

Attendance at Oldmixon

SIMS Attendance has been part of a complete review of attendance policy at Oldmixon. The module does generate useful reports, but it is the actions that follow that make the difference! Good class attendance is celebrated at assembly, with extra 'play time' for the best attending class each week. Children with 100% termly attendance are rewarded with a book token, their names are published, and parents congratulated. Jackie remembered "before, when Chris wanted to know the best attendees, an LSA did the calculations. This meant hours of time away from the children. As well as 'carrots', improving attendance needs tight administrative procedures. Oldmixon has instituted a 'first-day call' to parents, who are asked to leave an explanatory message on the school's answer-phone. Jackie sorts these messages, and rings parents back quickly, when necessary. She said "the number of calls I make has decreased - we have a book in the office for parents to complete if they come into school with siblings - this also helps us follow-up quickly".



Unauthorised absence has decreased steadily at the school - 0.9% by 2001, 0.6% a year later, and now it is down to 0.3% - below Chris's target of 0.5% for this year! Attendance is also rising steadily, as the school's actions increasingly help parents understand the importance of good attendance for their children.

SIMS Attendance has been an important tool in this process, but the change could not have been achieved without the strong leadership of Chris, the efficient management of the processes by Jackie, and the work of the rest of the Oldmixon staff team!

City Academies Choose SIMS

Recently two of the high profile and innovative City Academies (City of London & West London) have chosen SIMS above the competing systems, clearly demonstrating that SIMS delivers what schools need. The choice to use SIMS reflects feedback given to us by thousands of schools in our recent annual survey. We asked questions about the SIMS software currently used by over 22,500 schools.

You told us your top four issues are saving time, ease of use, reducing bureaucracy and quality of support. We are pleased to report that over 80% of schools gave us scores of above average or better across these issues. This demonstrates just how much SIMS is used in schools to support colleagues in their key objectives of improving standards of teaching and learning, by giving the school access to the best information possible. When asked how satisfied they were with SIMS overall we discovered that over four fifths of respondents would recommend SIMS to a friend and were happy with SIMS.

CES continues to work hard to develop its offerings to schools, constantly listening to feedback from surveys and in-school consultations. For free monthly updates please sign up for the free SIMS e-newsletter by visiting www.sims.co.uk

Lesson Monitor at Castle View School

"LESSON MONITOR: SAVES ME HUGE AMOUNTS OF TIME AND ENABLES ME TO TRACK PUPILS VERY QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY..." Year Head Peter Webb at Castle View School, Canvey Island

When Castle View School received their DfES Electronic Registration Grant, Head Russell Sullivan decided to use the funding towards purchasing laptop computers for all his teachers, and SIMS Lesson Monitor software "because it was the best value on the market, and we could therefore get so much with the grant!".

Senior Manager Lena Donovan filled in the details: "We are big users of SIMS, well supported by MISE (Capita's Essex Regional Support Centre). When we up-graded to SIMS SQL we decided to replace most of our teachers' PCs with laptops - and we used the e-Reg money to buy a new server and a wireless network. Jock Cairns, a member of Capita's Lesson Monitor team trained our senior managers very well, and they cascaded the training to all staff". Many schools have security concerns when teachers have improved access to pupil data. Lena said: "We use a screensaver password system, and it works well".



Lesson Monitor is Easy to Learn

I asked Year Head Peter Webb about the training: "it is an easy piece of software to learn - we started with one year group but ALL teachers were registering their classes within a few weeks". Attendance Officer Karen Drake had a key role in the success: "We made it clear at the start that registers were to be completed within 10 minutes of the start of the lesson. All the lesson registers come into my office on-line, very quickly". Form tutors use Lesson Monitor for the statutory registration period, so Karen uses the one module for attendance administration - (because of SIMS integration, Castle View also benefits from the reporting outputs from SQL Attendance!).

"the lesson registers come into my office quickly, on-line, at the beginning of each lesson"...

Karen Drake, Attendance Officer



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Lesson Monitor at Castle View School (continued)

Getting Full Benefit - A Team Effort

Karen, pastoral staff and class teachers all look for lesson attendance exceptions, individual and group patterns and immediate individual pupil tracking. Peter Webb explained: "The pupils soon realised that all staff knew their attendance for each lesson, all the time!" He summarised the benefits:

- Wherever staff are, we have all the information in front of us, on our laptops – we don't have to walk all around the school to check a pupil's lesson attendance. This saves a great deal of time.
- As a Year Head, I have access to all teachers' lesson registers immediately – I can check who is in and who is not at a very early stage of each lesson (the reason for Karen's 10-minute rule!)
- Like all pastoral staff, I have my list of possible truants and persistent 'lates' to sessions or individual lessons – so I can track these 'stars' and intervene early – this is critical.

