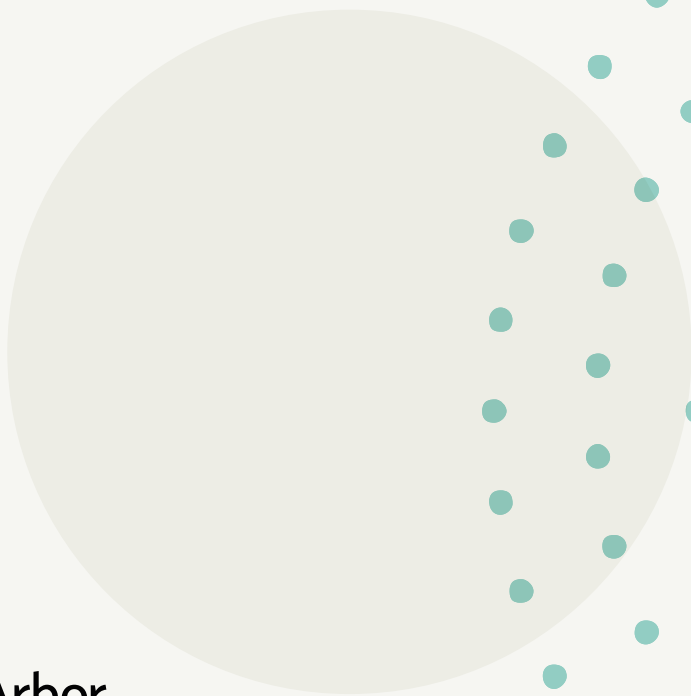# Bringing everything under one roof

Five primary schools share their experience of using Arbor to reduce workload, eliminate third party apps, and work better as a team

Arbor

A little bit about Arbor

Arbor is proud to be home to the UK's most-loved school software.

Arbor MIS
Arbor MIS helps schools of all sizes work better, with intuitive tools designed to make a difference. Chosen by over 6,000 schools and trusts, we're proud to be the UK's most popular cloud MIS.

92% say that Arbor transforms the way they work for the better

92% say that Arbor saves them time compared to legacy systems

81% say Arbor has improved how they analyse and understand their data

Arbor MIS for MATs
Used by over 450 MATs, MAT MIS is your trust's mission control. Working seamlessly with your school MIS, it gives you the tools you need to improve the way you run your trust, grow sustainably, and work as one organisation rather than many schools.

Arbor Finance
Used by over 1250 schools, Arbor Finance is the top-rated school finance system for LA Maintained schools. It makes day-to-day school accounting simple, paperless and affordable — with streamlined features just right for the size of your school.

Contents

Introduction

One, shared workspace: How Arbor is helping schools bring everything under one roof, and why it's important

The benefits of a shared workspace

In a recent survey by TeacherTapp, 46% of respondents said that teacher workload was the biggest problem facing their school.[1] At the same time, teacher vacancies are at an all time high, as record numbers of teachers are leaving the profession.[2]

At Arbor, we believe that some of these problems are made more difficult by outdated technology in schools. Legacy IT systems and processes can make it hard for teams to work together seamlessly. Data is spread out across multiple systems and spreadsheets (or even on paper), instead of all being in one place. This leads to high workload and unnecessary stress, with roles becoming isolated, and staff singing from different hymn sheets.

Our philosophy is that an MIS should be built to be used and loved by all staff — from office staff, to teachers and senior leaders. We want schools to have one shared workspace, with all systems integrating seamlessly together. That way, your MIS can do the heavy lifting when it comes to the administrative side of school life. And school staff can have the time to focus on what matters most, rather than trying to wrangle with clunky technology.

Helping primary schools work better together

In this short book, we wanted to dig into some of the ways that having a shared workspace helps school staff reduce workload and work better as a team. To do this, we've interviewed pairs of staff at primary schools, who tell us about the specific ways that having all their systems under one roof, in Arbor, has transformed the way they work.

You'll read how Arbor has helped one primary school get rid of multiple systems, how one office team has used it to measure and improve communication with parents, how it's made reporting and the census a breeze at another, and how one senior leadership team can now do much more with their data. Each of these stories is intended to shine a light on why schools work better when they have access to a shared workspace with everything they need, all in one place.

