Aligning systems, people and processes in your trust

Four trust leaders share how, when and why to get started

Arbor

Confederation of School Trusts

Foreword

Duncan Baldwin
Chair, Data Leaders Professional Community Confederation of School Trusts

Duncan is an expert in performance data and assessment. He currently provides consultancy support to CST's Data Leaders Community while working part-time for the Endeavour Learning Trust and supporting other schools and trusts around performance data and assessment. He previously served as Deputy Director of Policy at ASCL and as a consultant at Capita.

Confederation of School Trusts

As the national membership organisation and sector body for school trusts, it is no surprise that we at the Confederation of School Trusts believe in the power of academies working together to improve the lives of children. We are often asked though why this structural change in the way schools are run is necessary: surely good teaching can exist whoever's name is above the door?

To those reading this report it will perhaps be less of a challenging idea to say it is because structures do matter.

The school trust uniquely brings schools together in a single organisation, with the same, single, central mission to advance education for public benefit. That — or words to that effect — are part of the charitable aims of every trust.

Other looser collaborations have existed in the past but none have offered the consistent and unifying power of the school trust, with all involved part of a single organisation with shared goals. That naturally leads to questions of how directive trusts should be in how they operate: if we are all doing the same thing, shouldn't we all do it the same way?

Academies were also intended to be innovative, and it is in that spirit that we have seen many different models emerge. Some trusts operate with a high degree of harmonisation across all academies over a wide range of processes. Others favour a more devolved model, with a greater amount of decision-making at school level or through geographical or phase clusters.

CST does not have a preference: we believe it is important that trusts have the freedom to operate the system that works best for them and their schools, always subject to principles of good governance. Each trust's approach will likely change over time as the trust changes, and new needs and challenges emerge from its school communities.

Our 2023 National School Trust Survey found that almost every trust views finance as something primarily directed at a whole-trust level, with more than two thirds saying the same for estates, school improvement, procurement and people management. This does not mean that schools, principals, or other managers are excluded from decisions in these areas, but more often that they are supported by experts that work across the trust. The picture is usually much more nuanced than some of the more forthright discussions about centralisation versus autonomy might suggest.

The case studies in this report set out a range of models, and why — right now — it works for that trust.

"We believe it is important that trusts have the freedom to operate the system that works best for them and their schools"

CST's Building Strong Trusts framework however is clear on the importance of shared language and shared conceptions of the trust's vision, and its strategic and operational plans. The trust board must have a clear view across the organisation, with robust and reliable systems and reporting that make that possible. We have seen great innovations in software and approaches that can support that, some of which are touched on in this report.

We are grateful to the colleagues who have written the case studies included here. Your trust's situation is unique, and will need its own solutions, but we hope these concepts and ideas will prove useful. We hope they will help you to build trust and collaboration, empower your team, find the balance between standardisation and autonomy which works for you. Above all we hope they spark new conversations and concepts to help deliver for the children in your care.

Duncan Baldwin

About Arbor

At Arbor, we're on a mission to transform the way schools work for the better, with brilliant, intuitive tools designed to make a difference.

We're the UK's most popular cloud-based MIS, and are used by over 5,500 schools and 450 MATs to work more collaboratively, free staff from unnecessary admin and make a measurable improvement to the way they work each day.

At Arbor, our School MIS and MAT-level MIS are designed to work as one, seamless pair of systems - giving you the tools you need to work together as one organisation. More than just a dashboard, MAT MIS is the only true MIS for trusts, giving your central team a dedicated tool where information and actions flow school-up and trust-down.

Working with CST as a Platinum Partner, we're proud to bring you these insights from a variety of MAT leaders and hope that they are a real source of inspiration for positive change at your trust.

About CST

The Confederation of School Trusts is the national organisation and sector body for academy trusts. Almost three million children are educated in our members' schools and we work to drive real change to make their lives better. We do this by advocating for, supporting, and connecting school trusts.

We advocate for trusts as the best approach for improving education by helping politicians, policy makers, and the wider public better understand what they do. We support trusts through practical advice, strategic guidance, and consultancy. We connect them with each other, and with expert thinking and research.

Like our members, we are a charity aimed at promoting the public benefit of education. We believe school trusts make lives better for children because they bring schools and people together in organisations with a strong, single purpose: education. This encourages the sharing of expertise, ideas, and resources to give pupils a better start in life.

