

# OUR LADY'S HIGH SCHOOL ALIGNING MIS & FINANCE SYSTEMS WITH SCHOOL STRATEGY

## OVERVIEW

Our Lady's High School is an all-girls' Catholic school with a mixed Sixth Form based in the London Borough of Hackney. The school is highly ambitious for its students and takes pride in preparing them to become compassionate and caring citizens.

We spoke to Business Manager Duncan Lambe and Assistant Headteacher Declan Tierney about their recent move to Bromcom. We wanted to get an insight into the process of changing MIS and Finance packages from the school's point of view, to understand whether they have seen any early benefits from the move and to revisit what they are hoping to realise as they progress with their new system.



“We were looking at going to Bromcom a couple of years ago, and we hesitated. In retrospect, we shouldn't have hesitated. We should have just gone with it. I think we'd be in a better position than we are now, but, as I say, we are where we are.”

**DECLAN TIERNEY**  
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER

## WHAT PROMPTED THE CHANGE?

There were two key reasons that caused the leadership team to question whether their existing SIMS system was still the right solution for the school. Firstly, the costs were edging up year upon year as they were having to rely on an increasing amount of additional or third-party systems to carry out what are arguably fundamental tasks for an MIS.

When this expense alone was added up, it amounted to a startling amount of money on top of the standard license fees.

Moreover, the school were moving towards cloud-based solutions for several other tools, for a wide range of reasons. Several years ago, began moving the school onto the



“We found we were paying for more and more additional ‘bolt-on’ software licences to achieve the things that SIMS didn't do on its own or didn't do very well. Over £10,000 per year was required for additionally functionality not included in the core MIS we were already paying for. It was time to move to a new MIS.”

**DUNCAN LAMBE**  
BUSINESS MANAGER

Google Platform and benefitting from the efficient and user-friendly way of sharing information. With the school primarily using cloud-based software, having a legacy MIS and Finance system which needed Windows PC's, servers and regular maintenance was a significant hindrance

Add to that the ongoing costs of on-site servers, technical support, increased workstation costs and so on, and it became a clear what needed to be done. Many schools that are fully cloud-based can save thousands

on IT equipment and associated maintenance costs by purchasing Chromebooks or basic tablets rather than fully blown workstations running Microsoft Windows. This just wasn't an option when the School was still tied to SIMS and FMS.

After reviewing the market and discussing options with the Local Authority, they made the decision to migrate to Bromcom Cloud-MIS and Finance.



“One of the things I want staff to get used to is what information there is about their form that they can pick up easily – behaviour, attendance, assessment – this can help them engage quickly in a meaningful way, leading into better pastoral outcomes.”

**DECLAN TIERNEY**  
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER

## MANAGING SUCCESSFUL CHANGE

Undertaking a change such as this within a large organisation can often seem daunting but the leadership team took the approach that staff should be spared from the workload as much as possible. This helped to create a positive association with the new system as staff didn't feel the pressure to retrain within a short space of time.

For example, initially the teachers were only tasked with doing the registers via the Lesson Dashboard, a page that appears as soon as they login. Once this was part of the normal routine and everyone was up to

speed, they then began using behaviour charts and logging events. Each new task or change was appropriately phased to ensure that staff were comfortable and receptive.

It's early days but this approach is working well and the feedback from the staff has been very positive. The team are planning ahead and working out what their Assessment approach will look like in their new system. Before long, teachers soon see the benefits of using Bromcom as a central source of information rather than needing to draw from several different systems.

## INTEGRATED FINANCE

The school opted to move onto Bromcom Finance for the new financial year to make a clean cut between the systems. Although it's only a handful of weeks into its use, the staff are now using it with confidence. Duncan acknowledged the challenges of switching over at a critical time of year and the pressure of needing to get everything right. However, they now have the advantage of being able to consider FMS as an archive for

historical information and the new system as the way forward.

Fortunately, the system has been designed with FMS users in mind, so there is enough familiarity in the processes to ease the transition. Despite a few initial teething problems, overall, the Finance migration has been successful for the school, and staff have taken to it well.

## NEXT STEPS

One of the next key projects is introducing the integrated Parent Portal and App. The school aim to have this up and running for September and feel it's the right time for them to make the move. Previously, they relied on simple text messages from a third-party app to communicate with parents. The concern was that many parents didn't have smartphones and there was a digital divide.

