How Felpham College took its school trip management process from a resource-intensive paperwork calamity, to a seamless digital experience, giving staff their time back, enhancing parent engagement, student participation, data security and the school's ability to efficiently meet its duty-of-care obligations 24/7.

Felpham Community College

A mixed comprehensive secondary school on England's south coast in West Sussex, Felpham Community College first opened its doors in 1974. Run by the local authority, Felpham is a high-achieving school, which operates with an international ethos, while encouraging its students to pursue healthy lifestyle choices, community mindedness and financial literacy. These goals are evidenced by the school being identified as an Ofsted Good Provider as well as through numerous awards, including the International Schools Award, Healthy Schools Award, Personal Finance Centre of Excellence, and Gold Award as a UNICEF Rights Respecting School.

Despite these accomplishments, School Business Manager, Phil Rayner, identified the college's management of educational visits, trips and extracurricular activities as an area of significant operational inefficiency and source of frustration for staff and parents alike. Read on to uncover Fepham's automation journey, as Rayner discusses the challenges, solutions and results achieved.

Summary of Results

5000 → 0
From grappling with over 5,000 paper consent forms each year to zero.

100 TRIPS AUTOMATED
Felpham College digitally manages 100+ trips per year with Operoo.

1 SOURCE OF TRUTH
For all student medical data and emergency contact information.

NO MORE CHASING PARENTS
Automated reminders mean parental requests are return on-time; without any manual follow-up.

100% GDPR COMPLIANT
Operoo helps Felpham College meet GDPR compliance with ease.

24/7 MOBILE ACCESS
Anytime access to student medical information from any device -- even when offline.

100% PARENT ADOPTION
Parents love the speed and convenience of Operoo.

ACCIDENT IN AUSTRIA
When a bus accident and a break-down delayed arrival home, Operoo saved the day.

The Challenge
The definition of insanity...

Before his life as a School Business Manager, Phil Rayner knew that the way most schools collect parental consent and student medical data didn't make sense.

" As a parent, even before I became a School Business Manager, I found it immensely frustrating completing the same paper consent forms, containing the same information, for every school activity or trip "

said Rayner. "The experience was needlessly painful and redundant. Why couldn't the school simply keep a central record of that information and simply seek parent permission to reuse it again as needed? This always puzzled me. I distinctly remember thinking to myself; 'there must be a better way of doing this!'."

When Rayner began his role as Felpham College's School Business Manager in 2011, he saw the extent of this recurring people and paper-reliant problem from an administrative perspective.

" With over 100 trips to manage per annum, and more than 5,000 paper consent forms to administer, I understood the resource costs of these manual ways of working for the first time "

said Rayner. "Carrying huge bundles of paper forms was also cumbersome for staff to manage during excursions, made it slow to find critical information and communicate effectively in an emergency situation, and presented a significant risk from a data security perspective. It became one of my priorities to find an efficient and effective solution to automate this continuous drain on staff time and the school budget."

Rayner and his colleagues spent several fruitless years searching for the right solution -- including scanning paper forms and saving them on Microsoft Sharepoint as well as trialing packages like Cognito Forms and Microsoft Forms. But, ultimately, the options they found were either too simplistic or required too much technical support.

"We explored in-house solutions, including building our own forms application, and bought-in software packages," said Rayner. "But, nothing sufficiently ticked that all-important box -- the ability to easily collect data once and use it again many times over. That is, until we discovered Operoo."

The Solution
A Cunning solution: "It is the only one that ticked all the boxes"

Rayner and his team first discovered Operoo, then known as CareMonkey, via cashless catering system Cunninghams. However, having been let-down on many occasions in the past, Rayner said that he was initially skeptical when assessing Operoo's suitability for managing Felpham's school trip, student medical data and parental consent processes.

"Operoo's sales literature said all the right things," said Rayner. "But, we had heard it all before, only to be disappointed as soon as the sales pitch started. However, on this occasion, we quickly realised that Operoo was exactly what we were looking for. It was as if someone had read my mind and created a software package that met my exact requirements.

" We signed on the dotted line and I can say, with genuine sincerity, that we haven't been disappointed in any aspect of the system. "

From a functional perspective, Rayner said that Operoo delivered a combination of intuitive features that were able to uniquely meet Felpham's needs. First and foremost was the ability to digitally collect data and iteratively update it throughout the year, on a case-by-case basis as needed, thereby saving significant administrative effort for staff and parents alike.

> *"Operoo completely eliminates both the use of paper and the need to make repetitive requests for information when planning, managing and running school trips"*

said Rayner. "We simply collect and collate student medical and emergency contact information once; at the beginning of each school year. We then easily access and verify all student medical and emergency contact information as required. The flexibility of Operoo's eForm Builder also allows us to create customised digital forms with fields that capture the same information and responses as their paper predecessors.