How Arbor helps

At Arbor, we're proud to work hand-in-hand with our primary schools to make sure our MIS is always supporting their unique needs, and contributing to a better working life for all staff. We hope this book shows exactly how we're making this a reality.

Got a question about how Arbor MIS could work at your primary school? Feel free to drop us a line at hello@arbor-education.com. We'd love to hear any thoughts, comments or questions you have after reading this book!

All the best,

James Weatherill

James Weatherill
CEO at Arbor

1 https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/voting-behaviour-budgets-and-if-you-could-fix-one-problem/, 2023

2 https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/teacher-vacancies-remain-high-post-covid, 2024

Using Arbor to reduce workload and work better as a team

Lucia
School Business Manager

Kelly
Office Manager and Attendance Officer

Great Chart Primary School Kent

Students:

420

Location:

Kent

Using Arbor since:

March 2021

Arbor is very parent-friendly, we've had really good feedback.

What is your role and which bits of Arbor do you use the most?

Lucia: I'm the School Business Manager, and I'm also the Arbor Champion for our school, so I know lots of the system well. I do bits of assessment, marksheets, reports, getting things set up for September and generally help people with what they need.

Kelly: I'm the Office Manager but I also do the role of Attendance Officer. I use it for a lot of reports for attendance, admissions. I like all the reports you can get, bespoke or ready-to-go. There's so many more options than in our last system.

Has Arbor helped you get rid of third-party systems?

Lucia: We used to have a system for our parents' evenings, parents app, payments for things like uniform sales, another app for dinner money, clubs and trips. Obviously that's all on Arbor now. There are so many systems when you think back and we used to have to manage it all. Now it's streamlined, our information is in one place and it saves us money as well!

Does Arbor help you work better as a team?

Kelly: Yes, 100%, it helps me collaborate with the rest of the Office Team. Having communications in one place is key. When you're updating people's details, we used to have different apps, so you'd have to update three different systems, whereas now, because everything is all under one roof, it's just there when you need it. And most of the time, parents can do it themselves, which is much better. Things like phone numbers, email addresses.

Another good example is that in our school, one of the receptionists has every Thursday off, so I step into her role once a week. Arbor helps me just slot into that, as I can see if there's a planned absence or anything else logged in the system, like emails to send or notes she's added — it doesn't have to be a paper trail or in spreadsheets. All I've got to do is go in there and look.

Lucia: The same for me. Where I work with another member of the team on finance, we can do everything in one place in Arbor, including reconciliations, so it definitely helps us collaborate. Again, because it is all in one place. Previously, we'd have to reach into different systems to try to, for example, reconcile the money that comes into the bank and now it's just really straightforward.

Using Arbor to reduce workload and work better as a team

Can you think of any other ways Arbor has helped improve your ways of working as a school?

Kelly: Arbor means I'm just not chasing people all the time, and it's better for safeguarding. If I think about the attendance side of my role, I love the fact you can send a text message to the guardians of all the pupils who aren't in school that day. It's the same with clubs and trips — parents can give consents on the app, which means no more paper slips.

Lucia: And contact information automatically updates across the system, so teachers can access parental numbers, medical information and contact details when and where they need, because it's cloud-based. That means they don't have to print everything before they go off-site. The parents like it too — Arbor is very parent-friendly, we've had really good feedback.

Would you say Arbor has helped reduce staff workload?

Kelly: Yes. As everyone can use Arbor, it means there's less back and forth. For example, we used to have a little filing drawer with all of the contact numbers in, and teachers would have to come down and ask, "can I have this pupil's parent's contact number?" Now they can log in and get it straight away for themselves. It saves lots of time, so it's reduced workload in that sense.

Lucia: I've had feedback from teachers that they can pull reports so much easier than they ever could before. Before Arbor, I would always get asked to do that for them. Now they can quickly and easily see for themselves who their Pupil Premium or Free School Meals children are. The same with parent consultations this week. Previously, we would have had to provide those reports, or things would get lost and the whole system was confusing. Now, as a teacher, you can see your own appointments, who is coming when, and there's no back and forth — so it cuts down on teacher workload.

