

Creating a Joined-Up Secondary School

Why you should look for an MIS
which is built for collaboration
— and how Arbor does just that



About Arbor

Arbor helps schools and MATs of all sizes work more easily and collaboratively, with intuitive tools designed to make a difference

Arbor MIS

Arbor MIS gives schools the tools they need to work better today and be ready for tomorrow. Used by 3,000 schools and 300 trusts across the country, it's the fastest growing MIS today.

Arbor MIS for MATs and Groups

See the bigger picture with the only true MIS for MATs. More than just a dashboard, Arbor MIS for MATs is custom-built for better collaboration across your trust, with tools that make working together easier at every level.

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Introduction



What do we mean by a joined-up school?

Collaboration is often talked about as one of the key elements of a successful school. But legacy IT systems and processes can make it hard for teams to work together seamlessly. Accessing data is difficult, reporting is complex and over-customisable, and student data is spread across multiple systems instead of being in one place. All of this leads to high workload and unnecessary stress, with roles becoming isolated, and staff singing from different hymn sheets. Crucially that means important information about students falls between the cracks.

As Arbor's Head of Product, something I often hear from schools who move to Arbor MIS is that it's helping their team work more efficiently and effectively together — that they're working in a more "joined up way". That idea is fundamental to the way we build Arbor. 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 — giving schools one shared workspace to support each other and encourage collaboration.

Strategies to join up people, policies and systems at your secondary school

From improving safeguarding to overhauling interventions, in this short book, we wanted to dig into some of the ways Arbor helps leaders to create a more joined-up school. To do this, we've interviewed pairs of staff at secondary schools who tell us about the specific way Arbor has helped them work better together in their roles.

You'll read how Arbor is helping one secondary school think about their data in a new way, how it's transformed another's timetabling and SEN, how it helped to find the missing link between three roles in one academy, and how it's improved the efficacy of interventions at another. Each of these stories is intended to shine a light on why schools work better when they have access to a shared workspace — something that's become all the more important in a post-Covid world.

How Arbor helps

At Arbor, we're proud to work hand-in-hand with our secondary 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 secondary school? Feel free to drop us a line at hello@arbor-education.com, or give our team a call on 0208 050 1028. We'd love to hear any thoughts, comments or questions you have after reading this book!

All the best,

Hilary

Hilary Aylesworth
Head of Product

Using Arbor to collaborate on SEN provision



Jon

Droitwich Spa High School

Age range:

12–18

Location:

Worcestershire

Students:

1,477

Joined Arbor:

January 2020

Type:

Academy Converter



Mandi

For us, every minute of every kid's day is accounted for properly in the MIS. It goes without saying how important that is in terms of the speed of response.

**The collaboration story:
Deputy Headteacher and
SEN Assistant**

What's your role and how do you use Arbor?

Jon: I'm the Deputy Headteacher at the high school, so one of my main jobs is doing the timetable and making sure that all of those timetables are up to date.

Mandi: I'm the SEN Admin Assistant. One of my jobs is timetabling our Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to classes, as well as running interventions.

Has Arbor helped you to work together more easily?

Jon: Yes. It was impossible to get a decent SEN timetable from our previous MIS — trying to see where a teaching assistant or LSA was on the timetable at a particular moment in time was horrendously cumbersome. Between us, Amanda and I have worked well together to harness the power of Arbor and turn this around.

Mandi: Since we've introduced Arbor, we can now work together. I can move the LSAs and students around on the timetable and change rooms and timings, which automatically populates in the students' and LSAs' timetables. Before,

Jon and I were constantly having to update the timetable piece by piece. Arbor has also helped with our annual reviews because I've been able to actually print off a timetable that includes which LSA was where, rather than having to physically write where each LSA was and what sessions they did.

Would you say Arbor helps communication between you both?

Jon: I'd almost go as far to say, and I mean this in the nicest possible way, that we don't have to communicate with each other! For example, if I've just had a meeting with the pastoral office about a child, I no longer have to call Mandi to see if there's an LSA with them. I can simply check. So actually, it's helped to save time as well.

One of the things we designed Arbor to do is surface the right data, at the right time, to each user. Do you feel it's easier to answer questions with that data to hand?

Mandi: Yes, definitely, it's very easy. For example, an LSA will ask where they're needed — I'm able to pull up the timetable and tell them straight away. It's at my fingertips. Before Arbor, this was on an Excel spreadsheet that I had to update constantly. Now, the changes are immediate, and will automatically update on the student's app, which is key.

Jon: I’m not an SEN expert, but I would imagine that we’re not unusual in how regularly these things need updating — five or six times a week. It’s such a fluid situation, with kids going in and out of interventions, so it’s important that these constant changes are reflected in the timetable automatically. The flexibility of changing the timetable inside Arbor is incredibly powerful.

And it’s better for safeguarding as well. In our previous MIS, when we had a student coming out for intervention, it would be recorded on a spreadsheet because it was such an arduous task to do it in the MIS. That just isn’t good enough. Now, for us, every minute of every kid’s day is accounted for properly in the MIS. It goes without saying how important that is in terms of the speed of response.

