



How Allerton High School digitally transformed the way it manages pre-admissions, streamlining the entire process, automatically inducting new students once admitted, and instantly syncing data back into its Management Information System, SIMS.

Allerton High School

Digitizing and automating pre-admissions forms, tasks and processes

Traditional, resource-intensive pre-admissions take hours to complete, thousands of recurring administrative tasks, and sheet after sheet of paper — which all costs money. Estimates indicate that the average UK school spends over £7,200 each year on the administrative costs associated with processing just the paper-based elements of pre-admissions applications. And, that's just the tip of a very expensive iceberg. Then, there's the time and expense of chasing parents for information, communicating with pre-admitted families, manual data entry, induction for new and returning students, and more.

When COVID-19 hit the UK schooling system, manual methods of conducting student pre-admissions became too difficult and dangerous for schools and parents alike. Hear how Leeds' Allerton High School overhauled its cumbersome new year processes, saving time, money and completing a typically people and paper-based exercise 100 percent digitally.

Summary of Results

<p>HOURS → 5 MINS</p> <p>Data filters and automated Trigger Actions turn hours of follow-up into five minutes work.</p>	<p>REAL-TIME DATA ANALYSIS</p> <p>Can assess pre-admissions progress, trends and demand via dynamic dashboards.</p>	<p>1 SOURCE OF TRUTH</p> <p>For distributing, collecting and monitoring all pre-admissions form responses, requests and completions.</p>	<p>100S OF HOURS SAVED</p> <p>No more distributing physical admissions packets, face-to-face meetings, or chasing, collating and analyzing returned paper forms.</p>
<p>100S → 0</p> <p>Hundreds of photocopies, phone calls and transcription of paper forms eliminated.</p>	<p>100% DIGITAL</p> <p>All pre-admissions applications were completed digitally for the first time using Operoo.</p>	<p>NO MORE DATA ENTRY ERRORS</p> <p>Interpreting and manually re-typing hand-written responses from paper forms is a thing of the past.</p>	<p>100% ADOPTION</p> <p>"Parents love the flexibility. Admin staff love it too. Operoo saves us loads of time."</p>
<p>SIMS 'GAME CHANGER'</p> <p>All pre-admissions dietary and medical data syncs with SIMS upon acceptance.</p>	<p>AUTO SEGMENTATION</p> <p>"Operoo's Smart Groups allow us to distribute targeted messages, information and requests in a way that wasn't possible before."</p>	<p>GDPR COMPLIANCE</p> <p>"Being able to have parents login, and track those logins, means we can be sure permissions are being authentically obtained."</p>	<p>FROM WEEKS TO DAYS</p> <p>All pre-admissions applications were completed and submitted in days, not weeks, and with no manual chasing.</p>



6 Ways Operoo Transforms Pre-Admissions for UK Schools and MATs



1. All your pre-admissions and school forms ready-to-go

Digitally distribute and collect all required forms and data with Operoo's ready-to-send pre-built eForms.



2. Automated tracking and reminders

Don't waste effort calling and emailing parents over unreturned forms. Track response rates and let Operoo do the chasing for you.



3. Faster responses via multilingual & mobile access

Empower parents to complete forms using their language and device of choice.



4. Seamlessly communicate with pre-admitted families

Send automated, group and personalized digital communications to parents of pre-admitted students with zero manual effort.



5. Eliminate data double-handling with SIMS sync and PDF mapping

Stop grappling with manual data entry. Instantly sync data captured during pre-admissions to student records in SIMS. And, map Operoo eForms to official DfE PDF form templates.



6. Trigger new student induction processes upon enrolment

Operoo will programmatically trigger all new student induction requests upon enrolment, removing common admissions bottlenecks.

The Challenge From inefficient to unworkable

Like most UK schools, Allerton High School used to loathe conducting annual pre-admissions. Completely manual and paper-based, the process meant hundreds of repetitive, time-consuming and laborious tasks: From enumerate staff hours wasted making photocopies, driving to local feeder schools to distribute physical pre-admissions packets, drawn-out face-to-face meetings, chasing parents over missing information or indecipherable handwriting, to error-prone data entry that dominated the summer.

