

The Ultimate Guide to Cashless Payments

Walking you through the cashless journey with our end-to-end guide for adopting and implementing cashless payments in your school



Introduction and contents

Adopting or changing a cashless payments solution can seem more trouble than it's worth. Trying to jump through all the hoops, wade through the sea of red tape, and consider enough to ensure that your school and its parents are receiving the best possible system sounds like a mountain to climb.

But if you're not happy with your current payments provider, or are yet to kickstart your cashless journey, making the change to a top-of-the-range cashless solution will be worth it.

That's why we've put together this step-by-step guide to walk you through the process of adopting or switching your cashless solution. In here, you'll find everything from why schools are choosing to fully embrace a cashless environment all the way down to how you can get the most out of your new software, with everything in between.



03

Why are schools going cashless?



05

What to consider before making the change



07

How to choose the right payments solution

09

Tips for switching to your new cashless solution



11

How to get your parents on board



Why are schools going cashless?

Whether collecting money for school dinners, trips, clubs, or school uniforms, more and more UK schools are choosing to use cashless payment providers, such as [ParentPay](#), to handle their transactions.

In our [latest whitepaper](#), for example, we found that:

- As few as 1.6% of schools still *only* accept cash payments.
- Over 50% of schools say that the admin burden of carrying cash is their biggest concern about collecting physical income.

Schools who have fully harnessed their cashless capabilities have increased their productivity, boosted their fundraising efforts, and cultivated a safer school environment.

Admin staff who work with a cashless payment system will no longer have to manually track and count up cash, and are able to monitor cash flow more closely.

This frees up valuable staff time, which can now be spent on more important tasks which improve the running of the school.

In the case of Avocet Multi Academy Trust, Trust Finance Officer Zoe Stewart spoke to us about how converting to a cashless system has also increased security:

“Holding physical cash on site had always been an issue, so when we converted to a purely online system, this risk was almost entirely removed. We have also seen a 55% increase in online income due to the ease of a cloud-based system giving parents peace of mind that their money is being spent in the right places.”

Whether you're looking to make the leap to become a cashless school or wanting to know how you could be making the most of your cashless capabilities, **there are many benefits for schools who fully utilise a cashless system...**



1

Easier to check payment details

With powerful software, you're able to view the full payment history per item, easily record a manual transaction, or refund and view settled and unsettled transactions.

2

Pupil safety

Not only do parents get peace of mind that their money has reached the office, but pupils are safer as a result - there's no risk of misplaced money or potential bullying.

3

Reduced paper handling

Automated receipts and consent forms make slips of paper a thing of the past. Parents can view receipts, see their payment history, and provide online consent.

4

Reduced debt

Parents have more opportunities to pay online or through other means such as PayPoint. Schools can efficiently manage debt by monitoring payments.

5

Saves you time and money

An average primary school can save 25 hours a month by no longer having to chase parent debt, manually record transactions, count out cash payments, or take trips to the bank.

6

Security

There's no risk of any monies going missing or not reaching the school office. Schools no longer need to store cash on site and there's no risk of misplaced payments or fraud.

7

It's convenient for parents

Parents can make a payment anytime from home, removing the need to remember exact amounts of cash or having to rush into the school office first thing in the morning.

8

It's inclusive

Parents can pay online and on their phones if they have access to a computer and/or smartphone. Parents without online access can pay with cash via PayPoint in their local store.

9

Increased free school meal uptake

Online and PayPoint payments remove the need for pupils to reveal their entitlement for free school meals (FSM), meaning parents are more likely to opt for FSM and pupil premium.

What to consider before making the change

With all the benefits that a cashless system can bring, your school may already be considering the transition away from being fully cash-based. But choosing the right cashless payment solution for your school isn't an easy decision.

Before you start to consider the perfect solution, there are a few things you may want to think about to enable your school to enjoy a smooth transition.

With some simple planning, you can prevent future headaches, allowing staff to focus on driving school improvement.

Understand everyone's needs

The choice to go cashless may impact more groups of stakeholders than you initially realise.

Parents, pupils, suppliers, and school staff will all see major changes when a cashless system is implemented. Luckily, these changes will be for the better, and all stakeholders should see an improvement in their school experience.

Nevertheless, even positive change doesn't necessarily come without hesitation. That's why it's important to engage everyone who'll be affected and understand what they want and need out of a cashless payments system. This will give you a good idea of what you'll need to find for the perfect solution for your school.

Internal surveys and [parental engagement questionnaires](#) are a great way to gauge thoughts and opinions from all stakeholders.

Fully utilise cashless payments

You won't *just* want to collect income for any one item. Have you considered how you could get the most efficiency out of a cashless solution?

Streamline as many payments as possible and you'll find that getting buy-in from all your stakeholders will be much smoother. You could collect payments for:

- School meals
- Trips
- Uniform
- Stationary
- Clubs
- Tickets for events

But it doesn't end there. Simon Kneeshaw, Head of School Support at ParentPay Group, father of two teenagers, and husband to a school bursar, [has a well-rounded view of the challenges facing schools](#):

"Queues of parents at the school office simply isn't an option anymore. Encouraging use of payment and parent communication systems not only minimises cash handling, but also reduces unnecessary administrative contact with pupils and staff and centralises financial reporting."

