CASE STUDY:

Diocesan School for Girls

1,550 Students

79,500 Slips sent

Joined in 2017

EdSmart keeps up communications at Dio during pandemic

Like so many school leaders across the world, Heather McRae, Principal at Diocesan School for Girls in Auckland, laments the loss of excursions, camps and other forms of education outside the classroom as an unfortunate casualty of the global pandemic. A major impetus for introducing EdSmart's School Organisation System (SOS) into the school was to reorganise the steady stream of forms, permissions and requests between school administration and the parent community that excursions and other such activities demand.

Instead, in 2020, EdSmart's SOS has taken on an unexpected role, revealing its capabilities to the school in a very different way; one that has met the exacting and pressing requirements that a public health emergency brings.

"It has enabled us to push information out to parents, as another form of communication," says Heather. "We do email all parents and we do text them but EdSmart is also a really good way of getting information out there – short, sharply and quickly."

"These are exceptional times and I think it's influencing the whole world in how we communicate," she continues. "They say the rule is you have to inform parents three times about something – once is never enough. So to have multiple means for the way you communicate is the way to go. And it's certainly proving effective for us based on feedback. Our stakeholder feedback this year is that our communication has improved and people are really appreciating that."

The journey for Diocesan School for Girls (or 'Dio' as they're commonly known) and EdSmart began in 2017 with the appointment of the school's new Director of Business and Planning, Paul McDowell-Hook. Coming from a background running an IT company, Paul brought with him a more informed view of how established school processes could be efficiently facilitated with interoperable and flexible technology.

"We sat down as a school group to see how we could plug everything in, to make sure that

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HEATHER MCRAE
Principal
Diocesan School for Girls

we had the technology that was going to provide the best service for families and the best information that we could possibly find," Heather explains.

DIOCESAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

EdSmart

"So that's when we first looked at EdSmart. We wanted technology that would link into our existing student database, Synergetic, and our learning management system, Schoolbox. We also wanted a cloud-based solution and ease of access for parents and girls, especially in relation to the forms."

"While we still have servers at school for some applications, being cloud-based is definitely the way of the future," she continues. "And we believe that it gives parents accessibility anywhere in the world – and quickly. We also needed it to work on mobile devices and any other device that parents may be using."

While Heather acknowledges that all schools differ in how they use information, she feels confident in saying the average school today is swamped with masses of information moving to and fro across its community and stakeholders. That means it is important to have the appropriate device paired with the appropriate information and, consequently, doing the appropriate thing.

In order to hit on this measured equation, Paul formed an IT group of all the educational experts in the school to identify the right assessment and achievement data, and ensure it was consistent with the information presented on sites such as the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

"It was really important to put all the different options together because, as we know, there are lots of options out there," admits Heather. "But EdSmart worked perfectly for us with our student and information database, and also with the way in which we wanted to communicate and push out information to parents as opposed to them having to find the information on our website. EdSmart fit that bill perfectly."

Having gone to such lengths to get the technology mix right, Heather and her team were buoyed by the positive response to EdSmart from the broader Dio school community. As she states, "They love the simplicity of it."

"For a request for a trip or attendance of an event, just to be able to do it on their mobile phone wherever they are, is so much easier than interrogating their child about what's happening at school. That kind of push information has been really effective for us. It has worked particularly well with our mobile app and making sure that our mobile app has everything on it that we want parents to receive."

"There's a sustainability aspect too but, for us, it's really about how you can disseminate and track information much easier. It enables the teachers to have all the up-to-date information and it's easy to collate all the data you need to go on an excursion."

Most schools will come to EdSmart to fulfill one major pain point in their operations (e.g. automation of permission slips and consent forms for excursions) but most are surprised when, after introducing EdSmart, the SOS takes on more and more roles within their school, freeing staff time and enhancing their community in unanticipated ways. Sometimes, it can even take a pandemic to uncover the magic of EdSmart's technology.

When asked to provide her final thoughts on EdSmart, Heather doesn't hesitate in saying: "I would encourage New Zealand schools to have a look at EdSmart and see where it fits." And, she adds, "The EdSmart people are great too."

The possibilities of EdSmart may surprise you.