“ Allerton’s entire pre-admissions process was paper-based; not a single bit of it was online ”

Allerton High School's Data Manager and Educational Visits Coordinator, Gary Loughrey. "I'd been looking at ways to transfer our pre-admissions online for years. I knew we could create a far more productive and enjoyable experience for both our staff and incoming families. But, it was one of those initiatives that always got put on the backburner. Of course in hindsight, I wish we'd acted much sooner." Loughrey explained that each phase of Allerton's pre-admissions journey used to require significant time and paper — from preparing and distributing physical pre-admissions packets to prospective families; then collecting, collating and acting on submitted forms and data.

“Basically, we didn’t really have a properly connected, systemised process,” said Loughrey. “We relied on individual staff members to piece together and control a large number of moving parts.

“We’d receive the list of initial prospective students from our Local Government Authority. We’d then save that information in a spreadsheet and determine how many pre-admissions packets we needed to compile. We’d make hundreds of photocopies of the required forms, collate them into individual packets, then literally drive around delivering those packets to the local primary schools from which each year’s prospective students had applied.

“After that came months of chasing parents about missing forms, incomplete or inaccurate information. Because everything was people and paper-based, we spent hundreds of hours manually collecting and collating applications without ever really having a good overview of incoming data to help us manage, track and analyse trends or the overall process.

“And, because the distribution, collection and collation aspects of our pre-admissions weren’t systemised, we had to manually type everything into SIMS in order to complete the application process and kick-off student induction. As you can imagine, that volume of manual transcription — combined with interpreting hand-written forms — made it a thankless task, which was fraught with data entry errors. On top of that, this final step amounted to one of the biggest summer jobs for the school’s one full-time office administrator. Simply put, the process lacked reliability, efficiency and scalability.”

But, that wasn’t the end of the awkwardness and inefficiency caused by the school’s paper-based pre-admissions approach. Subsequent actions, which needed to take place once data had been returned, also proved difficult. This impacted the pre-admissions experience both internally, for staff, and externally, for parents.

“Communications and additional information that needed to be distributed or requested, based on certain types of responses gathered, was also done manually,” said Loughrey. “For example, if incoming students cited that they had particular food allergies, we’d need to pass that information along to the schoolcanteen by hand.”

It was the same for outgoing information, such as selecting extracurricular interests.

“We’d send 200 bits of information to every school applicant, just in case they were interested in any one of our many co-curricular activities,” said Loughrey. “We couldn’t segment forms and communications into groups, or automatically distribute targeted responses containing additional information, based on data received. And, when information came back to us, we’d have to manually filter through it again, passing data to relevant heads of department throughout the school, such as our Head of Music.

“ *Using Operoo, we can now filter collected data and set-up automated Trigger Actions to analyse and act on demand for things like the music program or special learning assistance. What used to take hours now takes five minutes.* ”

When COVID-19 struck, Allerton’s existing pre-admissions process went from inefficient to unworkable:

“The onset of COVID-19 gave us the impetus and urgency we needed to act,” said Loughrey. “Suddenly, none of the mechanisms in place were appropriate. Everyone was working remotely, so needed access to the same set of data without being in the same room. At this same time, paper documents and face-to-face conversations presented unacceptable health risks.

“Luckily for us, we’d already started collecting online consents for educational visits through Operoo. When pre-admissions season rolled around in the midst of remote learning, we discovered that we could also take that operational process online using Operoo.

“ *The move to digitise, streamline and automate Allerton’s pre-admissions might have been born out of necessity during the pandemic, but one thing’s clear: We’ll never revert to the old way of doing things.* ”



The Solution

From all paper, to all online

While embracing best practice process automation technology enabled Allerton High School to generate significant efficiency gains throughout the entire pre-admissions lifecycle, Loughrey said that there were specific benefits that stood-out.

“Chasing forms is a thing of the past; that’s the biggest challenge we’ve overcome working with Operoo,” said Loughrey. “Distribution and follow-up is all done for us.”

“We just select the cadence with which we want our automated reminders to go out, and the parents of prospective students keep receiving subsequent requests until missing information is submitted.