What would you say to a school who was reluctant to move MIS?

Lucia: I've already shown lots of schools why they should switch! The main thing I would say to schools is that Arbor is so easy to use. If you can use the internet, you can use Arbor. In our previous MIS, everything was so complicated. Mistakes were hard to rectify, and it was harder to get simple things done. I know that schools are scared of change, but Arbor is so easy to use. You don't have to spend hours learning a new system.

Kelly: I agree. There's so little training needed — Arbor is just common sense! I would also say the support is really good.

Lucia: Definitely. With our old MIS, you could spend hours on the phone in a queue for support, over one little glitch. Now you can find the answer online, in the Help Centre or within the community. And I've met quite a few of your team face to face at different conferences as well.

If you can use the internet, you can use Arbor.

Using Arbor to transform the way we do reporting

Clare
Business Manager

Sharon
Senior Administration Officer

Hamble Primary School

Students:

358

Location:

Southampton

Using Arbor since:

June 2022

What is your role and which bits of Arbor do you use the most?

Clare: I'm a Business Manager, so at the moment I've mostly been using Arbor for clubs and trips. I used communications for the first time this morning! And it's simple, it's really easy.

Sharon: I'm the Senior Administration Officer, so I use the main database for pupils. I'm just setting up communications now so I can start to move away from parent mail for emails and communications.

How would you describe Arbor to a school who hadn't used it?

Sharon: I love Arbor, it saves me a hell of a lot of time. Reports are a breeze. Attendance reports are so much easier now, I have my demographic analysis report, my Pupil Premium reports. The drag and drop function makes it so user-friendly, and then I can choose how I want to download it, be it live or in an Excel spreadsheet. With SIMS we used to have to set up how we wanted it presented to us. Then we had to go in, alter all the reports, resave it all, to print it off as something different. I used to hate the way it did reports — they were clunky, difficult and awkward.

Census was a breeze too — it was so easy to get everything on, just brilliant. It's seamless, it's clear, it's easy to use. I absolutely would wholeheartedly recommend it.

Would you say Arbor has given you better visibility over your data?

Sharon: Yes, without a doubt. I know where my data is. It's easy to find. I can manipulate my data in a much easier way. There are strings of data that I like — I love the demographics feature because it's all just there. I can just chop and change my parameters and it's done. I couldn't do it that easily with SIMS. It was just like pulling teeth sometimes. So the fact that I can pull so many different things in so many different ways is ideal, perfect.

How would you say other members of staff feel about Arbor?

Sharon: The teachers really like it. I used to get questions like "can you run me a report? Can you search this? Can you find this for me?" It was a complete epiphany when we showed the teachers how they could pull up their own class list and do X, Y or Z. There was a moment of "oh my goodness, we can all do this." The fact that their registers are easily done one, meals are easily done, assessment is easily done — and it's all there at their fingertips.

Clare: Yes, it's a lot easier where teachers can do their own things on it, where they don't have to rely on the office anymore, which takes our workload off, which is good because we often have a lot on!

What advice would you give to schools who are thinking about moving MIS?

Clare: I've got experience with several different MIS, both in the cloud and otherwise. In my experience, you get out what you put in. We really made sure we were ready as a school by laying the foundations right. We wanted to make sure that it was smooth for our teachers but also our parents, because parents don't like change.

One of the selling points of Arbor for parents was that you won't have to have all of these separate apps. We can have it all in one place, can do it on the web, you can do it just here online on your phone. So that was the point. They wouldn't have to switch between one and the other and get confused as to which one it was in. And we released it in little bits to them, partly for us because we wanted to make sure we did one job properly, not three jobs half as well.

What would you say to a school who wanted to stay with their current MIS?

Clare: I often say to my husband, who works in another school, "why haven't you got Arbor?" No system is perfect, and we're still finding the best way to make it work with our school, but the pupil side is really good. I really like the look and feel of it. We wouldn't go back to our old system.

Sharon: I've already tried to convert a couple of schools. I can't tell you enough how much time and workload we've saved. I'm always happy to embrace new technology, especially when it makes my job easier. And so far Arbor has done that. I haven't had to spend hours printing out forms for new registrations to fill in. Then I haven't had to input them all because that used to take me nearly a week across the summer to put by hand. I can quickly look to see what parents have added, whether they've added their doctor surgery or some other information, and then easily follow it up. Job done.

