

# School Data Manager Persona

**Tim Donaldson**

## Overview



Tim is the Data Manager at a large secondary school in a single-academy trust in the Westminster borough of London. A solutions-driven professional, Tim brings a highly organised, calm, and resilient approach to managing complex data systems. With a background in science education and a strong foundation in statistics, he transitioned into data management, combining his problem-solving mindset with a hands-on approach to integrating diverse data sources into insightful reports. A self-confessed 'school data geek,' Tim thrives on uncovering the success stories hidden within student data, using analytics to drive positive educational outcomes.

While not formally involved in procurement decisions, Tim is a trusted advisor to leadership, guiding data strategy, system improvements, and reporting enhancements. His experience and insight make sure that data isn't just collected but is transformed into meaningful, actionable intelligence.

**School setting:** Tim works at a comprehensive secondary school for students aged 11 to 18 that is part of a trust with a sixth form. His role is pivotal in ensuring that the right data is available and used to improve student outcomes and operational efficiency.

## Key aspects

This section is about Tim's emotional characteristics, key responsibilities and areas of focus and challenges.

Category	Information
Personal traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands-on and self-taught problem solver</li> <li>Analytical and detail-oriented</li> <li>Curious and adaptable with a strong growth mindset</li> <li>Enjoys tackling complex technical challenges independently</li> </ul>
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centralise and standardise data across the school</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate data sources into a unified system.</li> <li>• Automate manual data processes and streamline reporting.</li> </ul>
<b>Skills</b>	<p><b>Data Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise in MIS systems (SIMS, Arbor), Power BI, PowerApps and Snowflake integration.</li> <li>• Advanced Excel and spreadsheet skills</li> </ul> <p><b>Technical problem solving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses tools like ChatGPT for DAX coding and troubleshooting.</li> <li>• Builds customised dashboards for various stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing resistance to new systems.</li> <li>• Adapting MIS system to meet the unique needs of secondary school</li> <li>• Navigating complex data integration across multiple platforms.</li> <li>• Balancing technical data needs across SLT with limited formal support.</li> </ul>
<b>Unique contributions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages the school's MIS. Can spearhead the school's MIS transition, for example, from SIMS to Arbor.</li> <li>• Created custom data integration workflows using PowerApps and other tools.</li> <li>• Automate data gathering, data accuracy for producing students reports and data churning spreadsheets and reports for SLT and Governors.</li> <li>• Keep up to date with DfE requirements and guidance on how schools should collect or use their data. (He must have strong knowledge of the various national data sources and keep on top of that ever-changing landscape, informing senior leaders where needed.)</li> </ul>
<b>Key challenges and motivators</b>	
<b>Current priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unifying multiple data sources into a single, cohesive reporting system.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reducing manual data gathering and reporting processes and streamlining data integration.</li> <li>Enhancing Power BI dashboards to better visualise student performance and outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>Technology challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty integrating diverse data sources (Arbor, Power BI, PowerApps, 4Matrix, SISRA spreadsheets) into a single system.</li> <li>Heavy reliance on manual processes and trial-and-error methods for building reports.</li> <li>Struggles with unique data needs for a secondary school that modern MIS systems —outside of SIMs — don't seem to support fully.</li> <li>Limited support in the decision-making process, requiring self-initiated problem-solving.</li> </ul>
<b>Motivators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing efficient, automated systems that reduce manual data entry.</li> <li>Learning new tools and techniques to improve data integration and visualisation.</li> <li>Implementing data solutions that directly impact student outcomes and educational success.</li> </ul>

## Demographics

- Age Range:** 35-45 years old
- Gender:** Male
- Hobbies and interests:** Running, volunteering, member of a choir

## Career background

**Current Job Title:** Data and MIS Manager

**Time in current role:** 4 years

**Previous positions held:** (12 years of experience working with schools)

- Senior Data & Information Officer (Local Authority)
- Research Officer (Local Authority)

**Education:** Master's in Educational Research and Bachelor's degree in Computer Science (can also have degrees in Data Science, Data Analysis, IT, Data Analytics and AI)

- **Unconventional education route:** Bachelor's degree in Zoology.
- **Career Path:** Started as a science teacher, transitioned into data management after supporting the previous data manager, eventually taking over the role.

**Professional Insight:** Believes that outstanding data practice and strategy play a crucial role in improving schools.

**Peer-to-Peer:** Engages with fellow data managers at events and on forums, as well as teachers and IT staff, but often works independently to solve data integration and reporting challenges. Has a strong relationship with colleagues within Westminster City Council, and the Westminster Data Manager/Exams Officer group.

### Challenger framework type

- **Technical problem-solver:** Thrives on figuring out complex systems and integrations.
- **Educator:** Uses his teaching background to explain complex data processes to non-technical staff.
- **Innovator:** Constantly seeks better ways to integrate and report data using tools like Power BI, PowerApps, and ChatGPT.

### Communication Preferences

- **Preferred Channels:** Email, events and word of mouth. Peer forums, online communities, and technical workshops for shared learning.
- **Valued Content:**
  - Solution comparison documents
  - Technical blogs or webinars focused on data automation and reporting improvements.

## Decision-making process

- Tim isn't formally part of procurement decisions but heavily influences system choices through technical evaluations and proof-of-concept testing.
- Provides leadership with insights on data challenges and potential solutions, often building prototypes to demonstrate new system capabilities.
- Uses hands-on research and peer recommendations to evaluate new tools before advocating for adoption.

## Key Insights:

- Tim values solutions that centralise data and eliminate manual processes, helping him streamline reporting and improve data accuracy.
- Expresses the need for advanced data analytics.
- Demonstrating long-term efficiency gains will be key to gaining his buy-in.
- Position MIS and reporting tools integration as enablers for accurate data to shape the design and structure of education analysis, not just simple data management platforms.

## Note

This persona is based on qualitative research from Data Manager interviews, forum entries, Data Manager blogs and analysis of secondary schools with the role. It is also built from interview research from The Key Group.