Can you think of any other manual processes that you’ve been able to get rid of, or places where your workload has been reduced?

Mandi: Being able to add notes and link the documents in the Student Profile — you can get an instant and clear understanding of what’s going on with that student. So I find that very useful. And, of course, the access arrangements are great in Arbor. They help the communication between SEN and the

exams officer. We produced a live report that goes onto our staff portal, so all teachers can actually have easier access to this live information.

Jon: I could talk to you until tomorrow about things that Arbor’s helped with. But for me, it’s not about how much time it saved me, it’s about how much more powerful your impact can be. It means I can do better, smarter, more insightful things.

Could you tell us about how Arbor helped your school during Covid?

Jon: I dread to think what we’d have done without Arbor. From a systems development perspective, it was impressive. Compared to our old MIS, it’s so refreshing to see that constantly evolving product and genuine commitment to getting things done quickly if it can make a really big impact. We’ve carried on things like virtual parents evenings — I couldn’t believe how easy it was to integrate Arbor to a third party. It’s great to think, there’s probably a better way to do this and Arbor can help. Our experience has been that Arbor listen. You never, never thought that before — there was no point asking for anything from our old MIS. You can’t really knock it.

I could talk to you until tomorrow about things that Arbor’s helped with. But for me, it’s not about how much time it saved me, it’s about how much more powerful your impact can be. It means I can do better, smarter, more insightful things.

Mandi: For me, it would be the mail merge emails. Now, we can send bulk emails out with our individual education plans attached to them; we used to print them, as well as things like letters, and send them out. That’s now a big time saver for me.

Would you say that Arbor has helped you to create a more joined up school?

Mandi: Absolutely. Knowing where a student should be, and everyone having that information — it’s right there in front of them.

Jon: In a heartbeat. Moving to Arbor is one of the best things we’ve done in the last few years. It won’t change the school by itself. You’ve still got to lead the staff and the kids, but it’s night and day different to what we were dealing with before because it makes that so much easier.

Using Arbor to collaborate on admissions and exams



Laura Cooke



Tim Waites



Kate Baxter

Baxter College

Age range:

11–18

Location:

Worcestershire

Students:

1,349

Joined Arbor:

March 2018

Type:

Academy Converter

We were finding that different people were recording things in different ways, and it was creating confusion. This meant that some things were missed. That doesn't happen anymore.

The collaboration story: Deputy Headteacher, Exams Officer and Data Manager

Tim: I'm Deputy Head and my major roles are around curriculum, so I timetable and I do the options, as well as line managing Laura and Kate. So that brings in exams, admissions and data.

Laura: I'm Laura, Exams Officer and general dogsbody! I'm really happy with the exams part of Arbor — I think it's brilliant. Especially the seating plans.

Kate: I'm data, just everything numbers, and a general Arbor person, so even though I don't work in attendance or behaviour, I still have to know the workings of them to be able to create and manage things.

Has Arbor helped you collaborate better as a team of three?

Kate: Yes, definitely. Between the three of us we've taken on admissions, which feels like it was the missing link. Admissions is linked into the timetable and the exams students need to sit. We've all found Arbor makes it a lot easier for us to do our jobs, because normally we have to ask the question to somebody else, they go away, find the answer and come back — whereas now we're the ones answering the questions that we're asking.

Could you tell us more about how Arbor has helped you better together?

Tim: Before we took on admissions, there was a "too many cooks" issue — which made communication difficult as the information was in lots of different places. For example, a student might finish a managed move, but the message wouldn't get through to the right people. Now, we've set up a communication link, which means there's a folder for each child out on AP or managed move. It doesn't matter which member of staff is doing the meetings, they can simply drop their notes into the student's folder, which is pinned on their pastoral wall — everybody knows where it is. We know exactly where every child is, what they're doing, and who's looking after them, which means our safeguarding is just going through the roof. It's so, so much better.

The fact that the three of us can work on it together is really, really important because an in-year admission needs the data, needs the exams, and needs the timetable. That's where this collaboration works really well. Not to mention that thanks to Arbor, we know the registers are right, which means our attendance team can get on and do what they need to do. The workload has dropped because we now know where students are, what they're doing, who they're supposed to be with... and the registers reflect that.

Would you say that Arbor has helped to reduce overlap between different staff at your school?

Tim: We were finding that different people were recording things in different ways, and it was creating confusion. This meant that some things were missed. That doesn't happen anymore.

Laura: For exam entries, I used to have to ask others questions and then somebody would have to find out the answer while I waited. Now we are all part of the same system, so we know exactly where a student is, what they're doing and what exam entries I need to put in for them, which has been so helpful.

Kate: Definitely. If there's an outstanding question, we now know what we need to do to get the answer. We don't have to wait for somebody from another side of the office or another side of our school.

And do you find that you are sharing data differently as a result?