It's seamless, it's clear, it's easy to use. I absolutely would wholeheartedly recommend it.

Using Arbor to make our data more meaningful

Tamara
Year 6 teacher and Maths leader, upper KS2 leader

Tim
Headteacher

Cornerstone Primary School

Students:
335

Location:
Fareham

Using Arbor since:
2022

It's going to save you time and workload, and join up your school's processes.

What is your role and which bits of Arbor do you use the most?

Tamara: I'm a Year 6 teacher, upper Key Stage Two leader and Maths leader. As a teacher, I use the register everyday, but I also look at the attendance across our different phases, especially for those students who have under 90%. I also regularly use Assessments and formative tracking, looking at data over time, progress over time, average marks. And we use that to inform the next steps within the classroom and how we're making sure we fill some of those gaps. So I use Arbor to look at trends and take action with those trends, as well as just doing my everyday tasks.

Tim: I'm the Headteacher. Similarly, I use Arbor a great deal to look at Assessments — that's particularly useful when we're having pupil progress meetings. I also look a lot at whole school attendance, drilling down in particular groups and doing comparisons with the national percentage on Arbor. I'm actually in the middle of finalising my Headteacher Report for this term, and having the data at my fingertips has been really useful for that.

How has Arbor changed the way you work as a school?

Tim: It's about having streamlined processes and data visibility. For context, we opened in 2013 with only two classes and we've grown as a school. At that time, we were using about ten or twelve different systems. What we've been trying to do since is consolidate everything into one of three bundles: Arbor, CPOMS and Microsoft Teams. We're all about driving time efficiencies and being forward thinking when it comes to technology. We're a Microsoft Showcase school and keen to show, both locally in Hampshire but also nationally, how technology can be used for the better from a primary school perspective. Arbor plays a role in how we're driving those efficiencies.

Systems like Arbor have everything built in one, shared space. I'd say it's going to save you time and workload, and join up your school's processes. We've got everything from school lunches, communications, registers and assessments sat within the Arbor infrastructure, which really just simplifies everything from my point of view as a Headteacher, but also in the office. It's in a different league to what we were using before.

Using Arbor to make our data more meaningful

How does Arbor save you time?

Tamara: Once you've got the data in Arbor, you don't have to spend time generating percentages or spotting trends — Arbor does that for you. For example, the average mark over time is automatic. You can look at a list of your pupils and it ranks them top to bottom. And what's great is that you can take action with that data easily. The data also then feeds forward, so when we get to the end of the year and are looking for trends and patterns in domains, all that information is there for you.

Say you're looking at maths, number and place value across the school, I'm not having to look at everybody's assessment journey across the school to see what their number and place value is. Instead, the information is already sorted. You can look at pupil groups as well, like SEN, so you can really drill into the different demographics. It's saving time in terms of data calculation, but also means we can do more with the data.

Tim: I think there are lots of examples where we've been able to drive efficiencies, but it mostly comes down to housing that data in one place. For example, last year, we were able to save at least half the time we would usually take to write reports over the summer by using Arbor's Assessment and Reports functionality to generate our end of year reports. Where we've been inputting reading, writing and maths assessments, Arbor generated the reports for us, rather than staff having to retype it.

Has Arbor increased data visibility?

Tim: Yes. I can quickly access ongoing class teacher data, and can easily drill down into trends. The fact that it's live and on a shared platform and can do all that drilling down, whether it's domains or groups, just means there's no having to wait on one another.

Tamara: From a staff point of view, the data visibility has improved because other staff know anybody can access it at any time. It increases accountability. Also, we no longer have separate Excel spreadsheets. It's also easier because everything is in one place and we all know how to use the system well. So, when we do our registers morning and afternoon, assessments are right there at the top.

What would you say to a school who hasn't moved yet?

Tamara: From a teacher's perspective, I like not having to log into multiple systems several times a day — everything I need is there. Or, if a child's absent and they've got an appointment or off sick, I can instantly see why. The information is right in front of me, when I need it. I don't have to chase up that information — that saves me conversations, which saves me time.