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What is intelligent alignment, and how did our data strategy help us achieve this at Danes Educational Trust?

Rob Wall.
Data and MIS Lead at
Danes Educational Trust

Rob is an experienced data leader who has worked in a variety of education settings before joining Danes Educational Trust.

Factfile

Students:

8,500

Number of schools:

6 primary
5 secondary
1 university
technical college

Location:

Hertfordshire

Executive summary:

- All students at a trust should benefit from their school being part of a wider organisation

- A trust's data strategy plays a key role in creating this cohesive experience, as it means staff are all singing from the same hymn sheet

- This 'intelligent alignment' drives efficiencies, saves money and allows staff to focus on student outcomes

What is intelligent alignment?

When it comes to centralisation, we often use the term 'intelligent alignment.' For us, that encompasses the areas we've centralised, like finance, HR and business functions (and at some point in the future, aspects of curriculum), but also our processes, our people and our culture. This runs alongside the idea of our Danes Educational Trust (DET) Graduate, the aspiration that all of our learners, be that a child in nursery or a student in our university technical college, are benefitting from being part of our trust and that we are delivering on our trust vision to each child.

We centralised our business functions from day one. There's cost savings to that, which in the current climate makes financial sense — every penny that goes towards the children's learning counts. It also improves the quality and consistency of what we're able to report on and compare centrally, which will in turn make us more effective at supporting schools where needed. But aligning your processes also allows the colleagues in each of your schools to focus on the core thing, which is teaching the children. That's what has always got to be at the heart of your decisions.

When is the right time to centralise?

There will always be questions of, would we change anything if we were to start again? What will this look like longer term? How do we make sure our model is scalable and sustainable, but without breaking the bank? It's also thinking about when the time comes to take on schools that are already performing well, if you have a standardised curriculum and other models, how do you attract those schools? And how do you continue to make sure all your schools feel listened to as you grow?

But certainly in terms of when to centralise, I think you need to consider that from day one. For many trusts, this is a given for things like finance, estates and HR. Data and marketing are often put to one side, but if you are truly aiming for intelligent alignment, and all schools being parts of one whole, then it's important to consider not only each of these functions, but how they interact with each other.

As you grow as a trust, school improvement becomes the fundamental function of your organisation. The true measure of school improvement, be that measured behaviourally, educationally or by other means, is found in the data. My role was introduced so we can review that data centrally, and move forward with our

"The true measure of school improvement, be that measured behaviourally, educationally or by other means, is found in the data."

schools as one unit. What we try to imbibe is that we're only as strong as our weakest school. And so by collecting, reviewing and sharing that data, our strongest schools actively come to us and say, how can we support? What can we offer? How can we work collaboratively together? It makes us stronger as a whole. And that's what it comes back to — viewing our trust as one organisation, which is what intelligent alignment and the idea of the DET graduate is all about.

Our data vision

About 12 months ago, I started putting together a data vision to help us realise the full potential of data to improve learner outcomes and maximise business value. We wanted to have a single version of the truth, supporting schools and business services to harness the power of data in order to measure, challenge and improve performance. If you take something like attendance, I can easily see the data from all of our schools and I can celebrate the wins, or spot anomalies, like a chickenpox outbreak. It's the collective, collaborative approach, which helps when you're all on the same page and have access to that data centrally. It makes it easier both to support and to challenge.

One good example is our primary school assessments. Originally, all of our schools had their assessments set up differently, and the language wasn't cohesive. Primary schools don't have data leads that secondaries do, so in-depth analysis only happens if you have an assistant head or equivalent who's really passionate about data. This made it an obvious choice for us to centralise — we wanted commonality of language and commonality of reporting. What we found when we spoke to some of our schools was that they were sometimes still using the system set up 15 years ago that someone had forgotten to archive and kept cropping back up. What we now do is build all of our assessments centrally in the MAT MIS and then push that out to our schools so they don't have to build it. We have a set of trustwide assessment marksheets and grades, and we can collect and analyse that data centrally. I share that with the schools individually, but also we can now see trust averages, which is great for our central team. We were doing that manually before. There's fewer errors, but most importantly we can see where our central support is needed the most. It means we can make more data informed decisions. I believe that what we should strive towards is to be data informed, because data-driven suggests

that one comes before the other. It's a very subtle shift, but the data is informing what we're doing, it's helping us to think about what our processes and our next steps are.

