VenturEd Solutions™

SUCCESS STORY

How Falkirk Council save 50 hours of work by monitoring attendance data

besa BRITISH EDUCATIONAL SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION AWARDS 2024 WINNER



After the pandemic, **absenteeism** was at an all-time high, with many pupils not returning to school altogether.

As a result of that, Falkirk Council decided to intervene by finding a way to study the large amounts of data they collected from their schools, and sought support from Ventured Solutions.

We built a completely bespoke data dashboard that allows the council to easily identify patterns and make data-driven decisions and interventions where needed.

The data challenge

Every school collects endless amounts of data each day, and manually inserting it into spreadsheets is extremely time consuming. Because of the amount of data, these spreadsheets are consequently very hard to analyse, and it becomes easy to miss out on patterns and instances that require a prompt action.



Falkirk Council's mission was to help out the children in their community, and to provide support where necessary; however, individual headteachers from the local schools were struggling to manually keep track of data by relying on traditional methods. Especially since COVID-19, attendance significantly dropped, and to take meaningful action, Falkirk Council needed support in studying what this data meant.

The solution

The Education Dashboard tracks daily absence and attendance data in schools, and equips education establishments with data and insights to promote opportunities and reduce inequalities, and help schools address the attendance drop since COVID.

Rebecca McDonald, Change Manager at Falkirk Council, reports: “We spent many hours with our frontline staff to understand our requirement, and to then develop the technical aspect of the tool. Our goal was to translate complex data and different aspects of the system into something really simple, intuitive and visually engaging, so that teachers could use it with ease.”

Project timeline

Q4 2022

- Reach out from Falkirk Council and initial meetings
- Initial implementation project kick off meeting

Q1 2023

- Backend implementation undertaken
- Initial pilot schools authorised
- Initial pilot schools deployed
- Second stage pilot schools authorised
- Second stage pilot schools deployed
- Pilot phase signed off

Q2 2023

- Remaining schools authorised
- Remaining schools deployed
- Project signed off

Start of the project



Falkirk Council contacted our Enterprise Business Manager at the start of 2022 to enquire about options for the collection and aggregation of SEEMiS MIS data for schools within the LA's boundary. During ongoing conversations over the early months of 2022, our team identified that the use of Synapse Pipeline was the ideal solution, covering the Authority's needs.

Supporting on the Data Connector project with Falkirk Council is one of our Technical Project Managers at Ventured Solutions, Sarah Paul. Sarah expands on the steps she and her team followed when crafting Falkirk's bespoke tool:

"The first step was speaking to the local authority to find out exactly what data they wanted to collect, and then we asked them to authorize access to the data. Our development team were then able to proceed with the early-stage configuration of the product once the customer had provided their list of field requirements from the MIS platform."

Authorisation stage

The customer then provided us with a list of schools, including their preferred pilot establishments at the end of 2022. Our implementation team configured the pilot school connections at the start of January 2023, handing over the initial object collections to the Falkirk team to test at the early stages of Q1.

Once the customer was happy to sign off on the early pilot adopters, our Implementation team began onboarding the remaining 50+ schools, processing the necessary authorisation requests with their central LA Systems Officer. This was completed during the early weeks of Q2 2023.

End of the project

As with projects of this sort, there are inevitably additional requests and feature requirements that need to be addressed before project sign off. We were delighted to provide the Falkirk team with a fully functioning solution, meeting all their needs, by the end of Q2 2023.

Falkirk Council agreed to be featured in our segment of the **'EdTech: Innovating Teaching & Learning' ITN Business documentary** at the end of 2023, which focused on the evolution of education technology post-pandemic. We participated to put a spotlight onto Falkirk's Data Connector project and show its impact.

Watch it here!

The results

Falkirk have consistently been using their data dashboard to be involved in their local families' safeguarding and to plan interventions whenever an inconsistency is spotted. The cloud based software can save individual teachers up to **50 hours of work** when it comes to monitoring and analysing attendance.



> **"We've been able to keep on top of our data monthly, sometimes daily, to look at the impact that our specific interventions are having.**

Since the tool was introduced part way through the 2023/24 academic year, there has been an **incremental reduction in absence** across the authority, with the number of students with over 10% absence reducing by nearly 400 from 2022/23 to 2023/24.

2022/23



2023/24



Parent feedback

Most parents understood that since the pandemic, recognising the need for help earlier could have made a difference. Parents and carers talked about their kids missing school due to mental health concerns, other health issues, and practical reasons. They were also trying to improve their family's wellbeing, including planning holidays, but the cost of living made that difficult.

Overall, parents discussed various challenges, including financial and wellbeing issues, with some children missing school to help care for their parents.

On a more positive note, the new tools now let schools see absence patterns and trends immediately, allowing them to contact parents quickly if issues arise and set up support. Parents have appreciated having those conversations.

When a teacher is be able to show a parent their child's absence over the academic year, it really brings home the seriousness of some of the issues that young people and their families are facing.



The visualisation of this information makes it easier for parents and carers to have informed discussions with the school about how to best support the young people with these problems and help get solutions in place quicker.