"With Lesson Monitor I can track my pupils' lesson attendance all the time, and intervene early if there are problems – as all pastoral staff know this is critical!"

Peter Webb, Year Head

- First day contact with parents is therefore much easier – and we have the lesson attendance evidence on the screen to show parents. This defuses any arguments!
- Our previous system was very slow compared to Lesson Monitor – and it wasn't on my desktop. I now literally have the information I need at my fingertips! (Peter has SIMS. net on his lap-top, and as a MIDAS user he has a great deal of pupil data immediately available.)
- I missed the training session – but I coped, this shows how easy it is to learn!

SIMS Reference Sites

We would like to welcome Castle View School in Canvey Island to our SIMS Reference Site Group.

Other recent reference sites include:

- Hayesbrook School, Tonbridge, Kent
- Holmesdale Technology College, Snodland, Kent
- Minsthorpe Community College, Pontefract, West Yorkshire and
- St Hilary Primary School, Penzance, Cornwall

Reference site schools use SIMS to reduce bureaucracy and teacher workload, AND to provide management information for evidence about key decisions, leading to school improvement. If you are interested in finding out more about SIMS Reference Sites, please contact Viv Nunn on 01234 838080, or viv.nunn@capitaes.co.uk



Sandwell: Top Class Support

Achieving SIMS Accreditation: Sandwell's SIMS Team Manager Paul Butler explains the benefits!

"Why do we need to put ourselves through customer and Capita scrutiny and comment to achieve a logo on our letterheads?" That was the dilemma the SMIS (Schools Management Information System) Team debated before eventually deciding to embark on the Capita Accreditation process in the first two weeks of February 2003. The Spring Term also proved to be one of the busiest since our unit was formed in the late 1980s with local and national initiatives increasing the workload for schools and support staff alike. However the process, experience and result proved we made the correct decision.

In 1997 the Team achieved the SIMS Joint Support Scheme Award. In essence the requirements were: a visit, documentary evidence and an analysis of our facilities. The main difference between the JSS process and the new Accreditation Scheme is the Customer Online Survey. Surveying our Customers with an automatic analysis of the results was appealing. As a traded service full costs recovery is essential. It could be argued our "buy-back" is a survey in itself, however there is no real opportunity to comment on the service we provide. Surveying customer opinion has always been a task on our "to-do" list, but it somehow always seemed to appear at the bottom.

Surveying our customers with automatic analysis of the results was appealing!

The procedure itself began with a visit from Capita Education's Jack Harrison to explain the process and timelines. We agreed the dates for our schools to complete the on-line questionnaire and the completion deadline for the SMIS Questionnaire. Sandwell SMIS also supports schools in Dudley LEA, so we decided to have a separate survey to allow us to analyse the two LEAs independently. To prepare our schools we wrote to them explaining the Accreditation process and provided a paper copy of the on-line form for reference.

The fun really began on the first day of survey when we discovered that a high proportion of the school email addresses we had supplied to Capita were inaccurate. This resulted in follow-up phone calls to schools to ensure the On-line Form had arrived. However, the extra work did enable us to update our school email records!



SIMS Team: (Left to Right) Jackie L'Herroux (Advisory Officer), Sue Stevens (Curriculum Projects Co-ordinator), Paul Butler (Strategic Manager), Chris Hinson (Projects and Systems Manager), Julie Duffell (Advisory Officer).

The appeal of the Customer Care Form is that SIMS support teams can view the analysis in real time; fortunately our results were positive and encouraging. There were some interesting findings though as the results were compiled. For example, it became obvious some schools entered scores on recent services received and not over a long period of time, "you're only as good as your last game", is an apt analogy. This could have a positive or negative impact on results of course, but it did make us more conscious of the latest school visit, course, etc. being the most important. One section of questions requested schools to list modules used and in some instances this encouraged an audit of modules in use. In fact some users actually discovered modules they were unaware of. This is an issue for us since we encourage the use of all SIMS Modules. The reverse also became apparent because schools omitted to register modules they use regularly, or, the names of modules on the Form caused confusion. As a result of these experiences marketing, news and regular updates now have a higher priority for us. Technical Support was marked the lowest by schools on the survey - an issue over which we have least control. This brought home to us how essential the quality of a school's equipment is in the delivery of a SIMS Service.

