



## CASE STUDY SUMMARY

### **Customer:**

Newlands School is a Wellington primary school with a roll of 370 pupils.

### **Issue:**

Needing an efficient way to contact parents during uncertain times.

### **Solution:**

A system that integrates with their student management system (Edge) and can send mass text alerts anywhere, anytime.

### **Outcome:**

School staff can easily dispel rumors and communicate the facts to its community quickly and effectively.

## STOMPING ON THE RUMORS

SCHOOL-LINKS HELPS NEWLANDS SCHOOL COMMUNICATE THE FACTS TO FAMILIES DURING WELLINGTON'S 'WILD WEEK'

### **CUSTOMER**

Newlands School is a primary school in Newlands, Wellington with a roll of 370 pupils. They are proud of their multicultural community and their mission is to inspire lifelong, creative learners.

### **NEED: A WAY TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH PARENTS DURING UNEXPECTED EVENTS**

Several years ago, a storm hit Wellington and caused Newlands School to lose power. The following morning, staff rallied together to attempt the mammoth task of informing each family that the school would be closed that day. Staff called parents off paper lists, texted from an old cell phone and stood at the school entrances to inform parents of the situation.

"Everyone tried to ring in," says Office Administrator, Megan Chisholm. "We would have had 50 messages on the phone, because we've only got two lines into the school."

Everyone agreed that the system was inefficient, ineffective and a huge pain for school staff and families. Newlands School needed a reliable, easy way to communicate quickly with families when something out-of-the-ordinary happened.

The search began for a system that enabled the school to communicate more effectively to parents. Newlands School first trialed a local emergency contact system, however it was very time consuming to update contact details because it wasn't integrated with the school's Student Management System (SMS), Edge. "I was in effect managing two databases of student information, with higher risk for error in trying to keep details up to date in both systems," says Megan.

Shortly afterwards, they found School-links.

"The School-links system works really well," says Megan. "It integrates with our student management system – that's one of the main reasons we went with School-links. It's so easy to do an update and the systems 'talk' to each other." Newlands School uses the texting system to communicate with parents about absences as well as unusual events. "It is really invaluable," says Megan. "You want to have one list and one set of information for everything, and this is what School-links' integration with Edge does."



*“We used School-links to communicate the facts and stomp on the rumors. Parents knew exactly what we were doing.”*

**Megan Chisholm**  
Office Administrator

### **SOLUTION: MORE EFFICIENT COMMUNICATIONS**

Around midnight on 14 November 2016, some New Zealand residents were jolted awake by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake centered near Hanmer Springs. The Wellington CBD suffered damage and many buildings in the city were shut the following day. Confusion ensued as mixed messages on what organisations were open for business poured across social media and news channels.

“There was so much uncertainty in the community,” says Megan. “There were mixed messages coming from local authorities, other organisations, the media and the grapevine, so some people thought that all schools were closed that day.”

Luckily, Newlands School now had the School-links system in place to contact parents quickly and effectively with the facts.

Single story buildings only had to have a visual check, whereas two story buildings had to have an engineer assess them before people were permitted to enter. Since Newlands School is only single story, they opened after the Principal had completed a full visual check of the site.

Megan sent out a mass text via School-links from her home while the Principal checked the buildings. After the Principal gave the all clear, Megan sent another text out at 7.45am informing families that the school would be open. “We felt confident with the School-links system,” says Megan.

That week, Wellington was hit with another disruption. Torrential rain and flooding affected many parts of the city, and again, there was confusion around what schools and businesses would be staying open. “We ended up sending another text that Tuesday because we had a couple of parents calling to ask ‘Are you open? I’m picking up my other child from their school because the school told me to come and pick them up,’” says Megan. The school used School-links again to send out a message to parents reassuring them that the school was remaining open but they were welcome to pick up their children early if they wanted.



Another message also needed to be sent to inform parents of the decision to cancel the school's Rocky Shore Beach trip at the end of the week. "Although the weather was looking fine, we just decided that it was probably inappropriate during this uncertainty to take the kids on buses over to a tsunami evacuation zone," says Megan. "We used School-links again to tell parents that it was cancelled."

The resources that School-links regularly send out is taken to heart by the staff at Newlands School. "School-links give really helpful tips," says Megan. "They've lived through emergencies and earthquakes and they pass on this invaluable knowledge that people like us in different parts of the country don't know. I listen very carefully to what they have learnt." Megan was able to put her new knowledge into action by following School-links' guidance on how to effectively communicate with parents during unexpected events. "We took School-links' advice to communicate in as many forums as you possibly can," says Megan. During the earthquakes and flooding Megan posted a message on the website and sent emails in addition to sending the texts through School-links.

#### **OUTCOME: A SMOOTH, EASY WAY OF INFORMING PARENTS**

For such a chaotic week, the school was commended on its ability to communicate effectively with families throughout. "It just went so smoothly because wherever we were we knew we could get a message out quickly," says Megan. "We used School-links to communicate the facts and stomp on the rumors. Parents knew exactly what we were doing. Whereas I know with some other schools there was a lot of confusion about what was going on."

All families at the school received and understood that the school was open throughout the week and could make decisions based on this information.

"We knew that our School-links system was as up to date as it possibly could be, because any information that we change in Edge, it gets updated in School-links too," says Megan. "We were pretty confident that we had, to the best of our knowledge, the up to date details."

An eventful week was significantly less stressful than it could be thanks to effective, accurate communication between the school and parents. "We're confident in the School-links system," says Megan. "We have peace of mind knowing that we can contact all our caregivers within a couple of minutes, anywhere, anytime."

#### **ABOUT SCHOOL-LINKS**

School-links is a New Zealand-owned software product that provides affordable communication tools for education providers, from early childhood centres through to tertiary institutions. We are recognised by the Ministry of Education as an official provider for early notification services, and integrate with the mainstream student management systems. We offer extensive training and local helpdesk support.