Being a data-driven trust versus a data-informed trust

Being data-informed is something that goes hand-in-hand with having a 'data person' in the central team. But just appointing a data lead isn't a data strategy, and just because you can access your data doesn't mean you're data-informed. You have to be willing to adjust your culture, systems, and compromise on standardisation as well. You have to be willing to commit to the additional time and resources that you're going to need to invest to achieve it. If we don't do those things, it doesn't matter how hard I work or how much we agree on the initial vision. We won't become data-informed because we'll have too many people working in silos and reverting back to the old way of doing it that they feel safe with, rather than embracing change and transforming.

If we do it properly, then it will have huge benefits. It will save time and money, it will improve outcomes, and not just educational outcomes. It can improve lots of business outcomes as

well by driving efficiencies. Being data-informed has to be part of your DNA, it has to really impact everything that you do across the whole business. It's always going to be something you wrestle with: what to centralise and in what order. You've got things like assessment and curriculum — what comes before the other? The truth is that often you have to co-create the centralised versions of these processes — it's all a journey. But being data-informed along the way plays a huge role in how you support each of your schools in turn, by moving forward as one unit.

"Being data informed has to be part of your DNA"

Why considered alignment is essential to becoming match-fit for growth

Executive summary:

- Growth necessitates alignment — it is unrealistic to grow sustainably and efficiently as disparate schools

- Purposeful leadership is required when aligning systems

- How DCAT's change management strategy has led to their schools actively seeking more centralised functions

Stephen Barrett-Kinsley
COO at the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT)

Stephen is the Chief Operating Officer of the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT), a large cross phase Trust — that is still expanding — on the South Coast. Stephen started his career in education over 10 years ago as a part-time Clerical Assistant in a 2-form entry Infant school. He has steadily risen up the ranks to become the COO of a 23 school MAT; responsible for all areas of Finance, HR, Operations, Governance and IT. He also has extensive Governance experience and is currently the Chair of Governors of a large secondary school near where he lives.

Factfile

Students:

7,500+

Number of schools:

21 primary
1 secondary

26 by the end of the academic year

Location:

South of England

(Bournemouth, Hampshire, West Sussex, Isle of Wight and East Sussex)

What does being match-fit look like for trusts?

When thinking about trust growth and alignment, I often come back to the idea of getting 'match-fit': getting the foundations of your trust strong, scalable and sustainable. Being match-fit is a headspace — it's about acknowledging that growth creates work. You can't just bring on new schools and just hope that they know what they're doing. It takes time. It takes effort. You've got to induct people properly into the systems, processes and structures of your trust. To do this successfully, it is vital that you have good systems and processes in the first place. Clunky systems equal clunky growth.

You've got to enable the conversation to then ask where the Trust adds the value to incoming and current schools. When you're a smaller trust, you're much more able to do work for your schools on their behalf. When you're 20 schools, you can't operate in the same way. To me, the 'match-fit' mindset is delivering value with intention, and being able to do so at scale, instead of adding further admin resource which ultimately has limited impact on children's outcomes. The idea of alignment is critical to providing that foundation for growth, as it enables trust leadership to bring on and provide for schools efficiently and effectively.

I use the word 'alignment' over 'centralisation' because centralisation sounds more like something we impose at trust-level. And I also think that the centralisation message situates the central team as the single point of failure if things go wrong, opposed to collective ownership. The word 'alignment' more successfully encompasses how we work at DCAT, which is in partnership with our school leaders. We make sure the decisions we make and processes we decide on are a product of co-creation. That not only helps with buy-in but means the decisions themselves are more effective as local knowledge is invaluable. This is the considered part – consideration which our schools appreciate.

I would argue, then, that growth necessitates alignment. Whilst you could operate a 20+ school MAT with limited alignment, I would question its effectiveness. It comes down to smarter working. The bigger you grow as a trust, the more closeness you inevitably lose with your schools. You need to be able to get information, data and insight at your fingertips, not through twenty different conversations. And it needs to be the same data, measured in the same way, otherwise it's not meaningful.

Getting the foundations right

It's never a one-size-fits-all in terms of 'when' to align. Looking back, I would have aligned many of the things we did at 12 schools, like safeguarding and MIS, when we were at four. What we had to do is grow and effectively change all of our internal organs and how they work at the same time, which made the process more painful than it needed to be. My learning from that is to align when you're on the precipice of growth. That way you can lay your foundations, and not have to unravel your past work when you realise that the unaligned systems that worked for five schools don't work for ten.