Sandwell: Top Class Support (continued)

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The two weeks available for schools to complete the Customer Questionnaire were exceptionally busy but the results proved to be very positive and the process enabled the Team to assess its performance. We gained confidence and satisfaction whilst at the same time collecting evidence that can be used for future development and improvement.

As a fully Traded Service reliant on income generation, it is vital that our customers are surveyed and given the opportunity to comment on the service they receive. The On-line Customer Care Survey is an integral part of the scheme and provided an effective tool both for customer input and service provider analysis. The follow up a visit provided feedback that was very informative. The Team, LEA Officers and schools also enjoyed the presentation of the Accreditation Certificates by Jack Harrison at a scheduled Head Teachers' Meeting!



Editor Viv Nunn adds:

Paul's Sandwell team now supports Valley Road Community Primary School in Sunderland (yes...THE Sunderland!)

Valley Road is a unique educational establishment. It is purpose-built on the site of a former infant and junior school in an area of very high social deprivation, with unemployment running at 80%. Both the LEA and DfES finance the school; much of the funding comes from the New Deals for the Community Back on the Map Project.

One of the main objectives of the project is to break the cycle of deprivation and 'anti-educationalist' culture prevalent in such communities. The school is the focus of a neighbourhood community, and provides a caring atmosphere in which confidence in the value of teaching and learning can prosper.

Valley Road has been developed with ICT – both curricular and management - at the core of its foundation. After sensitive local negotiations, head teacher Chris Young chose to take support for SIMS from Sandwell's SMIS team.

We hope to report fully from Valley Road in our next edition of Achievement (arriving with you in December) on the contribution management information is making to this exciting and unique school!

Look out for more about Valley Road Community Primary School in the next edition of Achievement.



The Sheffield Story

SIMS EMS

Sheffield LEA: transforming the data agenda for our schools-with the right software tools and the right people!

Major organisational change is a complex process and we recognise the dangers of over-simplification in a short article. So let's look briefly at the before, after, what and how of the Sheffield story...

Before...

There was huge frustration in schools of all phases and sizes – in Sheffield as elsewhere - at the 'data agenda'. Demands by a variety of Local Authority departments and Government Agencies for the same information from schools, had been made worse by poor understanding of the critical nature of schools' organisational and reporting cycles. As the new millennium dawned Sheffield's headteachers were, like colleagues elsewhere, 'drowning in data requests':

"There was absolutely no coordination. We were asked for the same information time and time again. There was no central system at all and information about our Y7 intake came in paper format that had to be typed in by our staff." explained Julie Warne, Head of The City School.

After...

Now, Sheffield has been recognised by the DfES as a National Reference Site for its comprehensive use of a single education management system, Capita Education's EMS. EMS together with SIMS in schools, allow data to flow between schools and the LEA as it should – in the right direction, at the right time – and perhaps most importantly, ONCE!

"Now, things are so much better: we send information in one go to the data team who report to QCA on our behalf. One of the major improvements has been the transition data received about our Y7 cohort. We receive this in June and the KS2 Teacher Assessment at the beginning of July, in one block rather than in disparate bits from individual schools. One input into SIMS allows us to plan more efficiently and effectively and has reduced staff workload enormously." said Julie.



But the software is just the starting point – it is people that drive through change in organisations. Head of Information Systems Alan Marshall says that the leadership of Executive Director of Education Jonathan Crossley Holland has been crucial: "Jonathan has led a cultural change here – we have a 'service ethos' that views our schools as customers for whom we must make life easier, not more difficult!" Alan also emphasises that school improvement has been placed right at the heart of the 'information agenda': "so that heads can see the purpose of collecting and analysing data". The LEA works closely with other parts of the Council to deliver e-Government targets – 'joined -up' planning and action plans are key. These policies and values underpin the transformation.

What has changed...

- The wide variety of LEA databases has been consolidated into a single management system – EMS.
- Strategic decisions are based on consistent information held centrally in EMS.
- All appropriate LEA staff have access to the same school and pupil level information, so they don't have to ask schools for it!
- Development and support for 'whole school' networks for curriculum and SIMS has been enhanced; the policy is 'one school, one network!'
- Guidance on minimum standards of hardware, operating systems and peripherals are given.

The Sheffield Story (continued)



- Broadband internet access is being rolled out to secondary and primary schools.
- Data is encrypted and exchanged electronically between the LEA and schools via EMS and SIMS. To assist schools in this...
- A high quality Data Calendar is sent to all schools – with brief SIMS users' instructions...'simple but brilliant it helps us and schools to organise resources to meet data demands on time' says Yvonne Thurtle, Data Team Manager.



