

# Fingerprint scans replace roll-calls

By JUDITH TAN

TRACKING the comings and goings of 1,500 students of Kranji Secondary School took a high-tech turn last May, when an electronic system was installed to mark students' attendance.

The Biometric e-Attendance System, which comprises fingerprint readers, has since kept a daily log of absentees and latecomers.

About 20 schools have installed such a system on their own initiative.

With the school staff and/or students getting their fingerprints scanned upon entering and leaving the school compound, the system can generate attendance figures and sort them by class, day and duration of attendance.

It can even use SMS to get in touch with the parents of students who are absent or late.

Kranji Secondary's principal Maureen Lee, who moved the idea to get the system installed in her school, said it has cut the time taken to log student attendance by as much as 90 per cent.

Roll-calls by teachers to root out latecomers or absentees are thus a thing of the past in the school.

Madam Lee added that the time teachers save can be spent counselling students or getting started on the day's lessons.

Teacher Karen Wong said: "It is easier now, as we do not have to take the trouble of checking the telephone register to inform parents when students are late or absent. Previously, we had to call parents by the first period or at least before recess if the student was not in school at the morning assembly."



BPGH student Corlis Tan getting her fingerprint scanned before leaving the school, while classmates Goh Qian Hui and Cheston Mak wait in line. The school installed the system in 2005, in response to teachers' requests for a more efficient way to take attendance. ST PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

The biometric system opens and shuts the school's main gate, and this has cut truancy. It has also cut latecomer numbers by about a third, noted another teacher, Mr Shasi Kumaran.

The work of the school's prefects has become easier. They have fewer latecomers to book, although they are still stationed at the gates to see that the students put their fingers on the readers, and to direct them if a log-jam occurs at the fingerprint scanning stations.

Bukit Panjang Government High (BPGH) can count itself among the early adopters of the system, having installed it in 2005 in response to teachers' requests for a more efficient way of taking attendance.

Principal Lee Seng Hai said that at first, students could choose to put their fingers or their ez-link cards on the scanners. But after the ez-link cards were upgraded last year, they became incompatible with the readers, so students now use their fingerprints to get into or out of school.

Like at Kranji Secondary, parents can opt to be informed when their children are late or absent from school.

Parents who want this information receive an SMS on the time their children arrive at school, or they can get it off the Internet, explained Ms Lim May Leng, the school's vice-principal for administration.

Students from both schools said they

did not think the system intruded on their privacy or their freedom.

Their only complaint was about the jam when a big crowd turns up just before 7.30am and everyone needs to log in.

Nurul Nadiah Malek, who is in Secondary 3 at BPGH, said: "While the teachers do not have to call out names one by one anymore, it is sometimes inconvenient when access is denied and we have to re-scan our fingerprint, such as when the finger is dirty."

The Education Ministry said it is monitoring the usefulness of the system and is looking into introducing it in more schools. There are 356 mainstream schools here.

Additional reporting by Linus Lin