VenturEd Solutions™

CASE STUDY

How Parklea Primary School transformed communication and improved parental engagement

Driving parental engagement and simplifying payments from families with SchoolMoney and Teachers2Parents



VenturEd Solutions™

About the school

Founded in 2019, Parklea Primary School, located in the north of Luton, Bedfordshire, is an urban three-form entry primary school based on two sites, with a average of 24 students per class.

Around 67 staff members work across the two sites, and we spoke to **School Business Manager Carol Onley** to find out the impact of SchoolMoney and Teachers2Parents on communication and parental engagement.

Carol talks us through the journey from being a school where every payment arrived in cash or cheque and every message went home on paper, to one where parents respond within minutes, clubs fill within 15 minutes of going live, and the admin team cut their workload on club coordination by more than 80%.

Parklea Primary School

ABOUT

Sundon Park, Luton

548 pupils on roll

Using SchoolMoney since 2016

PRODUCTS

SchoolMoney

Teachers2Parents

TEAM

Carol Onley
School Business Manager

> **“Everyone talks about Teachers2Parents, Eduspot and SchoolMoney. Parents understand we’re a cashless and paperless school. It has changed engagement completely.”**

What parental engagement looked like before

Before adopting any of our platforms, the relationship between Parklea Primary School and its parents was built almost entirely on paper. Every communication went home in a child's school bag and every payment arrived at the office in cash or cheque.

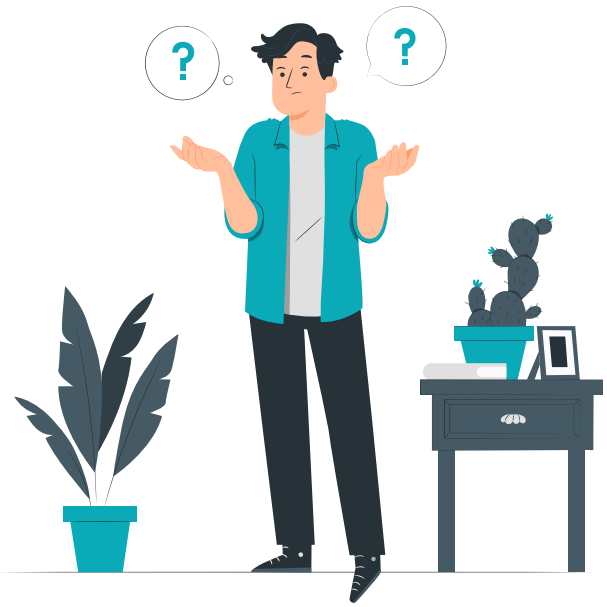


As Carol puts it simply: "Don't remind me of those days. They were awful days."

The challenge with paper-based communication was not simply one of volume or inconvenience. It was that the school had no visibility over whether parents had received anything at all.

Letters and forms sent home would frequently go missing, and when parents claimed they had not received information, the school had no way to confirm or challenge that. Carol acknowledged that "probably half the time they didn't, because the letters were probably still in children's bags."

The result was a school that was communicating with families, but had very little confidence that those families were receiving, reading or acting on what was being sent.



Core challenges

The limitations of a paper-based approach became increasingly difficult to manage. Carol identified several challenges that made it clear the school needed a better way to engage with families.

Club management

After-school clubs were a significant pain point. Carol gave the example of sending a letter home inviting 200 pupils to sign up for a club with only 15 places available, and struggling to allocate places fairly when they received 75 responses all at the same time.

Carol explained that this was one of the main reasons she wanted to switch to managing club bookings using SchoolMoney.



No evidence of delivery

Because all communication went home on paper, the school had no way of confirming whether parents had received it. When parents disputed receiving a letter or form, the school could not challenge that with any confidence.

No system to manage Parents' Evenings

Without a platform for parents to book appointments, coordinating Parents' Evening was very difficult. Everything relied on sending out invitation letters and collating the responses from parents manually.

> **“Trying to sort out Parents’ Evening without a system was a ridiculous nightmare!”**

The overall admin burden

Coordinating things like club sign-ups, from the moment letters went out to confirming places, producing registers and notifying parents was a significant task for staff, especially as the school used to have a smaller team.