“Once submitted, all documents, forms and associated data are collected in a single digital repository. Authorised staff have access to a single view of the same information anytime, via any device. Being able to track and slice-and-dice that data in real-time — with dynamic dashboards and filters for any field — means we can assess progress, trends and demand for certain aspects of the school program throughout the process. The enhanced visibility is amazing.”

Loughrey also pinpointed Operoo’s integration with Allerton’s Management Information System (MIS), SIMS, as particularly important for saving time and ensuring data accuracy.

“The Operoo - SIMS integration is an all-round game changer for processing pre-admissions data”

said Loughrey. “Firstly, it automatically pulls across all dietary and medical data captured during pre-admissions and syncs it with the student record in SIMS upon acceptance. Not only does this save time, it reduces risk by ensuring we have a single trustworthy version of the truth for managing emergency situations.

“Beyond medical and dietary information, capturing other pre-admissions data digitally through Operoo also saves significant time and removes human error from the equation. No longer do we have to interpret messy hand-written forms and re-type information from paper documents into SIMS.”

Other functional areas identified as critical for streamlining Allerton’s pre-admissions process, and reducing the resources required to oversee it, include the ability to automatically segment communication and recipient types, trigger instant follow-up actions, and flexibly engage parents via any web-enabled device.

“Operoo’s Smart Groups allow us to distribute targeted messages, information and requests in a way that wasn’t possible before,” said Loughrey. “We can now automatically add students to certain groups within the system, then instantly send them specific communications, based on answers received via Operoo eForms.

“The medical form is a good example of these follow-up actions. If parents of prospective students indicate that their child is an asthmatic, we’ve set-up the system so that a number of things automatically happen: The child in question is placed in a high-risk medical group within the system. Then, they’re sent a supplementary eForm, requesting parents indicate asthma severity, details of prescribed medication, and, if severe, attach a Health Care Plan obtained from their doctor.”

Combining Operoo Smart Groups with Trigger Actions enables Allerton to automate additional follow-up actions.

“Once we’ve established the specific needs or interests of incoming students, placed them in appropriate digital buckets with Smart Groups, and obtained supplementary information, Operoo Trigger Actions helps us automate the next steps too.

“Parents love the flexibility. They get the ‘ping’, go into the app, complete the request then and there, and it’s done.”



The Results

A 'transformative' change for the better

Overall, Gary Loughrey and his colleagues at Allerton High School brought their pre-admissions process into the digital age. Allerton transformed an entirely paper-based and manual journey into an automated experience, drastically reducing the resources and effort required by both parents and staff.

“*We’ve saved hundreds of hours, thousands of pounds and a lot of heartache,” said Loughrey. “I am so happy and amazed with our pre-admissions process now. We have used Operoo to completely remove all paper from the new starters parents experience. We send out all forms digitally through Operoo.*”

“Parents love it, responding quickly and accurately from any device or in any language. They also provide us with student medical data, which flows straight back into SIMS. Admin staff love it too. Operoo saves us loads of time, as the system triggers next steps in the workflow, subsequent communications, and does the chasing for us.

“We now have 100 percent adoption of Operoo throughout our staff and parent communities. It’s so convenient and important to have everybody on the same page. Because all pre-admissions forms, communications, requests and submissions are made through the one secure digital platform, we’re also able to ensure GDPR compliance and total data privacy — no matter where staff or parents are located. Those benefits are going to hold us in good stead a long time after the pandemic has passed.”

During COVID-induced remote learning, Loughrey recalled watching the initial response rates pour in when Allerton High School first set its digital pre-admission workflow live.

“Within 12-hours of making all the forms live in Operoo, 104 out of 212 families had already logged-in and verified student details,” said Loughrey. “Of those, 70 had actually completed all of the transition forms, which was simply amazing. We had all pre-admissions forms completed and returned in days, with two people overseeing the process, rather an entire team of people manually chasing-down forms for weeks.

“*To call the change to our pre-admissions process ‘transformative’ would not be an overstatement.*”

After experiencing their first digital pre-admissions period in the midst of widespread school closures, Loughrey said that the added flexibility would benefit families over the long-haul.