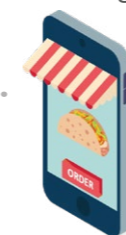
Simon recommends a few top tips to help you to get started...



Agree on a cashless strategy

Agree on a cashless strategy with your Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and communicate this to all stakeholders.

For instance, you could say: *In September, ALL new parents will be required to pay for all items online. Existing parents are encouraged to pay online or through PayPoint.*



Have a plan to deliver your strategy

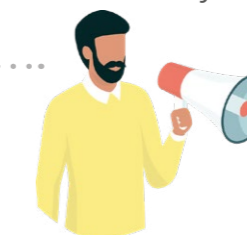
Central to your plan should be communication with parents and staff - start communication early with parents.

System training with staff should be included so that staff are competent in using the system before you go live.

Raise awareness and interest

Consult with pupils and parents so they know what to expect.

Use parent evenings, videos, emails, and newsletters to let everyone know when and how they can make cashless payments. Your cashless provider should be able to provide you with all the materials your school needs.



Spark action

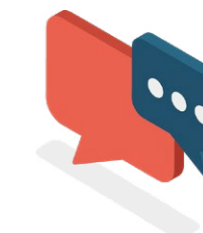
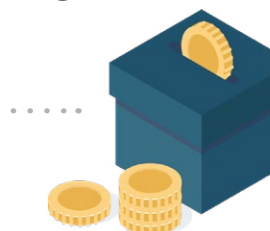
Consider utilising extracurricular events to encourage parents to pay online.

For example, 'Christmas meals need to be ordered and paid for online' or 'cash payments cannot be accepted for trips in school'.

Be inclusive for cash-based payers

Not everyone has a bank card or account.

Ensure your solution offers a socially inclusive payment option such as PayPoint, which allows parents to pay the school with cash in over 28,000 local shops across the UK, avoiding parents having to come into school with cash.



Remember alerts and reminders

Sharing balance or new payment item updates via SMS and email alerts with parents will help increase uptake and reduce parent debt.

How to choose the right cashless payments solution

Pick a payment solution that's tailor-made for you

Your school is unique. You won't want the same solution as every other school; you have your own goals and needs which will require a tailored solution to effectively meet them.

Successful outcomes are usually a result of thought-out planning, with schools and local authorities working with experienced suppliers who will ask the right questions to create the right solution.

Anne Bull, former LACA (Lead Association for Catering in Education) National Chair [gives schools some advice before they begin searching for a cashless solution:](#)

"Our cashless partners recognise that schools have different needs and they are able to offer the right solution to create a fully cashless school. Meeting parental expectations as well as saving school resources is also important."

Futureproof your school

Keep an open mind when searching for your ideal cashless solution; you don't want to limit yourself with a system that can't be flexible to your school's changing wants and needs.

It will help your search to have a clear definition of your possible future needs. But implementing a solution that can facilitate a variety of payment items and have the flexibility to grow along with your school may be key to future success.

Get to know your stakeholders

A cashless payment solution isn't just for schools, it's for parents and caterers too, and you'll need all your stakeholders on board for the transition to be a success.

While there's a lot that can be done to get your stakeholders on board once your system is in place, it's much more effective to involve everyone in the search for the right provider, so they are engaged from day one.

Clint Wilson, Corporate Development Director at [ParentPay](#), stresses the importance of school staff understanding all of their key stakeholders' and customers' needs, before selecting a cashless solution:

"Initially it's about joining up what parents, schools and caterers want. Most importantly, there are some questions that need to be asked both of yourselves and of potential suppliers, to ensure that any investment you make allows your school to realise the full benefits going cashless can have."

To help you find the best cashless solution for your school, here's some things you may want to consider...



Business case

Do you need reasons or an argument to convince School Leadership Teams and/or School Governors to introduce a cashless online system?

Goals

Have you set goals/targets in relation to becoming an online cashless school? Are these realistic and achievable?

Costs

Do you the annual license costs and what you will need to pay for additional features?

Payment options

Does the solution offer socially inclusive payment options?

Automation

Will the solution you are considering enable you to regularly update your pupil and staff data automatically from your school MIS?

Solution options

Does the solution provide and record UiFSM, FSM, and advanced meal bookings?

Reporting

Does the solution meet your existing requirements for income reconciliation reporting?

Value to existing services

Will the solution add value to the existing services being provided to students/parents by the school?

Training

Are there training costs for your staff to learn how to use the proposed online cashless solution?

Resources and ongoing support

Is there a dedicated support team to help you implement your cashless solution within the timescales required? Will there be any charges associated with this support?

Hidden and additional fees

Are there additional (hidden) fees after the first year of your contract; does your annual license cost increase?

