recent staff survey, many of whom have been part of the improvement journey since 2017, has recognised the benefits teamSOS is enabling.

- Reduced triage delays and improved response times for first aid
- Positive impact on attendance
- Provided simple and consistent safeguarding provision
- Maximised teaching and learning in the classroom
- Increased site safety

“The ability to split the work helped us focus our staff where they are needed the most. Being able to quickly ascertain students’ whereabouts if they are late for a lesson, and to keep known truancy offenders in school has been a truly positive experience for us.”

Some of the teamSOS features that resonated with the school’s needs are:

- Automated triaging with customisable incident types and response teams
- Real-time incident response including optional audio recording and media
- Incident timeline exports and reporting
- On-call rota support
- Integral speech-to-text conversion ensures discrete communications
- Integrated with CPOMS and MyConcern
- School-wide announcements feature and GDPR compliant group messaging
- Support for mobile, Windows and web

MAXIMISE TEACHING AND LEARNING

“Being able to spend time with our students is important,” said Emma. **“The rapid incident response and resolution using teamSOS and the better privacy it allowed has had a real impact on reducing disruption in the classroom. It has also created time for our on-call staff to circulate classes and talk to students, something they couldn’t do when they were using radios because of indiscriminate broadcasting when they received a report of a problem.”**

POSITIVE IMPACT ON ATTENDANCE

The Felixstowe team found it easy to customise their teamSOS to separate minor attendance issues from more serious ones. This enabled them to have different staff teams responding, with the office team dealing with students arriving late for class without having to engage the SLT or on-call team who could instead focus on more serious issues such as students with risk assessments or persistent truancy issues.

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Talking about how pleased she was with the teamSOS solution Emma stated that she could not find a fault, from conception through to implementation. **“My advice... go for it! We’ve had an excellent response from the teamSOS support team, no matter how many support requests we made, it was diligently and quickly resolved.”** Emma says **“We surveyed our staff, and they are all delighted with teamSOS, there’s no way we’d go back to our old systems now. In fact, we even showed teamSOS to OfSTED during their most recent visit to help demonstrate the new processes we have put in place to improve attendance and enhance our safeguarding efforts.”**

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