School trips had to be announced two months in advance so that the school had time to continously remind parents and chase for payment. As the school continued to grow, admin-heavy tasks like this became unsustainable.

> **“Coordinating clubs back in those days would have taken us about a week and a half to get all the forms back, allocate places and put them in as a register.”**

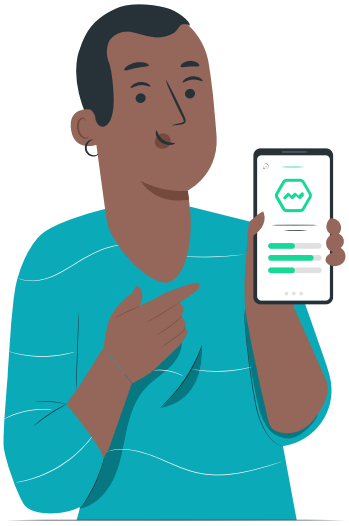
Payments and consent were disconnected

Under the old system, parents could return a consent form for a school trip without any payment attached. This left the school without a clear picture of genuine commitment and created additional work in chasing outstanding balances, which could take weeks or even months.

The solution

Parklea Primary School adopted SchoolMoney to manage all payment collection, and Teachers2Parents to handle all communications with families, along with our Parents' Evening Booking System.

Introducing parents to the new system



Carol was clear that the transition did not happen overnight. It was a slow process that required consistent effort and commitment.

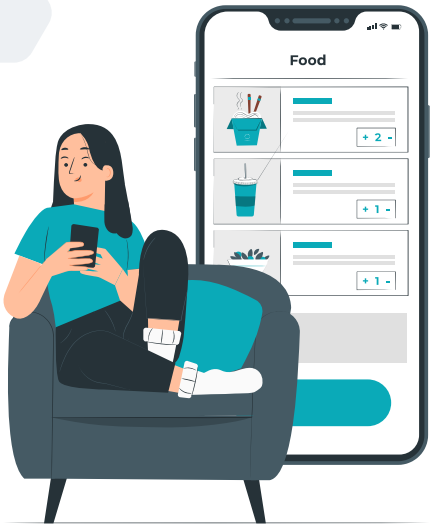
The school started with what was most familiar to parents: booking trips using online consent forms. From there, the school gradually extended the use of SchoolMoney across clubs and other activities.

> **"We have some staff with children here, which helps us understand how to support parents."**

As the School Business Manager, Carol makes sure that new cohorts of parents are introduced to the system every September when they attend their first parent information evening, and that all staff are informed so they can help parents get used to managing payments online.

> **"Initially some parents might take time to get used to it. We ask them to come in and sort it out for them, which works nine times out of ten."**

Cashless catering



The introduction of SchoolMoney for cashless catering was another major turning point. After previously using a different system, Parklea began doing its own catering and parents were required to book meals online, which changed the dynamic significantly. Parents who had been reluctant to engage with the platform now had a regular, practical reason to use it

The school also used free Breakfast Clubs as an entry point for families who had not yet engaged with SchoolMoney.

> **“We were an early adopter school for the Breakfast Clubs feature, which really helped us get parents on board, because if they know how to book a free club, they can book a school trip.”**

Supporting less confident parents

Where parents came in wanting to pay cash for a trip, the office would not accept it in most circumstances. Instead, a member of staff would guide them through the payment on their phone.

For families who were harder to reach, admin staff would go to the classroom door at the end of the school day to have a quiet, one-to-one conversation.

> **“Parents have a lot more confidence now. For those who struggle with the system, we help them and it does get easier. It’s about having that open communication.”**

Impact and evidence

The impact of SchoolMoney and Teachers2Parents at Parklea Primary School is evident across every area of school operations. From the speed at which payments are collected to the confidence staff have that every family has received a communication, the transformation is measurable and consistent.

Significantly reduced admin time

For Carol and her team, the impact of switching to Teachers2Parents and SchoolMoney has been “massive” in terms of admin time alone.