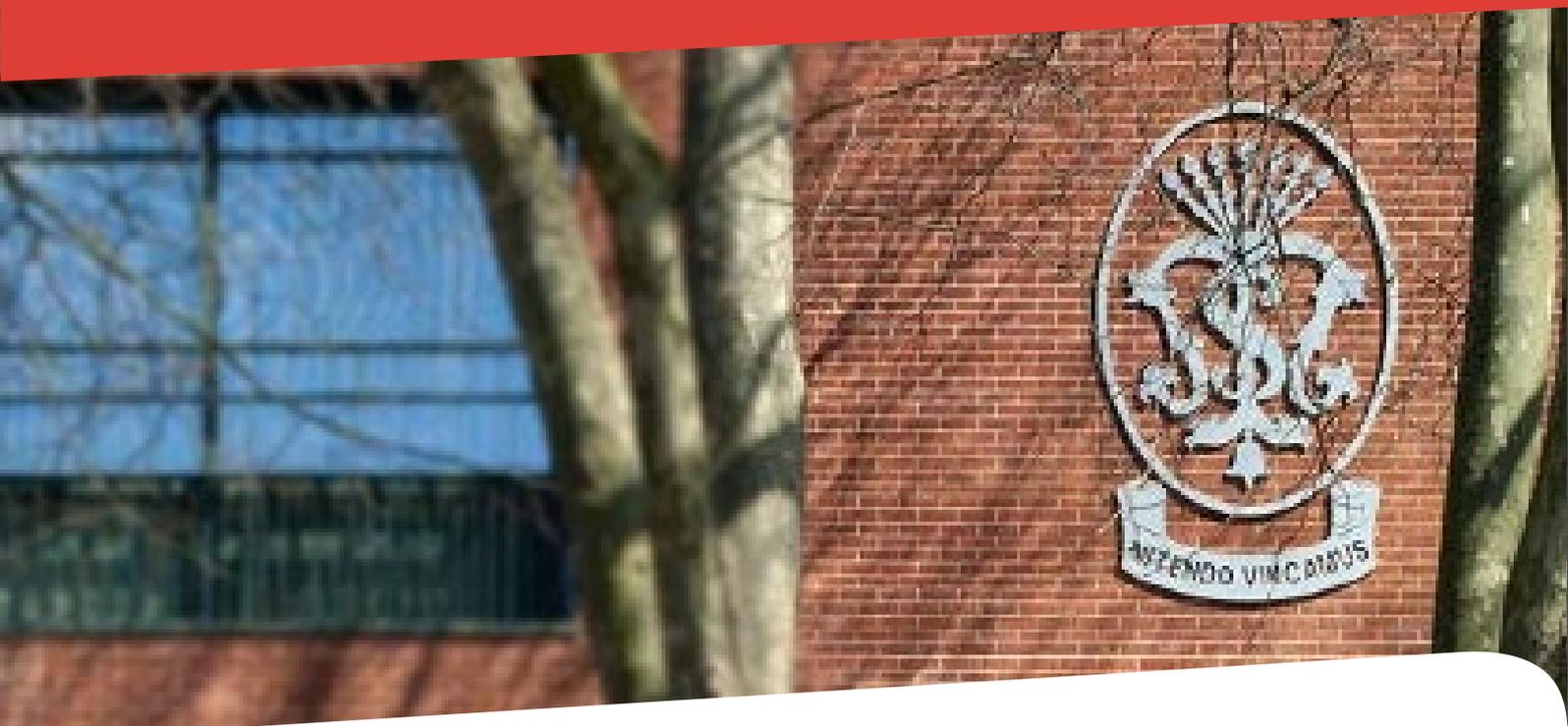
However, over time the number of parents without access to such technology has reduced so the school are looking forward to the opportunity to communicate with parents on a more regular basis with a wider range of information.

Thanks to the flexibility of Bromcom reporting, the school will be able to flag those who lack access to smartphone technology and ensure they receive reports and communications in a suitable format. For example, printable reports can be shared to their personalised portal, or simple text messages can be sent instead of emails.

There will be countless opportunities for using the Parent portal once it's rolled out. Parents can fill out admission forms, update pupil data, look at attendance, behaviour and assessment information or book clubs and purchase items from the school shop.

"I am really pleased with how positively the move to Bromcom has gone overall and how staff have managed to get on board with it, generally be very positive about the change, and start using it."

**DUNCAN LAMBE**  
BUSINESS MANAGER



## TAKING THE LEAP

Many schools find themselves in the position of considering a change in MIS, much like the team at Our Lady's High School. Declan joked about how he wished they had made the switch before the pandemic, as it would have helped them a lot over the past year.

When change is successful and the benefits begin to be realised, it's understandable to regret not doing things sooner. The absence of a key member of staff on maternity leave and a major IT infrastructure project were the reasons for the postponement. Many schools will relate to feeling that it's not the right time for them to make a big change. However, if the business case is there, sometimes it's necessary to work through these issues in order to get to a better position.

*FOOTNOTE - Thank you to Duncan Lambe, Declan Tierney and the Our Lady's High School team for providing their valuable time to being part of this discussion. If you would like to know more about how we can help your school or MAT, please get in touch.*

Whilst the school are still in the early days of adopting their new systems, the overall perception is positive, and some savings have already been realised through ending contracts for additional software. Over time, they can build on this position and begin using the software more extensively. As they have demonstrated, major change needn't happen immediately, it can be successfully phased in to maximise staff engagement and to minimise disruption. Thanks to this approach, Duncan noted that it had been a relatively easy process as they had realistic expectations from the beginning.



"I think people have just got to be brave, take the plunge and work through some of the pain that will inevitably be there in such a huge organisational shift. Just go in with your eyes open."

**DECLAN TIERNEY**  
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER

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