

# **White Paper**

## **Facilitating Rigorous Fire Drill Procedures in Schools**

*Bromcom Computers Plc describes how schools can have an efficient  
system to deal with Fire Practices*

Each year, over 2,000 schools nationwide suffer fires severe enough to involve the local fire and rescue services. These costs amount to over £50m per year. Fire precautions in schools and colleges are now subject to The Fire Precautions (1997) legislation. According to this legislation, fire evacuation drills should be held at least once every school term, preferably at the start of the term, and "each fire routine must be based upon a simple efficient procedure."

### **Purpose of the Fire Drill<sup>1</sup>**

Fire drills are intended to ensure that in the event of Fire...

- (a) The people who may be in danger act in a calm and orderly manner;
- (b) Those people who have designated responsibilities carry out their tasks to ensure the safety of all concerned;
- (c) The escape routes are used in accordance with a predetermined and practised plan;
- (d) Evacuation is achieved in a speedy and orderly manner;
- (e) An attitude of mind is promoted where-by persons will react rationally when confronted with an emergency within the school.

### **Significance of the Fire Drill Practice**

Responsibility for fire safety in schools is usually shared between the governing body, the Head Teacher and the Local Education Authority. The Head Teacher and governors could face prosecution if pupils are missed from the fire drill list and remain in an unsafe building.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) states that one of the key fire safety management duties is to conduct fire drills on a regular basis. It is therefore crucial that a reliable and efficient procedure is in place.

Regular fire drills promote efficient and disciplined practice in case of emergency and minimise panic in the event of a real fire. It is recognised that the process is not simple due to the sheer number of individuals who must be assembled in an organised fashion (it is particularly challenging trying to gather 500 plus children!) It is a huge responsibility for any school, thus schools must adopt an effective method of coping with a fire drill.

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<sup>1</sup> Lincolnshire County Council, "Fire Safety in Schools" (28.04.05)

### **Guidelines for a secure fire drill procedure**

- Rapid evacuation of the classroom with staff supervision
- Staff and pupils behaving calmly and in an organised fashion
- Class lists are easily transportable and are suitable for adverse weather conditions
- Disciplined and orderly student line-up
- Simple and speedy procedure to register pupils
- Up-to-date information on pupil attendance to hand
- Quick input of current attendance marks
- Missing pupils easily identifiable
- Efficient procedure to minimise disruption to the lesson

### **The Answer to Schools' Concerns**

Imagine an electronic system where you can take class registration, record pupil grades and behaviour, and still have full functional use of a Fire Drill. More than 700 schools nationwide have already discovered the benefits of using the Bromcom system.

Every teacher in the school has a handheld electronic folder or a laptop that he/she takes to every lesson to record the attendance. Radio transmitters enable the devices to function wirelessly so data can be passed to and from the school office instantly. This reduces the chance of human error and minimises time spent on administrative tasks for teachers, thus giving them more time to spend with the pupils.

Bromcom recognises the importance of Health and Safety in schools and surprisingly, although many schools are considering electronic registration, few systems have a stable Fire Drill function. This is where Bromcom's expertise and 10-year plus experience in the sector is apparent.

### **Fire Drill Procedure**

Each teacher's register has a 'rolling register', which is updated automatically throughout the day with the most recent attendance marks. In the event of a real fire or Fire Drill, this provides them with a clear picture of the class at any point of the day, with data from the most up-to-date register available at all times. If there is a Fire Drill, the teacher simply takes his/her portable device and takes the Fire Drill at the assembly point. Gone are the days where the school office handed out paper registers for each class. Everything is at each teacher's fingertips.

Teachers can easily check the assembled pupils against the most recent attendance marks in the Fire Drill view and immediately spot any missing persons.

If there is a real fire, the server should not be depended upon and Bromcom has therefore ensured that this is not a prerequisite by storing the Fire Drill register in the local memory.

## **Flexibility for Schools**

Bromcom offers schools the choice to adopt the system to suit their needs. Firstly, schools can choose from a variety of input devices, be it small pocketsize devices or laptops.

There is also flexibility with the way the Fire Drill procedure is conducted. Some schools prefer a Tutor Group-based Fire Drill where pupils assemble according to their Tutor Group. Others prefer a lesson-based Fire Drill where, the pupils remain with the subject tutor and the class when the fire drill is sounded.

Bromcom is aware of the significance of the consequences and implications of a school fire, hence, the Bromcom Fire Drill facility has been designed to ease the load and responsibility on the office staff and to empower teaching staff. The Fire Drill is an accurate and reliable facility. Furthermore, it is easy to use as the screen is a replica of the familiar Bromcom registration screen that teachers use every lesson of every day.

## **How does it work?**

When pupils come to ABC High School in the mornings, they go straight to their Tutor Group where their Form Tutor takes the morning attendance using the Bromcom folder or laptop. The marks are instantly sent to the school office for them to deal with any absences. Pupils then go to assembly before their first lesson.

At the beginning of Period 1, the subject teacher selects the register for that particular class from his/her electronic register. When this register is downloaded, there is a column known as the 'Rolling Register' where the last known attendance mark is displayed, in this case it would be the attendance marks taken by the Form Tutor. This allows teachers to instantly spot missing pupils and to identify any absence patterns.

At the end of the lesson pupils go to Period 2 where again the teacher downloads the register in a matter of seconds, and then calls attendance. The 'Rolling Register' would display the attendance marks for Period 1.

Period 3 is History. The lesson begins with the register being taken but in the middle of the lesson the Fire Drill sounds. ABC High School's Fire Drill is a lesson-based one. In this scenario, the History teacher takes her Bromcom folder and leads the pupils to the assembly point. The Fire Drill function has already been updated to the last known marks – in this case the History lesson (Period 3) so she can check that nobody has gone 'mysteriously' missing. Once the register has been taken, the bottom of the attendance column displays a total. This total must match the total of the 'Rolling Register'. If there are any discrepancies, the teacher is alerted and the figure becomes red. As soon as the expected number of pupils has been entered the register total turns green and an OK message is displayed. Once the Fire Drill is cleared, the class can go straight back and continue their History lesson.

Bromcom's Fire Drill functionality gives schools the confidence that a reliable system is in place to ensure that an emergency situation will be dealt with smoothly.

## **Case Study: Malbank School, Cheshire**

Malbank School is a combination of 3 Cheshire schools; the oldest of these was founded in the 1500s. Since then, the school has expanded rapidly and the number of students has increased fivefold over the past 70 years. There are presently approximately 1400 pupils and 80 members of staff in the Cheshire school.

The school hold regular fire practices to comply with the legal requirements and to ensure that in case of emergency, the pupils and teachers respond in a calm and collective manner.

In 2003, Malbank decided to purchase the popular Bromcom system mainly for registration purposes. According to Tim Owen, from Malbank's I.T Department; since implementing the Bromcom system, not only has school administration become more effective and efficient but also the Fire Drill procedure is much simpler compared to the previous traditional paper system.

At Malbank, when the Fire Alarm is sounded, teachers and pupils gather at the assembly point. The staff take their Bromcom xPDAs or laptops with them. The Fire Drill list has been automatically updated throughout the day and as it stored in local memory it takes just seconds to upload.

The staff at the school found the Fire Drill application very simple to use due to the familiar interface and they easily adapted to the system. Tim pointed out that bureaucracy is reduced with the Bromcom system and, as an added bonus, it is more environmentally friendly as well.

***"Wow it automatically updates so I know what pupils should be there. It's never been so easy, forget paper!!"***

***- Tim Owen, Malbank School***