But where do you start? First things first is to appoint someone to spearhead the vision and project — it will need that executive direction. Direction that understands that aligning systems has a driving purpose. A purpose in our case that it is enabling us as a trust to realise our vision of helping every child to achieve their God-given potential. At your peril consider any alignment in isolation. Then, it's the systems. People and processes should follow after that. You can have the best will in the world, alignment of people and their thinking, but if your systems are already clunky, then the foundations are already cracked. At DCAT, our safeguarding, MIS, finance and assessment systems are all aligned.

It's only once those powerful tools are embedded then you can think about, and accurately perceive, where you as a trust can add value. You've got to be able to have a handle on the billion and one bits of data flowing between schools and the central team, to harvest the data from it and hence create meaningful insight. Only then can you effectively drive school improvement across so many schools. That's why systems have to come before people and processes; or rather: that's why systems have equal weight as people and process. Your vision will not be successful if you are not on the same page and working from a single source of truth

The shift to autonomous centralisation

Of course, there's still a change management piece to be done around aligning systems. There will always be pushback when you're moving to something new, especially when schools have been using a piece of software for however many years. But that's where the alignment mindset piece comes in, and thinking of alignment as a partnership and culture, rather than something that's enforced. We're not just implementing a new system, we're saying, 'this is why we're doing it' and 'this is the impact it's going to have.' We don't shy away from the fact that it's going to be bumpy and work with our schools to pace change in the context that suits them.

> "You can only support your schools if you're able to work coherently across them all."

> "The idea of alignment is critical to providing a foundation for growth, as it enables trust leadership to bring on and provide for schools efficiently and effectively."

Naturally, the attitude towards alignment will vary from school to school and under what circumstances they joined the trust. Approximately 50% of our schools at DCAT are brokered by the DfE. We took a bit more central control and direction initially with these schools to make sure that their children are getting an effective educational diet as soon as possible. Whereas some schools are already outstanding when they come to us. With them, the approach we take is more one of alignment over time, as we can afford to showcase our value piece by piece.

More recently, what we've found is that schools are actively coming to us for direction. We have had some schools directly ask us how to manage persistent absenteeism. We were reluctant to infringe on the Head's autonomy, but they were keen to be operating within the same model as the other schools in the trust. A similar situation occurred when our schools were keen to be told which categories

to use within the safeguarding software. These are self-created centralised structures and processes, created this way because our school leaders can see the benefit in their schools of working towards the same framework and giving us consistency in reporting. If we had

turned around and said here's how to deal with persistent absences and here's your safeguarding category coding, our school leaders would have likely said that's a massive infringement. Instead, given the space to do so, they're creating centralisation autonomously.

Always adding value

It comes back to being able to deliver tangible value. As I've emphasised, that can only happen when your systems are aligned first, because you can only support your schools if you're able to work coherently across them all. But on top of this and the practical preparations needed to get 'match-fit', there needs to be conscious thought and leadership threaded throughout. If you AI-generated a MAT strategy, it would centralise everything as quickly as possible, without contextual thought, because on paper that makes the most sense. What you have to think about as a MAT leader, and have central to your thinking at all times, is the value that your trust adds back into those schools. By centralising and aligning, what are you achieving other than making your job easier? Are you having an impact on that school in its community? Only when you have the clear answers to those questions should you get started.

Standardisation — is this what makes a MAT a MAT?

Why embracing standardisation from day one helps schools truly benefit from joining a trust

Dave Leonard
Strategic IT Director - Watergrove Trust

Dave has worked in education for over twenty years providing IT support initially for a secondary school, and then for a MAT. He was a governor for twelve years and acts as an ambassador for Arbor, CEOP and the Association of Network Managers in Education. He also created and co-presents the LearningDust podcast which promotes better working relationships between teachers, techies and school leaders.