"For each new school trip, parents just check a button to confirm that all information is still up-to-date or simply edit specific data points as needed, rather than resubmitting everything, as circumstances change."

Rayner explained that, aside from the efficiency gains experienced by the school and parents regarding data collection and verification, digitising and automating the management of school trips also dramatically improved data accessibility and reliability.

"Before Operoo, everything was recorded on paper," said Rayner. "This had several undesired consequences: Not only did we have no ability to re-use information gathered, and so asked for the same information every time we held a school trip or activity, we were also unable to store it securely in one accessible place. Now, all authorised parents and staff can access the same universal source of truth, from one digital platform, anywhere, anytime, from any device -- even when offline.

"As you can imagine, having the right information at our fingertips is enormously important in emergency situations. Not only does this give our supervising staff added confidence whilst conducting school trips, our in-school first-aid contact knows that, with Operoo, she's always got access to the latest trustworthy student medical data whenever injury or illness strikes. And, because we've integrated Operoo with our Management Information System, SIMS, we know we've got access to the latest medical data possible for all our students."

Rayner cited other feature-based benefits of using Operoo to automate the management of school trips, including improved data security, analysis and segmentation.

"Critically, the increased data accessibility offered by Operoo is also governed by strong data security and GDPR compliance mechanisms," said Rayner. "User login, validation and tracking through the Operoo system gives the school surety -- and parents peace-of-mind -- when it comes to safeguarding personal information. That, of course, is something you simply can't guarantee when using paper or unsecured digital alternatives, such Google forms.

"Using uniform methods for capturing data, and storing it all digitally in one place, also enables us to analyse and act on that information in smarter ways. For example, live filters and dashboards allow us to assess data in real-time. So, if we have a trip to the theatre, I can see at-a-glance who has and who hasn't submitted consent forms, associated payments, or validated student medical information. Not only are unresponsive parents sent automatic reminders through Operoo, we're also able to quickly select that sub-section and distribute targeted communications on an ad-hoc basis too."

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The Results
Avoiding anarchy in Austria

Overall, Felpham College has taken an entirely paper-based and manually-driven approach to managing school trips and extracurricular activities, transforming it into a completely digital experience for staff, parents and students.

> " *Through Operoo, we automate approximately 100 trips per year* "

said Rayner. "Everything is streamlined: From the internal planning and approval process, the verification of medical details and collection of consents before a trip, digitally managing incidents and communications during the trip, to saving eForm templates for re-use and protecting people's privacy by archiving sensitive information once a trip is completed.

> " *Parents are happy because they're never asked to waste time filling-out the same paper forms again and again.* "

"They're also able to receive the latest updates about trips, such as late arrival or departure times, via the Operoo mobile app on any device and in any language.

> " *Staff are happy too because the repetitive and mundane tasks involved in organising school trips have been eliminated.* "

"Manually preparing, distributing, chasing and collating paper consents, payments and medical information is a thing of the past. And, requests for information and permission are returned substantially faster. Operoo is totally embedded in how we manage all our school trips.

"On top of that, supervising staff know they've got secure access to all the information they need in the palm of their hand, including the ability to easily communicate with relevant parents and school-based personnel through the Operoo mobile app -- via group email, SMS or push notifications."

It's this flexible -- and paperless -- information access and distribution, particularly during school excursions, which came to the fore amidst an international ski trip to Austria in 2019.

"We had a ski trip to Austria, which involved a 24-hour coach ride home," said Rayner. "On the penultimate day, there was a minor accident. A lorry driver backed into our coach in the carpark. The damage was bad enough to require a replacement bus, creating a significant delay, which altered our scheduled arrival time back at school.

"As the staff member on-call for that particular trip, I was able to sit at my kitchen table and use Operoo to communicate with parents, inform them of the delay, and keep them up-to-date. I could easily access all of the same information about the cohort attending the trip that was available to the staff directly supervising it."

But, that wasn't the end of the saga.

"Then, just as we'd finished updating all the parents, we had another unexpected delay: The replacement coach broke down," said Rayner. "But, with Operoo, I was able to communicate the latest set-back, while keeping the parents and the school informed about the group's progress.

"Being able to send group SMS and email messages to all the impacted families, at the click of a button, was invaluable. Afterwards, when everyone safely arrived back at school, we received a lot of positive comments from parents about how the situation had been handled -- which was all down to Operoo."

To put this experience in perspective, Rayner said that he had previously encountered a similar situation during another of Felpham's international trips. The difference? The school hadn't yet implemented Operoo.

"It was a slow, stressful experience," recalled Rayner. "I remember sitting there, working my way down a paper list of contacts, manually entering parents' details into my phone, sending one text message, and repeating the process dozens of times.

"Having endured a similar situation before, I can truly say that Operoo is worth its weight in gold."

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