Tim: From a Headteacher's point of view, SIMS was a tricky system to use. Arbor is much quicker, more flexible and much more user-friendly. When we were using SIMS, there were about three office staff who were using the system. I rarely used it because it was so frustrating: I couldn't find my way around it or it wouldn't let me log in — it wasn't telling me what I needed to know. I was having to email those key users to get that information for me, they had to wait for SIMS to work for them, and email me back — sometimes three or four days. Now, I'm finding the same information for myself in about five minutes.

> From a staff point of view, the data visibility has improved because other staff know anybody can access it at any time.

Using Arbor to streamline our processes

Liz
School Manager

Sally
Principal

Beacon View Primary Academy

Students:

355

Location:

Portsmouth

Using Arbor since:

July 2020

By having everything in one place, like wraparound care trips, in-app messaging, and parents evenings, Arbor is helping us to go paperless, as well as making our processes more streamlined.

What is your role and which bits of Arbor do you use the most?

Liz: My role as School Manager is largely based around HR, administration and communication throughout the school and beyond. That covers things like staff leave, wellbeing and parental engagement. It's not just about sending comms, but having an overview — knowing what's been sent, what the content is, and making sure that we're not overloading parents. It means I largely use Arbor for communications.

Sally: As Principal, what I use most in Arbor is the reports, especially custom reports, but also contacting parents and attendance. I previously worked in a secondary school, so I'm very familiar with legacy MIS — from writing timetables to setting up exams.

Have you been able to eliminate any third party apps since moving to Arbor?

Sally: As a school, we've just started using Arbor for lunches, online payments — we're always looking at more ways to make the most of the system. We've been able to get rid of communication apps, payment apps, assessment tools, classroom management tools — it's really nice to have everything in one, shared space. We've kept CPOMS because it works best for the context of our school.

How has Arbor changed the way you work as a school?

Liz: Sally and I are both 'process people.' We look for the shortest, most effective process — and Arbor helps us to do that in many ways. My project has been to encourage parental uptake of Arbor for breakfast and after school bookings. We used to have an old-fashioned paper system — that leads to errors, and is time-consuming. Plus, we've been awarded green flag status as a school and using paper forms doesn't fit with our eco-promise.

By having everything in one place, like wraparound care trips, in-app messaging, and parents evenings, Arbor is helping us to go paperless, as well as making our processes more streamlined. Also, thinking about the workload of our reception staff, reducing the footfall coming through reception from filling out forms and moving it into Arbor, just makes business sense to me.

Sally: When I first joined the school, three years ago, there was an individual Word document annual report for every child — each report had to be opened, checked and updated individually. I started by moving report writing into Excel, but now we have all of that information in Arbor, in one place and have been able to do an automatic extract.

Are there any other ways having a shared workspace has been good for your school?

Liz: With Arbor, different parts of the system all speak to each other, so keeping the right people in the loop, like parents or staff, is far easier. Moving the extracurricular clubs onto Arbor has been really helpful. If there are any changes with staff absence, I can email that particular group of children that have signed up. Plus, all the registers update automatically. Previously, when it's been paper based, if there's been a change, you then have to manually type in if you email those who attend.

Another good thing about that is that when parents book onto clubs, Arbor sorts the first-come first-served element. That means there's no dispute over who got their slips in the quickest.

Sally: Now that it's all set up, we've also really been able to improve the way we do Assessments. I love the cut and paste function and being able to colour code automatically. For all the staff, it's simple for them to enter the right data in the right place. The fact that a member of staff can extract the Excel sheet and literally cut and paste a column in is hugely timesaving.

I also think the dashboard is amazing. Everything I need to see as Principal is on my front screen the minute I open it, like our attendance, and I can drill down into different groups.

Does Arbor help your school work better as a team?

Sally: Arbor definitely contributes to us working together as a team across the school. If we focus on attendance, we've taught our staff how to pull off reports for their current class for the last two years. That means they can see which children

might be a cause for concern in regard to attendance because of previous years being positive and this year less so. It helps them to spot patterns. You could say that Arbor has definitely empowered those discussions within our team.