Factfile

Students:

5,000

Number of schools:

7

Location:

Rochdale

Executive summary:

- Standardisation allows schools to retain their identities while creating structures that better support all staff

- For schools to get the true benefit of joining a trust, standardisation should exist from day one

- This opens up opportunities for collaboration, support and delivering on strategy

What standardisation means to us

There's often a bit of hesitancy when it comes to the word 'centralisation.' And rightfully so, given that it can be interpreted in many different ways. Some trusts and schools alike are nervous about diving headfirst into the idea of centralisation, given its association with a loss of identity and autonomy. We prefer to refer to standardisation, which in our eyes means aligning systems and bringing processes into the central team, while actively encouraging schools to maintain autonomy in the contexts that make sense to them. Whether you opt to say centralised, standardised or aligned, it's important to iron out that vision upfront. At Watergrove, we aim for standardised platforms, but also actively encourage school leaders to apply local context when making decisions.

Our trust is geographically very close. Our schools are no more than half an hour from one another. That being said, there are notable differences in demographics and social makeup of the students. It's critical to us, then, that schools retain their local knowledge, identities and autonomy. They know the area, they know the parents, and, most importantly, they know the learners. It makes sense to apply that knowledge.

Why trusts should standardise from day one

We're always thinking about what the purpose of joining a trust is and what benefit being a part of our trust brings to our schools. I initially joined Watergrove at the same time as one of our secondary schools before becoming part of the central team. From a central team perspective, having standardised systems and processes best enables us to provide high quality support and facilitates the creation of groups of staff from across our schools to share experiences of using our systems. With that in mind, I would say that standardising from day one — as soon as one school joins another to become a trust — is the most sensible option, although budgetary constraints often mean that we have to wait until the end of a contract before doing so. Having that shared pool of expertise and being part of a community is one benefit of being in a trust — it's what makes a MAT a MAT. It makes sense in terms of economies of scale, but also in terms of culture. And, most importantly, that doesn't mean taking away the identity or autonomy of schools.

So what does that look like at Wategrove? We always try to make decisions that offer the greatest benefit to the schools and, in turn, the trust.

> "Having that shared pool of expertise and being part of a community is one benefit of being in a trust — it's what makes a MAT a MAT."

We have certain core functions that when a school joins us we insist that they take on: Google Workspace, our cloud based telephony solution, our filters and firewalls, our finance package and most importantly, our MIS. These are the non-negotiables, because it has to be that for a trust of any size, you're working on the same platforms to allow efficient sharing of information and proper communication. And I say proper, but I also mean safe and effective. Having those standardisations across all schools means that we can be sure we're protecting all 5000 of our children.

Having standardised systems and processes in place obviously makes support a lot easier — it means fewer systems to keep track of and to train staff on; but from a more strategic perspective, the ability to view information consistently across multiple schools is something that we now take for granted. It seems inefficient to operate in any other way. How could you otherwise be sure you were comparing apples with apples? The MAT MIS function of Arbor allows us to look at data from each of the schools individually or combined, and know that we're looking at a true picture. We can both push information out to and gather information from schools, in good faith that the information is consistent and

meaningful. Similarly with Google Workspace, using this tech has allowed us to be very efficient and smart in our working practices and how we share information. Both of these tools mean we can become more efficient and make better decisions based on shared data. That's what standardisation is all about, not, for example, having the same uniform for the sake of appearances.

Opening the doors to collaboration

This discussion is best exemplified in centralising a process like Single Central Record — something with 'Central' in its name will always be a good place to start! Having this supported by standardised cloud systems has had a significant impact for us. Our Central Team works closely with our School Business Managers to ensure that local knowledge of our school community is captured. We store the information in our MIS, which means we know it's stored accurately and thoroughly. It's easy for our HR team to ensure that everything is checked, because all our schools are on the same system, and that gives confidence back to the schools who know that something that is of critical importance is taken care of in advance of any scrutiny. It also minimises the chance of errors which you get with storing data in multiple places. We were

finding previously that schools held information in spreadsheets or in SIMS, often having to run multiple reports in order to surface what they needed. It was anything but a Single Central Record. Plus, CSR requirements are always being tweaked based on the latest updates to Keeping Children Safe in Education and Ofsted frameworks, so it's important that both our systems and processes are dynamic enough to accommodate all new specifications and legal requirements. Having those strong data and information sharing systems standardised means that we're all singing from the same hymn sheet.

And that really makes a difference in schools too. When my secondary school joined the trust, there was a feeling of change, and in some cases a fear of this

change, but it also opened up opportunities for collaboration. It felt like a shift from a single school to a real sharing of expertise — and that's what standardisation has brought us. It's the ability for schools to have access to their own experts rather than having to buy that in from elsewhere, because for a standalone primary, working under the local authority, they will get certain things provided by the LA, but they won't have access to people with specialist knowledge within their organisation. As the trust grows and centralises, it allows us to employ people in more specialist roles which further grows this pool of expertise. We should all be driving towards collaboration as this is what will get the best results for the young people in our schools. We're stronger as a collective.