> **“I think half of my team would walk out if we didn’t have SchoolMoney and Teachers2Parents any more! They all know the impact it’s had.**
>
> **Tasks that would take a week now take a matter of hours. It has reduced admin time so, so much.”**

Stronger communication and engagement

Carol is much happier about the school’s communication with parents now that Teachers2Parents is the default instead of printed letters. She says the key difference (other than responses becoming instant) is that school staff now have the evidence to prove to families that they did indeed send a message about something on a particular date.

> **“We still have parents who say they haven’t receive certain messages. The difference now is that we have the tools to check and tell them exactly what was sent and when. ”**

Although Carol admits they will always have a small number of parents who miss messages and blame the school, she has seen a huge improvement overall since switching to digital communication.

> **“It’s definitely made a big impact with reducing parent complaints, and parents are a lot more responsive.”**

Clear financial reporting

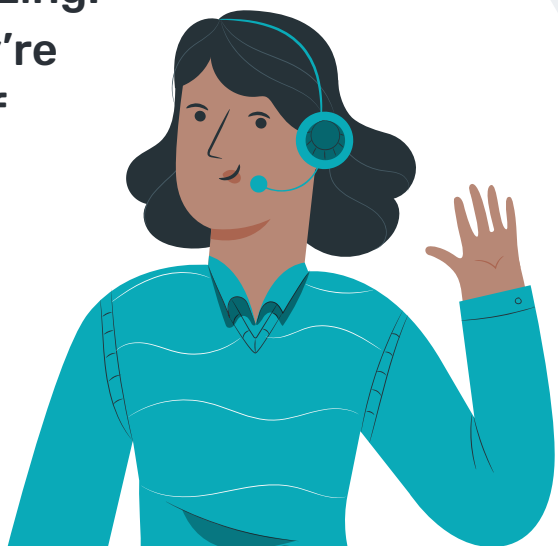
Carol is particularly happy with the improvement in school payments. She reiterates that the process is “much better now,” since she can see who has already paid or chase outstanding payments right from the SchoolMoney dashboard. “I use the reconciliation report, which is amazing,” she adds.

> **“All our staff know how to use SchoolMoney. We use it for everything we can. We couldn’t do without it now!”**

Reliable technical support

Carol is also confident that she can rely on our support team when she needs them. She says her team all know how to use SchoolMoney, but occasionally she needs to pass them specific instructions from the support team to help with things like updating the cashless catering menu.

> **“The support team are amazing. They really know what they’re talking about, unlike a lot of support teams I talk to!”**



Tips for schools struggling to switch

Although digital solutions for school communications, payments and more have been around for decades now, a surprising number of schools are still struggling to move away from traditional paper-based methods. Here are some of the best strategies that Carol recommended based on her experience.

Invite struggling parents in rather than trying to help over the phone. Carol was clear that it can be difficult to guide a parent through an issue without seeing what they're seeing. Her approach was always to invite them into school and sit with them.

Show parents how, using their own phone. If a parent came in wanting to pay cash for a trip, the office would instead walk them through the payment on their own device there and then, avoiding the need for cash.

Go to the classroom door. For families who were still not engaging, Carol's admin staff would go to the classroom door at the end of the school day to have a quiet conversation and help parents get set up.

Make sure staff understand what parents are seeing. Staff cannot help parents unless they understand the parent-facing experience. Training staff to see both sides was a significant part of getting families on board.

Use school meal bookings as a prompt. Where parents were still reluctant to engage, Carol used the meal booking process as a motivator, making clear that children would receive a limited lunch option if meals were not booked online. She found that this prompted parents to log on.

Keep plugging away. Carol acknowledged there is no single solution. Every September brings a new cohort of families and the process starts again. Her consistent message was simply to keep at it.

Conclusion

The impact of SchoolMoney and Teachers2Parents at Parklea Primary School is evident across every area of school operations. From the speed at which payments are collected to the confidence staff have that every family has received a communication, the transformation is measurable and consistent.

> **“The overall value of having communications and payments working together is perfect. We certainly couldn’t do without it and it’s had a massive impact for us.”**

Interested to learn more?

If you can relate to Carol’s explanation of the problems she faced before using SchoolMoney and Teachers2Parents, we can help. To find out more about how we can support your school or trust with similar solutions, head to our website and get in touch with our friendly team today.

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