Liz: It's also contributed to our teamwork with parents because we're making things much more transparent for them. The fact that they can see everything we're entering onto Arbor from their phones, if they've chosen to download the app, helps to build confidence in our school community.

What would you say to schools reluctant to move MIS?

Sally: There are lots of reasons why people might be nervous about change, so it would always be about identifying those blockers. I'd get schools to think about their big issues, which are often workload and wellbeing for teachers. If you take something like report writing, which is a bugbear for any teacher, I would emphasise that as Arbor is cloud-based, it means you can access it anywhere. We set up our reports before May Half Term and gave people until halfway through June to write them. Some of our staff did one or two reports a night for the whole of that time from the comfort of their own home, and they didn't have to worry about data getting lost or emailing spreadsheets back and forth. It gives people that flexibility.

Liz: Yes, I would echo that — you've got to consider the positive effect on wellbeing for all your staff, and I think Arbor does that!

Everything I need to see as Principal is on my front screen the minute I open it.
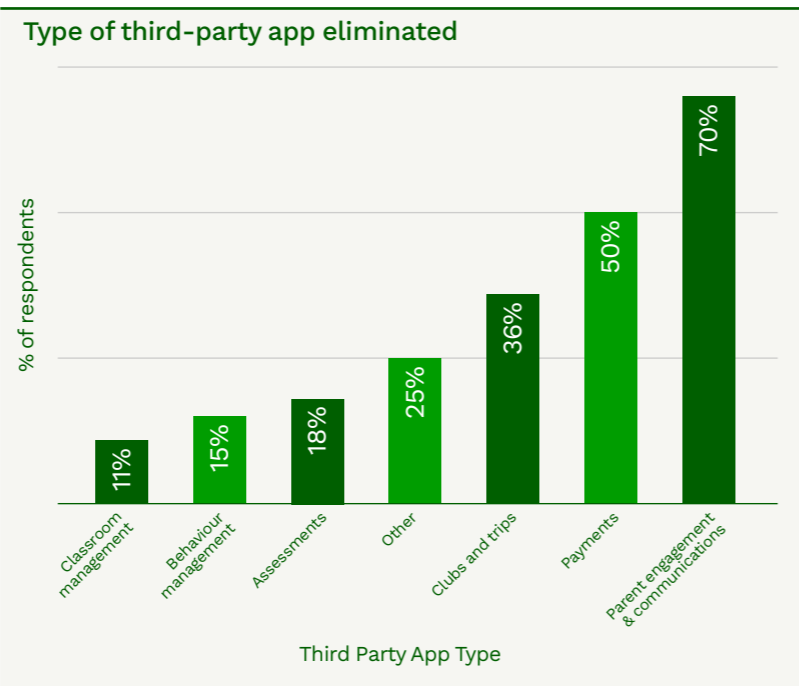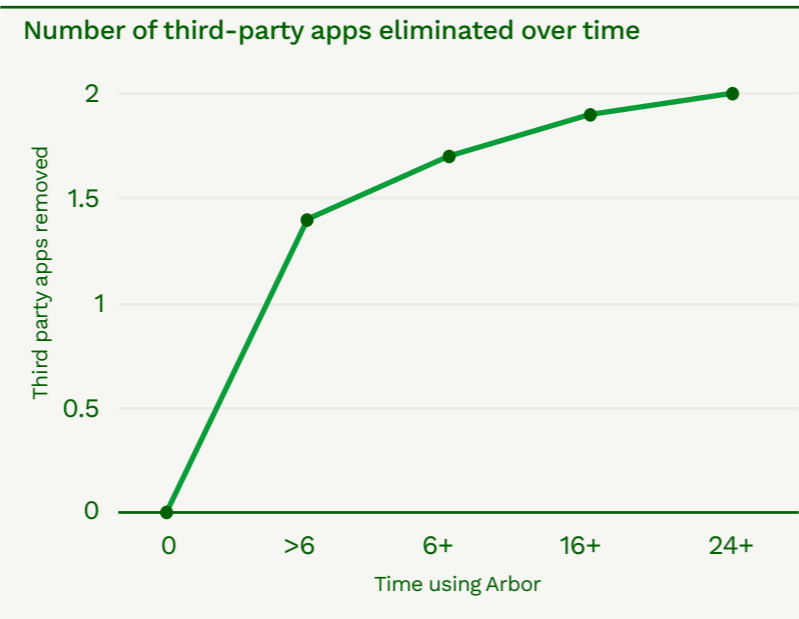
Using Arbor to save time and money

Arbor's latest research, with insight from Vaughan Primary School

Cost-saving looks different in every primary school, whether that's through streamlining operations, using less resources or becoming more efficient. But one thing is for sure — every pound and every minute in school matters, especially given the impact this has on the education workforce.