> "Having those strong data and information sharing systems standardised means that we're all singing from the same hymn sheet."

From filing cabinet to The Learning for Life framework

How the alignment of student information across our trust gives us the right insight at the right time

Executive summary:

- Schools collect an immense amount of information – how do you slice this information to make it useful?

- Marches introduced the Learning for Life Framework, a way of visualising student data across all facets of school life

- This centralised idea means the right people can access the right level of information at the right time

Andy Lowe
Director of Information Management and Attendance at Marches Trust

Andy joined the Marches Academy Trust in 2011 as an Attendance Officer at Marches School and quickly used his previous experience in systems and information management to gain promotion to the School Improvement Team. This has enabled Andy to support the schools in improving information flow and reduce the number of IT packages in use resulting in driving efficiency. Andy now supports all schools across the Trust with student attendance, systems and information flow.

Factfile

Students:

6,250

Number of schools:

5 primary
5 secondary
1 special

Location:

Shropshire

It starts with defining the data

Across any trust, there are hundreds of people collecting data every day. Sometimes people won't even know why they're collecting it, but they do it regardless. Other times, this information will end up in siloed spreadsheets, built by and accessible to only a small group of people.

Centralisation to me is more than making sure everyone is using the same systems. It's about defining what data is important for the trust to gather, so that they can then improve learning and drive efficiencies — do what a trust is designed to do. Part of this process has been getting people to think about what data they want to see and how it will help them, rather than just asking whether we have the data or not. That's what the centralisation is, it's the defining. It's knowing what you're collecting, deciding how you're going to display it, and determining how you're going to use it to drive change. And that's important for inspections too, whether that be MAT reviews from the government or Ofsted. Being able to provide that information quickly and easily is really important.

At the Marches Academy Trust, we've always had the data we needed from all of our schools, but we knew we wanted to access it more easily, understand it better, and do more with it. What evolved from this goal was the analogy of a three draw filing cabinet. The bottom draw contains all the information from all of our schools. The middle draw is the information that is useful to report on for trustees and executives, presented in a way that means they don't have to spend time rooting around — that's where a trust dashboard would come in. The top drawer is the data we visualise in Power BI, so extremely top-level.

From filing cabinet to framework

One of our ever-evolving projects is called the Learning for Life Framework. About three years ago, I was working on integrating attendance into the activity that goes on in the school, because, previously, our attendance officers were going in schools and saying, what's SEND done about this child? What's teaching and learning done about this child? What's safeguarding done about this child? We were all working in silos. I started designing a system that linked attendance with everything else that goes on in our schools. I happened to be talking to the Director of Inclusions, who described a framework she was

"That's what the centralisation is, it's the defining. It's knowing what you're collecting, deciding how you're going to display it, and determining how you're going to use it to drive change."

working on for SEND and safeguarding; we suddenly realised we were trying to create the same thing. So the light bulb went on and we said, let's join attendance into inclusions, into SEND, into safeguarding and align that with teaching and learning. This way, we could have a universal picture of each child — the same process in each school. In reality, all those elements of a child's education experience are interlinked, so why not present them as such?

In the model which we subsequently created, if something goes wrong for a child across one or multiple of these pillars, they then get moved to something called The Wave. The Wave is our way of visualising which students are priority and why. There's different stages, which require different actions, whether this be an in-person chat or something more serious like considering a suspension. We built The Wave through our central MIS. Interventions mirror interventions and actions

within teaching and learning, within safeguarding, within attendance. And that all pulls together into a Wave report in Custom Report Writer, meaning the right people can see the information at the right time.

The great thing about The Learning for Life Framework is that whilst it's a central idea, the schools manage each of their Waves individually, so they can still bring that individual knowledge to the students. We can push down the user defined fields from Arbor, and it can put all feedback into our trust-wide Power BI dashboard. That means we can serve the purpose of centralisation, to drive efficiencies and provide a framework for schools to operate, without removing that crucial context and local knowledge that schools rightfully value. And at the same time, we can surface that key information to our central team and board.