Service Level Agreement

Does the supplier have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that they can prove they can meet?

Tips for switching to your new cashless solution

If you've come to the decision to switch to or implement a new cashless payments software, it can feel like there's a lot to do and consider to ensure a smooth transition. But if it feels overwhelming or confusing, we're here to shine a light on all of the things that you could consider to make this change as easy as possible for your school...

1.

If you're switching supplier, check the terms of your current contract and consider any notice periods which might apply.

Make sure that you have saved any reports you need from the current payment system before it is decommissioned.

2.

3.

Update any references to the old payment system on the school website and other resources (e.g. parent's handbook). Add a link to your new software's login page to your school's website.

4.

You should contact parents to advise them of the planned change to the payment system, and use any materials given by your new provider to inform parents about your new service.

5.

If you have been collecting income via PayPoint with your current payment system, you should ensure that users return/dispose of any existing barcoded letters/cards, as these will not be recognised once the old payment system is switched off.

6.

If you're using your current payment system to settle dinner money direct to the caterer's bank account, you should contact the caterer to make them aware of the change.

7.

If you're using a cashless catering system linked to your current payment service, you should contact the provider of the till system to advise of the switch to your new software. There may be charges made by the till provider associated with the change.

8.

If you're running trips which are midway through the payment plan, make sure to set up the trip in your new software, as required, and record the money received to-date as account adjustments against each pupil. Parents can then pay the outstanding balances for the trip using your new system.

9.

Make sure you note down any starting balances and outstanding debts that need to be reflected in your new software. Check that a report can be run showing the closing balances from your current system.

10.



If you want to link your new service to a print management system, such as Papercut or Pcounter, then you should contact the provider of the print management system to confirm what is required, and any charges associated with this.

If you're using a Private Funds system such as Pebble Fund Manager, or Istek's Private Funds Manager, then you may be able to integrate these with your new software. Check this and contact the provider of the system to confirm what is required to enable the link, and any associated charges for this.

11.

How to get your parents on board

So, you've been able to successfully implement your new cashless software, but the journey doesn't end there.

Some parents take time and encouragement to become fully invested in a new process. Whatever the reason, widespread parent activation is the final piece of the puzzle.

We know that generating parent uptake can be one of the hardest parts of the cashless process. In our [recent whitepaper](#), we found that 27% of surveyed schools see parent uptake and usage to be the biggest barrier to successfully adopting EdTech solutions.

To try and overcome this, [being able to communicate the benefits of your new software is essential](#), and to deliver this message in places where your parents will be.

Utilise parents' evenings

Having parents engaged in 1-1 conversations is a golden opportunity to mention how their involvement with your new software can enrich their and their children's school experience.

Optimise your social media

Post regular, relevant updates and shout about the benefits of your software using simple language and engaging visuals.

Include a feature in your school newsletter

Most parents want to be actively involved in their children's education, and will welcome a [carefully curated newsletter that benefits their parental involvement](#). Optimise your newsletter with a good, digitally-focussed template that will engage your readers and they'll thank you for it.

Use a strong demonstration video

Ask your software provider for a snappy video which shows off all of its benefits. Set this running on a screen in reception, at events, or host it on your website.

Consider incentives

Try running competitions that utilise your software's functionality or enter everyone who signs up for your new system into a prize draw.

Speaking to Maria Smith, School Bursar at Barton St Lawrence CofE Primary School, we find out how important achieving 100% parent activation with their cashless provider, ParentPay, has been:

"The key is communicating with parents. We sent out school newsletters outlining what we were planning and the benefits. From here, everything went online. Parents know that if they don't activate their accounts they won't be able to pay for what they need to, and they're happy with this as they don't want their child missing out."

To help you achieve the best parent activation you can, here are our top 10 tips...



1 Put up posters around the school to raise awareness. Put them up at places where parents will be, such as payment queues and waiting areas, for maximum exposure.

2 Make announcements in the school newsletter, on the school website, or on the school's social media platforms.

3 Make an announcement at parents' evenings or new intake meetings outlining the reasons why the school is making these changes, and how they can benefit parents and students.

4 Promote your new software at school plays, concerts, or any school event, encouraging parents to activate their accounts before they leave.

5 Any time a parent comes to the office to pay for an item, offer help to get them set up with online payments, or provide them with an instruction sheet explaining how they can do it at home.

6 Help parents of disadvantaged families learn how easy your new solution is to use by providing them with access to a computer or tablet.

7 Run a PowerPoint presentation promoting the key features of the system in the school reception area.

8 Have a computer set up in reception and at school events demonstrating your new system and how easy it is to use.

9 Consider incentivising your parents. You might run a competition where everyone who activates their account or makes a payment online or through another means, such as PayPoint, is put into a prize draw.

10 Allow certain events or trips to be booked in advance using online methods or other means, such as PayPoint. This allows parents using your new cashless payments software to secure tickets or book places before they reach capacity.

To find out more, or to book a consultation
with our cashless payments specialists, visit
parentpay.com/request-more-information

