



## Trust

Six Primary schools located in Bradford, West Yorkshire

## Mathew Atkinson,

CEO at The Priestley Academy Trust

## Number of staff

350

## Using

SAMpeople  
SAMpeople Recruit  
FusionHR

“ We wanted an efficient system to reduce challenges, such as tracking staff absence and compliance of the single central record and payroll. Our goal was around streamlining those processes and having oversight from the central trust function. ”

**Mathew Atkinson,**  
CEO, The Priestley Academy Trust

# How Priestley Academy are centralising trust HR needs across their HR system and MIS

Priestley Academy Trust is a MAT of six primary schools in the West Yorkshire region, dedicated to providing an exceptional education to 2,500 students, including a high proportion with special educational needs. We heard from CEO Mathew Atkinson and his central HR team about why it was important to streamline their HR processes as the trust grows.

Mathew and his team were grappling with the challenges of managing HR needs for 350 people working across six sites with different line management systems.

Their aim was to make sure their staff were supported effectively while maintaining compliance across all schools. The trust needed a solution to centralise staff data and gain real-time access across all school sites. As part of the trust's strategic plan for 2025, Priestley Academy Trust had already made the decision to move all their schools to Arbor MIS to manage student data. With student data unified, the next step in their plan was to tackle the disjointed HR data, which was still spread across multiple systems and lacked central oversight.



## The Priestley Academy Trust's biggest obstacles included:

- **Lack of real-time HR data and central oversight.** Managing 350 employees across six schools meant fragmented data.
- **Compliance and safeguard tracking difficulties.** Maintaining an up-to-date Single Central Record, handling payroll accuracy, and completing the workforce census weren't done effectively in spreadsheets.
- **The need for data-driven decision-making.** Without consolidated insights, strategic workforce planning and policy and procedure alignment were difficult to achieve.
- **HR and MIS data lived in separate systems.** Without an integration between student and HR data, up-to-date staffing information wasn't reflected in their MIS. This created disconnects between central teams and schools, making it harder to manage cover and track absences.

## A purpose-built HR system for education-specific needs

Mathew knew the trust needed a centralised, user-friendly HR solution that could streamline operations while giving him and his team accurate, real-time data across all their schools.

The trust was benefiting from strategic and operational HR support through our sister consultants at FusionHR, so Mathew and his team were looking for an HR system that could carry forward the same best practices. Already seeing success using Arbor MIS to manage student data, Mathew also valued that SAMpeople is part of the Arbor suite.

**SAMpeople was a natural fit.**

“We needed a system that could centralise our HR data, improve reporting, and give us the insights we need to make informed decisions. SAMpeople provided all that, with an intuitive interface and strong customer support.”

**Mathew Atkinson,**  
CEO, The Priestley Academy Trust

## How SAMpeople met The Priestley Academy Trust's needs:

A real-time, centralised HR platform for easy data access and reporting.

A solution that seamlessly integrates compliance tracking, performance management, and workforce census.

A user-friendly, education-specific system designed by HR experts who understand the challenges of MATs are facing.

To ensure a smooth transition, the trust adopted SAMpeople in phases.

Starting with **Performance and Absence Management** (tracking their staff appraisals, grievances, and leave in one place), **Compliance Tracking** (ensuring all policies align across schools and that records are audit-ready), and **Workforce Census and Reporting** (automating reports for strategic workforce planning).

### The right insights drive the best people outcomes

Since choosing SAMpeople, Mathew explained, "SAMpeople has reduced our administration workload across the trust, allowing HR teams to focus on strategic initiatives and enhancing staff wellbeing rather than being bogged down in the nitty gritty. SAMpeople has been a big success across the organisation, giving oversight from the central trust function and bringing consistency."

In particular, the Staff Absence Management module has had a significant impact, Mathew noted, "The absence management module is great for being able to see across the organisation and understanding trends. It gave us the opportunity to work with school leaders to challenge what the data is saying so that we get the culture right in all of our schools and that all staff are being equally supported."

Building on this, Mathew has been able to improve workforce planning with accurate insights into staffing gaps, absence trends, performance and professional development needs. Plus, being able to have clear and consistent staff data to hand has supported him to make sure the right staff are in the right place at the right time, which helps the trust align staff allocation with student needs.

SAMpeople has helped the trust lay the groundwork for a future-ready workforce that's set to scale. With HR processes working in tandem across all schools and compliance strengthened, the next step for the trust is to leverage data further through integration and analytics.

## The future of connected workflows: SAMpeople and Arbor

Mathew's long-term vision is to connect his MIS and HR systems, allowing for smarter and more efficient workflows across the trust's schools. The integration is a way to reduce admin, strengthen collaboration between the central team and schools, and unlock trust-wide insights to support data-led planning.

By bringing Arbor and SAMpeople together, Mathew and his team will gain a complete picture of both staff and student data. Connecting their daily school operations and employee management together.

This joined-up view will allow the trust to uncover meaningful trends, such as how patterns in staff absence are impacting student outcomes. It will also support more informed decisions around cover, staffing, and support, streamlining day-to-day absence tracking and cover management.

By connecting the dots across systems, Mathew's team can be proactive, plan better, and make sure they can support staff and students where it's needed most.

Mathew's advice to other MATs is to "consider the long-term benefits of investing in a system such as SAMpeople because it can significantly reduce the HR burdens that you might feel as an organisation, improve staff satisfaction because they all know that the being treated the same and ultimately it, you know, it leads to better information and information is power because that supports your decision-making processes."

**Discover how SAMpeople can help your trust work smarter and focus on what matters most**

Get in touch at [sampeople.co.uk/book-a-demo](https://sampeople.co.uk/book-a-demo)