The impact of the framework

Again it comes back to the filing cabinet idea. What we were interested in was the middle drawer — it has a slice of what's happening for every child. The bottom drawer has all the information, and the top drawer is the top-level output. When I showed the data from the Learning for Life Framework and The Waves in Power BI to our CEO, she said they'd never had this sort of insight at their fingertips before. Now she can see not only where issues are arriving in schools and what section this falls into, but also what the schools are doing about it. We have different

visualisations, like a heatmap based on where students live. From a central perspective, that's been really useful because we're now able to scrutinise that level of detail.

Despite all its benefits to both schools and trust, this sort of framework isn't something that can just be introduced. Like anything to do with centralisation, it takes time and planning. I'd say it's also important to understand the difference between information and data management, particularly in schools. For me, someone with more background in information management is able to translate information into a language that people understand and to take a step back from the weeds of the data. You're wired to ask the right questions: what do we need, where are we getting it, is it sustainable, does it have legs, will it be accessible and understandable to the right people? And there's succession planning to think about as well.

Good information management is key to centralisation. You want your information to mean something, and you want to create joined-up working across your trust. While there's still work to be done, our Learning for Life Framework has laid the groundwork to make sure it feels like, in terms of data, we're working as one trust, not disparate schools.

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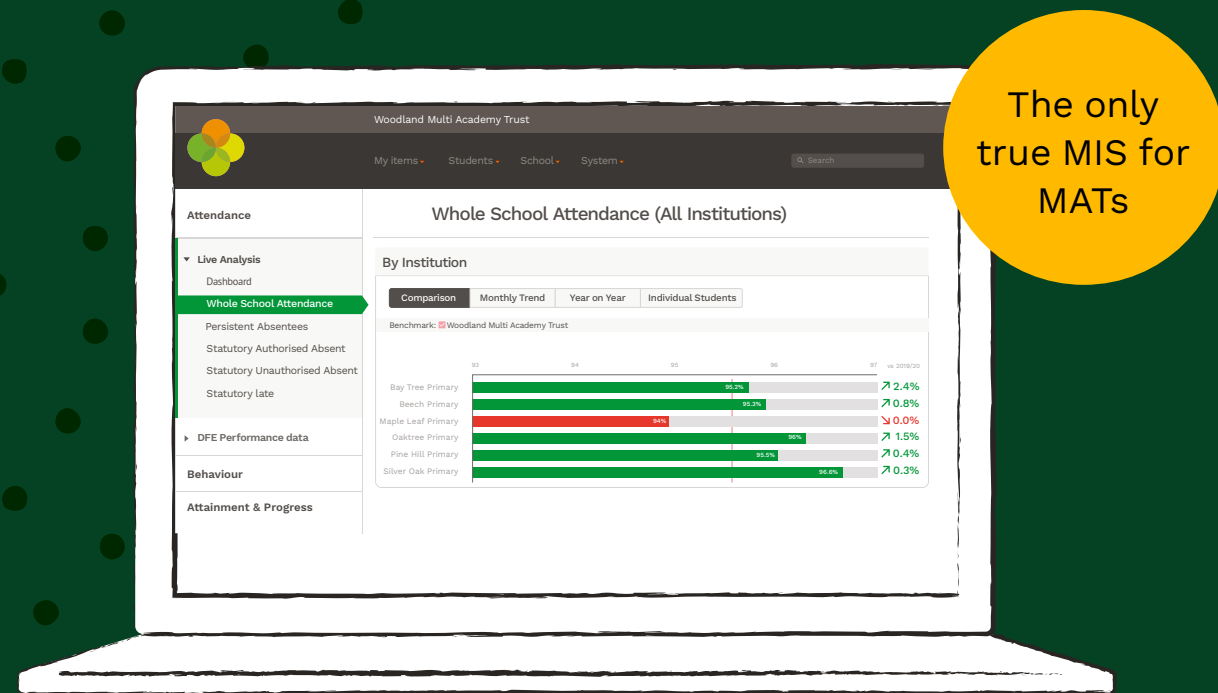
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Take action centrally

Manage key workflows centrally – from attendance to assessment policies – with Arbor's fast, intuitive MAT tools.

Collaborate and bring everyone together

Give everyone across your trust the tools to do their best work. Centralised communication makes working together easy.

Notes

Aligning systems, people and processes in your trust

We'd love to
hear from you
Get in touch

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