



How Arbor and SAMpeople are supporting Marches Academy Trust's growth with joined-up HR and MIS

Julia Hipkiss, Trust Lead HR Officer at The Marches Academy Trust, explains how adopting Arbor and SAMpeople has helped the trust improve consistency, reduce duplication, and prepare for rapid growth.

What challenges did you face before choosing SAMpeople?

The trust has grown steadily since academising in 2014 and moving to Arbor in 2018. But HR processes were on paper or spreadsheets to start out with. In 2019, our Finance Director spotted an opportunity to secure some bid funding, which we used to bring in our first HR system.

Unfortunately, the system we chose didn't deliver what we needed. It was mis-sold in terms of what it could do, and over time, it became hard to manage. We needed a full-time system administrator just to keep things running and figure out workarounds.

"As our growth began to ramp up, we were at 12 schools, with more joining in July 2025 and expecting to reach 20 by the end of the 2026 academic year, we knew we needed something more scalable."



Arbor MIS

MAT MIS

SAMpeople

Number of schools

- 8 primary schools
- 5 secondary schools
- 1 special school

Part of the Arbor community since

- 2024: Moved to SAMpeople for their HR system
- 2018: Moved to Arbor for their MIS



Julia Hipkiss

Lead HR Officer,
Marches Academy Trust

What was the main reason for choosing SAMpeople?

Most of the systems we looked at required buying several modules just to get started, and while our previous system included payroll, we realised we needed more specialist support for education-specific terms and conditions.

As a trust, we operate a central services model, similar to a Local Authority, we needed to make sure any system we chose would work for both central teams and school-based staff administrators, who often administer day-to-day HR processes.

We chose SAMpeople for a few clear reasons. Firstly, a big stand-out factor was the reassurance that the integration with Arbor was already up and running. Secondly, the HR system itself stood out straight away. The dashboard was a huge selling point, being able to see key employee stats at a glance and land on something clean and visual made a big impression.

What processes have you changed since having both Arbor and SAMpeople?

We've made real progress in shifting away from paper-based systems and manual workarounds, and having Arbor and SAMpeople work together has been a big part of that.

One of the first things we tackled was our return to work process. Previously, we had separate forms for self-certification and return meetings, all done on paper. We combined those into a single workflow using template forms in SAMpeople. We're already using that data to spot gaps in practice, and it's shown us that we need to offer further training, particularly around line management and absence and attendance management.

Plus, we're now using SAMpeople as our single source of truth for staff absence, with that data flowing directly into Arbor. It's made a real difference for our cover coordinators, especially during busy school mornings, because support staff no longer need to duplicate information.

*"Arbor's dashboard gives us a **clear, trust-wide view** of all absences, while SAMpeople lets us drill down into the details, particularly around specific categories like sickness."*

"We also had a great experience from the start with the SAMpeople team. They were genuinely helpful, offered us great set-up advice, and felt like a conversation with someone who understood schools."



Marches Academy Trust

How has having both systems impacted your people management?

We've seen better buy-in from managers, partly because SAMpeople is genuinely easy to use and partly because they're getting value from it straight away.

Compared to our previous HR system, we've had fewer login issues, fewer questions, and more engagement overall. There's still work to do, not everyone's using the system to its full potential yet, but compared to where we were, it's a huge step forward.

How does having Arbor and SAMpeople fit with your overall MAT strategy?

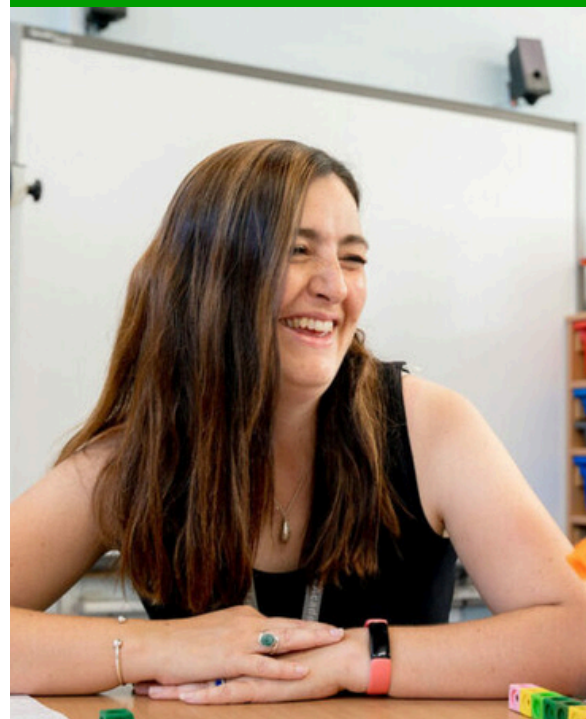
We need our systems to be able to handle our growth without adding workload to our school teams. Arbor and SAMpeople have helped us do that by giving both central staff and schools access to the same information, maintaining consistency.

We're currently onboarding a few new primaries, and the experience with the SAMpeople customer team has been a noticeable improvement on what we've had before. They've been clear, responsive, and easy to work with — which has taken a lot of pressure off what's usually a stressful process. They're realistic with onboarding timelines, and that's reassuring. When we've needed to pull things forward, they've worked with us to make it happen. Everything runs so smoothly that it almost feels effortless with them always able to say, "Yes, it's ready, go ahead."

*"Their calm, confident support has lifted a huge amount of pressure, and even now, **the service continues to be second to none.**"*

We're also starting to take a more joined-up approach with our data. Our Data Manager is already using a BI tool with the Arbor BI Connector, and we've set up the SAMpeople Data Connector now so we can work towards bringing HR data into that same reporting setup. The goal is to create a more real-time view of absence trends, particularly sickness absence, which is a key focus for our CEO, who is now using weekly sickness absence reports from SAMpeople. That's helped us spot patterns and provide meaningful KPIs for our executive team.

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Marches Academy Trust

What are you hoping Arbor and SAMpeople will bring to your trust in the next 12 months?

This year is about consolidation. We want to build on what we've started — deepen our knowledge of the systems, embed the workflows, and continue digitising our HR processes.

One big focus is moving our Single Central Record into SAMpeople. That's a major step for us. It'll help schools save time and money and bring recruitment and compliance into one place.

Because Arbor and SAMpeople are part of the same group, we're seeing real progress on the integration, and we know it can only get stronger.

We've already shared suggestions on things like continuous service dates, payroll numbers, and disability status, and it's clear those ideas are being listened to by the teams. It's good to know the systems are moving in the right direction and that the day-to-day needs of trusts like ours are part of that conversation.



To find out more about the UK's fastest-growing education HR system get in touch at:
www.sampeople.co.uk