- Support and training for the extended use of SIMS in schools has been prioritised. Training can be accredited, to improve skills and enhance professional development for ICT technical staff and teachers. In addition, there is targeted 'top-up' support for individual schools as necessary.
- Models of 'excellent practice' – primary and secondary – have been promoted, recognising schools learn from other schools.

And how?...it's a 'team thing'

...the Data Calendar - simple but brilliant! it helps the LEA and schools to organise resources to meet data demands

- Satisfaction levels are sought through surveys and customer user groups, with all phases of schools represented. Their needs are prioritised, and in return the services offered are regularly evaluated and adjusted accordingly'.

- The Director established an LEA 'Star Chamber' to filter ALL data requests to and from schools. This body includes ALL LEA staff who manage school-LEA data flow.
- Members of the central data team were seconded in to work alongside well-established departments, such as Special Needs and Grants and Benefits. Thus EMS expertise was transferred quickly, and new technology implemented sensitively.
- A Professional Partnership with Capita Education Services was established as a medium-term strategy, to bring staff 'up-to-speed' with the new EMS modules. This increased the confidence and competence of staff – a necessary 'quick win' when managing change.
- A senior school SIMS administrator joined the LEA as a Consultant in the Information Systems Team. This key school role was thus seen as crucial by the LEA, and correspondingly administrators in schools saw their role recognised, supported and enhanced.
- Other school consultants (with school management experience) were appointed, to set up good relationships with schools with regard to collecting data. With PLASC driving the need for school-level data to be accurate, the team developed an 'anything it takes' approach to assisting schools meet this need.
- On-going, working links with Advisers were developed, so that their awareness of the pupil performance analyses functionality in SIMS and EMS was raised. The enhanced features of Assessment Manager 6 and SIMS .net were built into planning for Inset on target setting. Thus when schools implement the new software, they understand the processes it analyses and reports.

The result?

Sheffield's use of pupil and school data is at the heart of the Authority's improvement vision. This is demonstrated through a significant increase in the number of SIMS modules being used by schools. As a result data becomes information, providing evidence for increasingly data-sophisticated managers in schools and the LEA to make strategic and local decisions that are informing the core of the education agenda: teaching and learning in the City's educational community.

Attendance at Oldmixon

SIMS Attendance: The tool supporting improved attendance at Oldmixon Primary, Weston-Super-Mare

In 1999, unauthorised absence at Oldmixon Primary School in Weston-Super-Mare was running at 1.3%. Like many seaside areas, Weston has considerable pockets of social deprivation within its permanent residential community. Headteacher Chris Rush explained: "We needed to reduce this figure – but we wanted 'real' improvement, not just facts and figures – it's the children that count, rather than statistics!"

Oldmixon has 200 plus pupils, with a 90-place nursery. Although the school has been on its present site for 32 years, it is to benefit from major building works this year. The school has also benefited from its membership of the Weston Education Achievement Zone. "The zone financially supports a number of projects - our breakfast and homework clubs, and our Easter school. These help create the environment in which our pupils can improve their learning" said Chris. WEAZ has also funded the implementation of the SIMS Attendance module in 10 schools across the zone. At Oldmixon, this support has included the installation and training on the module, and important 'extras' such as the answer-phone/fax, and certificates and badges for the pupils. Perhaps crucially, it has part-funded the costs of a key person, Jackie Robinson! Jackie is a Learning Support Assistant who is also the schools finance administrator – and now, thanks to the extra funding, the attendance administrator! This 'pump-prime' money is allowing the school to embed the use of the new Attendance module into its routines.

'Training on SIMS attendance is straightforward.'

Jackie said "the training was straight forward – a day was plenty of time. If we have a 'usage' problem the help desk at North Somerset sorts us out!"* Previously, teachers filled in manual registers, and balances were updated when time allowed. Chris herself compiled the necessary figures and reports – perhaps not the best use of a busy head's time! Now, teachers still fill in a register, but Jackie enters the marks in the module. "It takes about an hour each week – the system defaults to 'present' and so I just enter 'exceptions' with the correct code". Useful reports are easily generated – group analysis by



attendance category and individual attendance reports have proved immediately useful; the latter have been used by the Education Welfare Officer to support earlier intervention. This could mean important early intervention if Child Protection issues are suspected. Chris added: "The DfES Year End report went smoothly – it saved us hours of frustrating and boring calculating!" The next steps for the 'attendance team' are to send individual attendance reports (in Microsoft Word™) to pupils' parental reports, and to make more use of the various letters generated by the module.

'Useful reports from the software - and good management!'

* North Somerset's schools receive SIMS support from Capita Wessex Regional Centre