



Perry Beeches School

'The Most Improved School Ever!' improves parent/teacher communications and reduces costs

Background:

Established in 1930's in Great Barr, Birmingham, Perry Beeches School was rebuilt in the 1990's and is listed as one of the City's Iconic Buildings. With 920 pupils and 140 staff, the school gained technology status in 2004 enabling them to equip themselves with the most up to date equipment available. With six dedicated ICT rooms all pupils have access to the school computer network. The school boasts a wide range of facilities and credits some of its successes to having excellent communication systems with parents. Achieving the greatest 51% improvement in Maths and English across the country, Perry Beeches is proud to regard itself as 'The Most Improved School Ever!'

Key challenge – Reduce high mobile phone call charges and make staff more accessible to parents

"With an estimated 50 to 60 calls from parents to teaching staff every day, managing communications can be a logistical nightmare" says Deputy Head Teacher, Darren Foreman. "It is sometimes difficult for parents to reach teachers because they are teaching. This means that in many cases teachers have to call parents back and they are typically given a mobile number which can lead to spiralling phone bills. With an ageing phone system that was beginning to

become unreliable the problem was magnified because sometimes relaying of messages from the receptionist were delayed or simply didn't get passed on to teachers causing frustration for parents who then had to call again."

Solution – A new phone system delivers immediate annual savings of £1500

The school realised that it needed to upgrade its communications infrastructure and review how it could rationalise rising phone call costs. After reviewing six different suppliers, Perry Beeches chose Swyx Gold partner



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HBT Communications based in Coventry to help. "On call costs alone HBT could save us approximately £1500 per year" says Darren. By replacing the school's old hardware based phone system with a SwyxWare software based IP solution that integrated into the school's existing network, it was possible to transform the way in which parents and teachers could communicate. "Compared with the other suppliers, the new communications solution worked out £8,000 cheaper than the rest. We also felt that of all the systems we looked at Swyx could be installed with the least impact on the day-to-day running of the school" adds Darren.



Headteacher and pupils

Rather than the receptionist taking messages on pieces of paper and then delivering to members of staff, the Swyx solution enables calls from parents and other third parties to be directed straight to a teacher's extension. If they are away or busy, the system gives the parent the ability to leave a message which is then sent as a sound file which goes directly to the teacher's email inbox. The teacher can then retrieve the message when they log into their laptop or alternatively can even listen to it via their mobile phone. The Swyx solution also allows all parent/teacher conversations to be recorded electronically and stored on a hard drive. In the past this was done manually which was very time-consuming. "If you have to transcribe 50-60 calls per day, then the amount of time that can be saved is quite significant." says Darren.

Because the Swyx solution is software based, staff have the choice of using a softphone, allowing them to dial directly from their screen with a headset or they can use a normal deskphone. "Staff also find the built-in instant messaging solution very useful in talking to each other, which again really improves communication generally across the school." Says Darren.

The Swyx solution also provides extensive call data records so the school can closely monitor the type of calls. "When we started to get new phone bills through, initially it looked like we weren't making too many savings, but then after discussions with HBT we pinpointed the use of premium rate services such as 118 118, so we were quickly able to address this."

Benefits – Huge savings on call costs and positive parent feedback

Since working with HBT to replace the school's old phone system and carry out an audit of all communications costs, Perry Beeches has achieved the following:

- Mobile to mobile and internal communications are now FREE
- On-going annual savings of £1500 on call charges alone
- Feedback from parents is that communication has now improved
- Lower phone system maintenance costs
- All phone upgrades now take seconds rather than days waiting for an external engineer
- Reduced costs on rationalising number of phone lines
- Full electronic audit trail of all calls, plus time saved in transcribing conversations manually

In the near future, the school is also looking forward to using the 'video' capabilities of Swyx enabling pupils to use in a classroom situation, enabling communication with other schools.

Summary

Darren Foreman concludes, "Our on-going relationship with HBT and the deployment of a new communications system has enabled us to transform the relationships between parents and staff as well as helps us to make considerable cost and efficiency savings over the short and longer-term."

Partner - HBT communications