Teacher feedback

The speed that this information can be accessed means that teachers **no longer need to spend hours** analysing pupil attendance, and they are now able to quickly see who is impacted at the touch of a button and take the necessary action far earlier that they were previously able to do. This is essential to avoiding lengthier absences which often require more complex interventions.

An example of how this has worked...

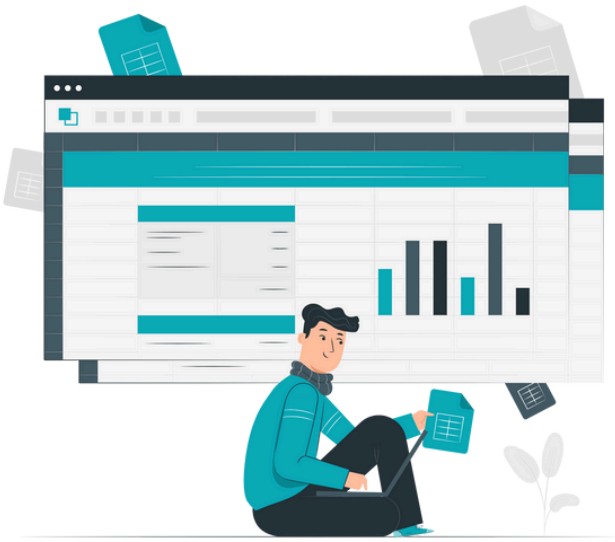
"Pastoral leads in our secondary schools will routinely use the dashboard to identify any new attendance concerns," Rebecca from Falkirk Council says. "A great example of this is when a young person has dropped below 90% for the first time and they can use the dashboard to identify that most of their absence is on a Thursday.

“With further investigation, we find out that young person has PE on a Thursday morning. The pastoral lead upon talking to that young person found out they don’t want to take part in PE because they don't have an appropriate PE kit anymore. The school were able to provide a new kit, and that pupil is now back attending PE and their attendance is improving. **Without the dashboard identifying this pattern would have been much more challenging.”**

Local Authority feedback

As part of their **‘EdTech: Innovating Teaching & Learning’ documentary**, ITN interviews Change Manager Rebecca McDonald from Falkirk Council, Headteacher Dawn Stanfield and Deputy Head Nicola Chok from Stenhousemuir Primary School, and Technical Project Manager Sarah Paul from Ventured Solutions to share the impact of the data dashboard and how it's really made a difference for educators, pupils and their families.

“For us, it's been how quickly you can get to the heart of the matter and do something about it,” Headteacher Dawn Stanfield comments. “So, instead of spending hours and hours analysing all this data, putting it onto spreadsheets, which is a really number crunching exercise for us, that's all done for you. **You can easily spot if anyone’s attendance changes patterns.”**



The versatility and durability of the software is helping schools flag students with specific learning or social challenges to get help to them quicker than ever before.

“We've been able to keep on top of our data monthly, sometimes daily, to look at the impact that our specific interventions are having,” Deputy Head Nicola Chok says. “For example, we now know that some of our children have medical issues that affect their attendance; this gives us the chance to figure out what other interventions we can put in place to support those children.”

Picking the right software that works for teachers in Falkirk was part of the council's strategic approach to work with technology companies like Ventured Solutions to bring pedagogy and e-learning into the post pandemic era.

“We wanted to be able to know really quickly what attendance was like across our school, or what it was like at stages,” Headteacher Dawn Stanfield says. “And at the click of a button, we can now see attendance at stages or attendance across our SIMD deciles. You can see the information so quickly, and I think it's one of those things that you have to see and try before you make a decision, because it's not a spreadsheet that you have to spend hours learning how to work. **The information is there, it's really visual, it's really clear, and it was created with head teachers.”**

Award recognition

In July 2024, our Data Connector project has been recognised as the **winner** of the ‘Evidence and Impact Award’ at the BESA Awards. We are so proud of this achievement and thankful to the teams at BESA and Falkirk Council!



Future plans

As with any data aggregation contract with Ventured Solutions, we insist on maintaining a strong relationship with the customer for the duration of their time with us.



This process is not different, and we continue to work closely with the Falkirk and SEEMiS teams to enhance the availability of data, future-proofing the product and allowing the customer to provide greater levels of support to those vital front-line departments within the Authority.

“Our dashboard tool is just fabulous for the schools in Falkirk, but **we want to work with Ventured Solutions to roll that out nationally and engage national partners,”** Rebecca McDonald says. “We're pioneering this tool, but if we share this learning and embrace it on a national level, we can show other councils how we confidently face some of the financial challenges every council faces. If we harness this learning, every educator in Scotland can be facilitated with this tool, this data, these insights to actually make a difference.”



Sarah and our team have no plans on slowing down anytime soon. “One of the most rewarding aspects of what we do is the fact that we know that **we're making a difference,** that there are so many children that have fallen through the cracks by having these pieces of software and local authorities talking to each other. These children, they're going to be looked after. They're not just going to disappear.”

Let’s work together for better pupil outcomes

Having tangible proof of how data insights can help significantly improve children’s lives is extremely rewarding. If you have a complicated data project you’d like to embark on, **get in touch with us:** we can work together to make a difference in schools.

venturedsolutions.co.uk

0207 237 8456