

Why Arbor's MAT MIS is critical to DCAT's growth strategy

Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT) is a 19 school mixed phase trust in the South of England with 18 primary schools and one secondary school, with plans to add six more schools by 2025. Founded in 2014, the trust is now home to nearly 6000 students.

The trust decided to move all of their schools to Arbor MIS and started onboarding in summer 2022. They started using MAT MIS for their Central Team at the same time, making it easier and quicker to work with their schools as one organisation, not many.



Stephen Barrett-Kinsley
Chief Operating Officer, DCAT

Growth at DCAT

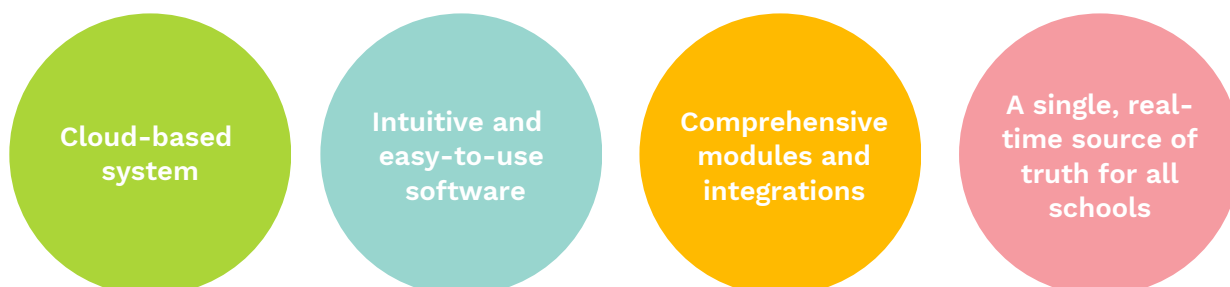
Stephen Barrett-Kinsley, COO at DCAT, says that growth is at the heart of the trust's vision for 2025 and wider strategy, and they are constantly thinking about how to achieve this sustainably without compromising value for their existing schools.

DCAT currently has schools in East Sussex, West Sussex, Bournemouth, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Stephen says that "one of the interesting challenges we have is creating that sense of connectivity and family for what is a remarkably geographically spread group of schools."

As they expand to 25 schools, it's increasingly important to be "match-fit" for growth. For DCAT, Stephen describes being match-fit as having a good handle on the trust's data: "With our old systems, it would have been impossible to intimately know the data or information of 25 schools. Our focus now is on changing the back-end software, systems and processes so that it enables seamless transfer of information and data."

Implementing Arbor across the trust

In 2021, the trust decided to choose a single MIS for all their schools - at the time, three schools were already using Arbor. There were four key things that DCAT wanted from an MIS:



The Central Team felt that Arbor met all of these requirements and also liked that the system is always being updated with new features: “You can demonstrably see a consistent effort to improve.”

When new schools join DCAT, they need to switch to Arbor within their first term. Although the trust isn’t prescriptive when it comes to most software, Stephen highlighted how important it was that all schools in their trust use the same MIS; it means that they can connect with other key trust systems including finance, payroll, safeguarding and assessment. Without joining up these systems, DCAT says that it’s difficult to “integrate [schools] properly into how we’re operating as a trust.”

Choosing a centralised MIS

Another benefit of using Arbor across the trust is ease of reporting. Before moving to Arbor, DCAT’s schools shared data with the Central Team via spreadsheets each term. As well as being a time-consuming process, it left room for human error and inconsistent reporting.

As DCAT grew, it became more important to have “seamless transfer of data, seamless access to data.” With their schools using Arbor MIS, it was a natural choice to use Arbor’s MAT MIS to make reporting more efficient and effective for schools and the Central Team. Data from each school feeds automatically and instantaneously into MAT MIS so that the trust can support their schools in real time, rather than waiting for termly reports.

Stephen recalls introducing Senior Leaders to MAT MIS and showing them, for example, how to see attendance at all their schools in one click. He says: “it was genuinely a life-changing moment” for staff who were used to legacy systems and lengthy workarounds.

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Working in partnership with Arbor, alongside our development and growth, has enabled us to work much more efficiently and effectively. I'm constantly impressed with Arbor's commitment to improve their system, and their willingness to learn from its users. I'm confident that in every case the schools will quickly learn to love the system.

Stephen Barrett-Kinsley

Benefits of Arbor for a growing trust

Arbor helps DCAT to work together as one organisation as they grow. Despite the distance between schools, standardised reporting helps DCAT to be consistent with how they treat their schools. MAT MIS also gives DCAT the insight to be able to create links between schools with similar demographics. For example, they noticed that two schools had high numbers of looked-after children and were able to make the connection between them so they could share best practices.

DCAT makes the most of using MAT MIS both to drill down into individual school data and look at broader trends. In particular, Stephen feels “the quick dashboards are just exceptionally useful. And being able to quickly drill down into a school's data by clicking a few buttons.” If they want to find out more, staff “have the ability to log into a school's MIS so that we can just quickly jump in and find out what’s happening.” A recent example is that a review of staff absence highlighted, on closer inspection, inconsistencies in the use of attendance codes. The trust was able to turn this into a training exercise to support office staff in recording attendance consistently.

Quick access to data is key when working across a growing organisation. Senior Education Leaders regularly meet to review data from across the trust and talk about the best way to improve school performance. They no longer have to wait for information from the school as they can access and analyse data before meeting with the Headteachers. This means that the time they have with them is much more productive and focussed on improvement. What’s more, comparisons can be drawn across schools and connections made to share ideas.

A particular focus at DCAT is attendance and they find it very useful to draw comparisons and set benchmarks for their schools so that they know where to focus. “We can quickly access that data seamlessly, have the conversation, create the links and move forward.”

