



Overview

Lyndon School in Solihull has been using the Impact Cashless Catering System for years, but is delighted with its recent upgrade from a card-based solution to a Biometric one - using fingerprint technology.

Objective

While the myriad of benefits arising from the installation of a high quality cashless payment system are increasingly known, understood and valued, for some, the fly in the ointment has been card loss and card management. In some schools the inconvenience of card loss and the requirement to allocate valuable resource to issuing cards, has led them to pressure suppliers for a better solution.

Solution

After some years of assessing fingerprint and iris scanning technology, Cunninghams were delighted to discover a fingerprint registration and identification solution that meets the demanding standards of a school dining room queue.

The solution, touchscreen technology, integrated with a fingerprint recognition module. This was introduced to Lyndon School in Solihull in March 2006. The system, provided by Cunninghams, has proved to be an enormous hit with the students, staff, and parents alike.

As Deputy Head, Brian Ashs explains, the introduction of this system seemed like a logical step from the swipe card system that the school had installed some years earlier. "Biometric came about as a natural extension because swipe cards, whilst being a more sensible and safe option than cash, carry with them their own issues like being broken or left at home. But there aren't many children that are going to leave their finger at home, you hope!"

Perhaps surprisingly, the system's installation has met with little or no resistance from stakeholders & staff to parents, and Ash says, it was pretty painless. "Once the Impact team had explained to some of the students that this wasn't the same sort of fingerprinting the police did and that their fingerprints weren't stored for any other reason, there were no problems at all. In fact, parts of the fingerprint are converted (using a mathematical algorithm) into digital data, which can then be used for future recognition. The image of the fingerprint itself is not stored."

"Overall this system has helped us in many ways and Impact's representatives couldn't have been more helpful reassuring the students and staff about the technology and offering fantastic technical support."

Claire Martin, manager for Solihull Catering Services, who handles the catering at Lyndon, and who was heavily involved in the biometric upgrade, is also delighted. Commenting on the system, Ms Martin, said "If we had the budget, we would convert all our schools to the biometric system. Although swipe cards have worked well, using fingerprints takes the whole process one step further. Not only does it remove the problems associated with children carrying and handling cash, such as the stigma of free meals and bullying, it also takes the swipe card out of the equation.

"It can be difficult for children to remember their cards or not lose them during the course of the week, and for every card lost, there is a replacement charge. Replacing a card also takes up valuable time and resources back of house. For this reason, the biometric system is more effective solution for children, parents, and caterers alike."

Outcome

Biometric technology has proved so successful that the school is considering rolling out the system to other areas such as registration. Brian Ash added "It is possible that towards the end of the year we will be trialling biometric scanners for other uses such as electronic registration, punctuality, attendance, and not just for the student, but for staff too."