

Visa Case Study:

Bringing benefits to fee-paying schools

The Visa payment system brings some definite advantages to independent or fee-paying schools – offering added choice and convenience to parents, and providing schools with the benefits of automated payments.

Either on the internet, over the telephone, through the post or in person, Visa payments can be set up quickly and easily. Our system can be used to process both one-off and regular payments. And it is appropriate for both low and high value transactions.

For the payment of schools fees, uniform and equipment purchases, school trips, extra-curricular activities and other such incidentals, Visa acts as a flexible, secure and convenient payment alternative.

- **Benefits to parents**

For most schools, the big advantage will be the convenience, added choice and flexibility offered to parents. Some parents, for example, may wish to use their credit and debit cards to help budget for school fees and related incidentals – in which case the choice of paying by a Visa card would be an attractive option.

- **Benefits to schools**

As well as offering additional choice to parents, schools can benefit from a range of tangible business and cashflow benefits. Transactions are automated (which avoids the expense and hassle of reconciling and banking cheques). Funds are deposited into the school's bank account typically within just three-to-four working days.

Payments can be taken over the telephone, through the post or face-to-face. A fully secure card payment facility can also be integrated into a school's website to enable online transactions. If required, schools can also use the payment card system to set up a series of regular payments (a little like a direct debit mandate).

Those schools that don't yet accept card payments may assume that there is little demand from parents. Those that have chosen to accept cards and publicise the option to parents have discovered that a substantial proportion are keen to take advantage.



“It’s all down to the way that parents want to pay. If their preference is to pay by card, we want to give them that choice.”

Dominic St John Parker, Bursar, Hatherop Castle School

Hatherop Castle School accepts Visa

One school that has chosen to accept card payments is Hatherop Castle School in Gloucestershire. Providing nursery and preparatory education to more than 200 children, Hatherop Castle is a co-educational boarding and day school. It is a good example of a relatively small yet thriving independent school which delivers high quality education and pastoral care to prepare children for their senior schooling and beyond.

As bursar, Dominic St John Parker, manages all of the financial and accounting aspects of the school, including payments from parents. Given the size of the school, he is in sole charge of all the related activities, and his aim is to process all payments simply, as efficiently and as cost-effectively as possible.

Giving parents the choice

Parents are expected to pay fees in advance of each term. They also receive a monthly invoice to cover all incidental expenses, such as uniform purchases, school trips, activities and so on.

They are actively discouraged from paying by cash and, instead, they have the option of cheques, bank transfers and payment cards. With no strong preference over which of these is actually used, parents are not steered towards one particular method. Instead, Dominic St John Parker’s emphasis is to give parents the choice of paying in the way that is easiest and most convenient for them.

“We are glad to accept Visa. It’s worth accepting Visa – simply because that’s how some of our parents prefer to pay.”

Dominic St John Parker, Bursar, Hatherop Castle School



Helping parents to budget

In particular, it is recognised that some parents may wish to make card payments in order to manage their cashflow and smooth their payments over a period of time.

In terms of the way cards are accepted, the school operates a fairly basic, low cost system. A card acceptance terminal is kept in the bursar’s offices. For any face-to-face payments, the card is inserted into the terminal in the normal way. For payments over the telephone the card details are simply keyed into the terminal.

At some stage in the future the school may consider incorporating an online Visa payment card facility into the “parents’ area” of its website – and Dominic St John Parker suggests that, for a larger school, this would probably be an obvious enhancement.

Overall, the big benefit to Hatherop Castle School of accepting cards is to provide added convenience and flexibility to parents – some of whom routinely choose to use cards to manage their spending.

To sign up to accept Visa, you’ll need to contact a bank or organisation that offers card acceptance services – known as an acquiring bank.