As part of our research into how Arbor can save schools money, we surveyed 338 School Business Managers, Bursars and Chief Operating Officers across MATs, primary, secondary, and special schools who are using Arbor. What we found was how these schools are saving money by replacing some third-party apps with Arbor's built-in functionality.

We found that the longer schools have been using Arbor, the more third party apps they were able to remove.

And when we asked what kind of apps these were, we found that most schools had been able to get rid of both parent communication/engagement and payments apps as a result of moving to Arbor.

Number of third-party apps eliminated over time

Type of third-party app eliminated

As part of our research, we sat down with Kirsten Beaven, School Business Manager at Vaughan Primary School, about how she saves over £20,000 a year by using Arbor.

"We carried out detailed system analysis and realised we were buying into an unnecessary amount of additional systems, simply because our previous MIS didn't support those functions that were necessary to school life: things like assessment of children's progress, school meals, receiving payments from parents, school club provision etc.

Back in February 2022, we were having to interface all these additional apps into our MIS, sometimes having to export and import continually to allow for the most up-to-date information. Not only were the additional subscriptions and applications costly, but also labour intensive from an administrative and organisational point of view.

When we looked at what we currently bought into, there was almost £20,000 worth of additional subscriptions and costs that we could effectively eliminate by moving to Arbor."

Use our checklist to see if your school or trust is using any additional third party apps that you could get rid of by using Arbor's functionality instead.

Check list

- ☐ Assessments
- ☐ Reporting tool
- ☐ Parent communications
- ☐ School communications
- ☐ Parent app
- ☐ Clubs and trips
- ☐ Payments
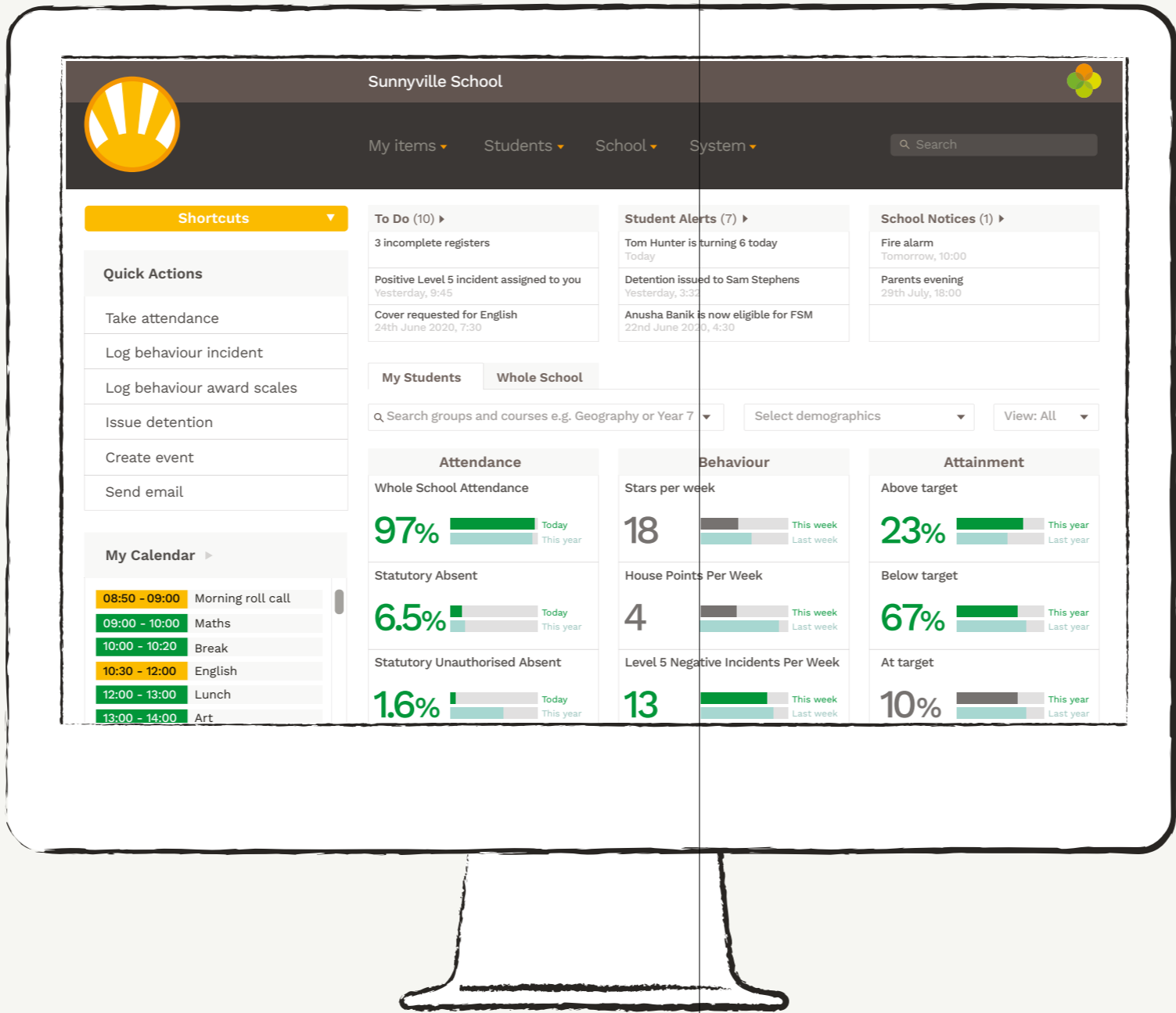- ☐ Behaviour management
- ☐ Classroom management
- ☐ Registers