“We’ve got quite a diverse community, many of whom often go back overseas to visit extended family over the summer break,” explained Loughrey. “Being able to distribute and collect all the forms and signatures online has been great. Conducting pre-admissions digitally, as well as induction for returning students, was essential during lockdown. But, it also injects much needed flexibility into the process, which our school community will benefit from far beyond the pandemic.

“And, on the flip side, it’ll keep parents accountable too: being on holiday or unable to come into the school will no longer be an excuse for not submitting required information.”



Extending the breadth of automation and depth of pre-admissions data synced to SIMS

As schools across the UK gear-up for the beginning of pre-admissions for the 21 / 22 academic year, Operoo has released a new feature to further streamline the process for SIMS schools: A predefined SIMS pre-admissions eForm template (March 2021).

This template includes all the questions that schools might ask parents and carers about their child. The questions on the eForm correspond to data fields in SIMS, which are usually gathered or verified during the pre-admissions process, such as priority contact, ethnicity and religion. The form and questions contain special mapping, allowing data to sync from the form to the correct fields in SIMS once a pre-admitted student is deemed enrolled.

Loughrey — and the school's SIMS Administrator, Lyndsey Scott — said the new data sync capabilities would significantly enhance an already-much-improved digital process.

"We're already looking forward to coordinating our 21 / 22 student intake because we're excited to build on what we've already started with Operoo," said Loughrey.

“ This new functionality will completely reshape the final data collation stage prior to enrolment. What took weeks will now take hours. It's going to be incredible — it's hard to put into words the positive difference it will make. ”

"It will free-up staff to focus on all the preparation work over summer, which normally gets rushed, such as locker allocation or coordinating equipment and activities for the first week back. It will be amazing. Managing our pre-admissions data is about to get a whole lot easier; again."

Beyond Digitising Student Pre-Admissions

Parental permissions, educational visits and COVID-19

Outside pre-admissions, Allerton High School has been working hard to streamline other operational tasks and processes utilising Operoo's digital workflows. Prominent examples include: Collecting consents throughout the school year, managing educational visits as well as the school's COVID-19 response.

“Through the onset and ‘new normal’ of COVID-19, Operoo was a life-saver,” said Loughrey. “Operoo essentially allowed us to run the school remotely and carry on as usual; albeit in a virtual environment.”

"We're using Operoo to undertake digital operations including parents communications and engagement; survey distribution, such as determining the IT needs of our students when studying off-site; obtaining parental permissions, including consent for students to participate in home cooking programs; as well as GCSE course selection for outgoing students. We've also been able to arrange free school meals for eligible students through Operoo — even while they're not physically at school."

During the normal school year, Alteron uses Operoo to collect consent from parents whenever required. When school returned after a prolonged stint of remote learning, Operoo came to the rescue again.

"On our return to the classroom, all students needed to participate in lateral flow testing before coming back to school," said Loughrey. "That shift back to face-to-face learning was made so much easier by being able to use Operoo to request and collect all testing consents. The ability to manage that process digitally, from start to finish, was really useful."



If it wasn't for Operoo, Loughrey said Allerton would be using a range of ad-hoc tools to manage its operations and run remotely during COVID.

"If not for Operoo, we'd be using a mix of email, Microsoft forms and standalone messaging apps," said Loughrey. "We would have very quickly found ourselves in the midst of a tangled, disjointed mess. The fact that all the data lives in one place, can link to SIMS, and disseminates automated follow-up actions using triggers, has made the whole escapade significantly easier to manage.

"By contrast, I have a number of close contacts who work at other schools, which don't have Operoo. By all reports, it's been a nightmare. All forms, communications and data are distributed, collected and stored in different apps. Nothing's connected, let alone automated. It's moments like this that I realise, upon reflection, that the last 12-months could have been even harder."

When normality returns to day-to-day school life, Loughrey said he was looking forward to recommencing Allerton's program of educational visits.

"Operoo is a really secure solution for consents," said Loughrey. "Being able to have parents login, and track those logins, means we can be sure permissions are being authentically obtained and that we're meeting our GDPR obligations. This, among other things, is what makes Operoo great for school trips. We normally run 40 - 50 each year, so I hope we can get back there soon."