

SENDS cuts Catholic Education Office's manual administration

Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office has 20,000 students

The Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office has 55 primary and secondary schools in the ACT and NSW. To streamline interaction with the parents of its 20,000 students for unexplained absences, the Office chose the SMS-based Student Event Notification Delivery System (SENDS), developed especially for the education sector by Alacrity Technologies.

Schools using SENDS within the Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office have seen student attendance rates improve, parent satisfaction soar and manual administration times cut by up to three hours daily.

Streamlining interaction with parents and guardians

Michael Haigh, Head of ICT Services with the Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office, explains, "Our secondary schools suggested an SMS system might be a quick way to inform parents about unexplained student absences. Alacrity, who we had already spoken with about a system for managing casual relief staff, advised us it could be done."

I wanted to develop a cooperative model, allowing us to cost effectively solve the problem once and then implement it across multiple schools.

Michael Haigh, Head of ICT Services,
Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office

Following an extensive pilot period, the Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office adopted SENDS, which is now fully operational in its two ACT girls secondary schools. Two co-educational secondary schools will implement SENDS shortly.

St Clare's College reduces administration with SENDS

One happy SENDS user within the Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office is St Clare's College in Canberra, an all girls school with 1,200 students in Years 7-12.

Lynne Robertson, Student Administration Officer at St Clare's, explains that before implementing SENDS, "We telephoned individual parents to advise them of their daughter's absence. Four of us would spend about one hour each making the calls."

"We set up SENDS because some parents of absent students were not contacting the school. This was our way of meeting our duty of care obligations because in most cases the girls were at home sick but their parents had simply forgotten to let us know."

95% of parents have adopted SENDS and the other 5% are those who don't own a mobile phone.

Lynne Robertson, Student Administration,
St Clare's College, Canberra

Benefits to Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office

- Improved student attendance
- Better informed parents and guardians
- Less manual administration daily
- Quick and easy contact with parents
- Optimised staff time



SENDS adoption rates are high amongst parents

Today, St Clare's College sends the absentee notification message simultaneously to a list of parent numbers in an instant.

The feedback I get from parents is just brilliant. They're always happy to hear from us. It's good for St Clare's because it lets parents know we care.

Lynne Robertson, Student Administration,
St Clare's College, Canberra

Lynne explains the process, "Now, when there is no reason given for the student's absence, a text message is sent to one or both parents notifying them that their daughter has an unexplained absence and requesting they contact the school. Within five minutes the return phone calls start."

St Clare's College saves up to three hours daily

SENDS is saving us on average three hours of staff time each day. It takes just a couple of keystrokes to contact many parents. I just love it! To anyone else in my position I would say 'take SENDS up straight away - it makes life so much easier.'

Lynne Robertson, Student Administration,
St Clare's College, Canberra

Lynne is quick to point out that, in addition to saving the school significant administration time each day, "SENDS has reduced our absentee rates. We now have the reasons for student absences, because in most instances we get an explanation from parents."

The SENDS process

The school administrator:

- Extracts a file from the student administration system
- Logs into Alacrity's website and uploads the file extract of unexplained absences
- Selects a message from a customisable template (or creates a new message template)
- Checks and then sends the messages to parents
- Waits for an email that is sent to the school confirming which parents received notification

A partnership to expand over time

Michael explains, "Alacrity is excellent to work with. They are keen to understand our business, always follow through on what they say they're going to do, and are very effective at dealing with the people at the top as well as on the ground."

The main benefit for me is that the schools are happy and using SENDS to make their life easier.

Michael Haigh, Head of ICT Services,
Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education Office

"One school is considering using SENDS to follow up 'students at risk' - that is, students who repeatedly hand things in late. The parent's mobile could be used to advise when their child's work is outstanding, or alternatively the student could be provided with an SMS reminder," he finishes.

"Today we use SENDS for absences, but in future I envisage using it to advise parents when an excursion arrives late or if sporting events are cancelled due to wet weather," Lynne comments.

About Alacrity

Alacrity Technologies (Alacrity) is a fast-growing Australian company that was created to deliver on the promise of intelligent business interactivity. Our patented CLEW (Closed Loop Environment for Wireless) technology enables real-time interaction for urgent information. Leading organisations like The Australian Bureau of Statistics, The Catholic Education Office, The Royal Australian Navy and The Australian Customs Service use CLEW.

Founded in 1998, Alacrity has offices in Canberra and Sydney and services organisations internationally through a network of trusted distributors in Asia, the Middle East and the United Kingdom.