All the features busy primaries need to thrive, out of the box

As soon as we migrate your data, you can get going on your essential daily tasks.

- ✓ Take and manage attendance
- ✓ Access pupil, staff and guardian records
- ✓ Complete the census
- ✓ Manage emergency procedures
- ✓ Send daily communications
- ✓ Manage meals and payments
- ✓ Report on pupil progress
- ✓ Keep parents engaged and informed

Intuitive Dashboards
Get simple, at-a-glance overviews of key performance measures

Attendance
Lightning-fast digital registers – no more paper!

Report Builder
Build reports using any data point in Arbor. Schedule them to run daily, weekly, or termly

Easy Assessments
Track your pupils' formative progress through school

My Classroom
Create seating plans and manage your class

Progress
Track summative progress

Behaviour
Record, reward and report on behaviour

Parent and student portals
Log in to see updates and make payments

Communications
Send and receive SMS and email and search all school comms

SEN
Assign and report on SEN

Integrations
Connect third-party systems to Arbor

Payments
Online and offline payments for meals, clubs and trips

Arbor App
Communicate with parents on the go

Census made simple
Complete your census quickly and easily without repeated resubmissions

Clubs and trips
Record attendance, monies collected and balances outstanding. No need to use paper!

Admin automation
Automatic escalation of tasks and chasing via email and SMS

Safeguarding
Securely permissioned access to child protection data

Group/LA data returns
Auto-submit central returns

Timetabling
Fully functional TimeTabler add-on

Live link to Excel
Automatically sync your data to Excel or Google Sheets for simpler number crunching

Calendar
School, staff and pupil calendars, linked to your mobile

Meals
Choose and manage meals across the school

Cover
Automatic messaging, scheduling and management

Interventions
Create interventions and monitor them over time

Staff and HR
Keep track of staff absences, appraisals and objectives

Flexible assessments
Create assessment frameworks that fit your pupils' unique needs

Student profile
See holistic information about a child all in one place, including notes, behaviour and comms

Personalise behaviour recording & escalation
Record, reward and report on behaviour in a way that suits your pupils

Notes

Bringing everything under one roof

We'd love to
hear from you
Get in touch

E   hello@arbor-education.com
T   0208 050 1028
W www.arbor-education.com

Arbor