Kate: We share a lot of data with anyone who will listen! And the more people are exposed to it, the more they want to see it.

Tim: We've also got a lot of kids with complex needs, and lockdown brought in needs that we've never encountered, so it's really important that the data and

communication is timely. One of the things Arbor has allowed us to do is get quality, totally up-to-date information out there quickly. There's no lag. We're certainly getting to that point where everything is coming through the MIS. We used to have siloes, so behaviour would sit with the Head of Year, for example. Now everything sits in Arbor: attendance, their SEND, their medical records.

Laura: Yes, some of our more complex students have lots of pastoral information stored in Arbor. It is brilliant to have all that because you've got a hell of a lot of information that you can refer to at a glance.

During lockdown, many schools relied more heavily on technology to stay in touch with staff, students and parents. Can you tell us how you used Arbor during partial school closures?

Tim: Covid showed us that our processes weren't robust enough and that we weren't making the most out of Arbor. We've changed processes within the school to make sure that we strengthen the use of it.

Kate: I completely agree. Arbor's not limiting us, instead it's making our minds go: "What can we do next?"

Because Arbor naturally interlinks, you haven't got any kind of siloes. And that's allowed us all to kind of say, actually, if the system can do this, why can't we collaborate more together?

Tim: It's totally facilitating it isn't it? I think the biggest one is around admissions and students going out onto alternative provision, managed moves, or a curriculum that uses outside providers and being able to reflect all of that in their enrollment and attendance.

Kate: Yes, and it hasn't taken long. Somebody always knew where the kids were. But now, if Ofsted rang me and said, "I want to know about that child", we can go onto their Student Profile in Arbor and tell them exactly what they need to know.

Are there any other ways that having a shared workspace has benefitted your school?

Kate: We started using Arbor internally so that when a new student arrives, we can select their teachers with one click and contact the teachers to say, "you've got a new student who starts tomorrow and here is everything you need to know." Before, a teacher would have a student turn up to their lesson and wouldn't know all the information they needed.

Tim: The internal communication through the Cover module is also really good. I can be confident that the cover supervisor has had the email, and can access the registers and cover work, because it's all on Arbor. The same goes for when I teach a lesson. The important stuff is flagged and the facts are all in one place.

Laura: Teaching assistants are also using it a lot more. It's good to see everyone so proactive with it.

Kate: It's because it's so easy to use. Teachers can have confidence in the system because everything is interlinked.

Would you say that Arbor has helped to create a joined-up school?

Kate: Yes, massively. Because Arbor naturally interlinks, you haven't got any kind of siloes. Behaviour runs through communications, which runs through assessment, which runs through exams. There's no real way of seeing where one section starts and another section ends. And that's allowed us all to kind of say, actually, if the system can do this, why can't we collaborate more together?

Using Arbor to collaborate on delivering school strategy



Graham Cowgill



Thierry Brunier

Ralph Thoresby School

Age range:

11–18

Location:

Leeds

Students:

1,018

Joined Arbor:

January 2020

Type:

LA maintained school

I liken Arbor to when I got my last car — you could tell the person who designed it probably wanted to drive it.

The collaboration story: Assistant Headteacher and Data & IT Manager

What are your roles and how do you use Arbor day-to-day?

Graham: I'm the Assistant Head, so my role is centred around student progress. It's all about tracking, data collection, reporting to parents, and behaviour. One of my projects at the moment is tracking curriculum assessments. We had some departments who were doing this amazingly through Excel spreadsheets, and others where it was being done on scraps of paper. We liked in Arbor that you could create curriculums and curriculum assessments to track and formalise your base. We're at the stage now where they've just been uploaded, and they look great.

Thierry: I'm the Data and IT Manager, so I use Arbor for everything really — I'm one of the Arbor champions. My role is really in the management of the database, and finding out the new opportunities that we can use Arbor for.

Would you say that Arbor helps you to collaborate more easily?

Thierry: We have always collaborated, so that hasn't increased, but it has made it easier to communicate what we are trying to achieve. The features that we have in Arbor mean we can take what Graham is strategising, and then I can bring it to life with the team. With some systems, you're very limited to what you can actually do. Previously, I had to build things myself. So in that way, Arbor has increased what we can do and it's far easier to work on things together.

One of the reasons I thought it would be good to do this interview with Graham was because he came into our Arbor roll-out later on, having taken on assessments. We changed the way we did the reporting quite substantially and now it's constantly evolving.

Could you tell us a bit more about the ways Arbor helps you communicate better internally?

Thierry: I liken Arbor to when I got my last car — you could tell the person who designed it probably wanted to drive it. You find, with Arbor, that you're developing it in a way that makes it easier to use. There are no more spreadsheets going back and forth. On the whole, people are

getting data for themselves. The big difference is in the questions that the team ask. It went from “Can you export me a spreadsheet with x, y and z” to “Can you show me how to do this in Arbor?”, which just makes our processes more efficient.

Graham: Yes, it’s allowed me to go to Thierry with an idea and have it brought to life in Arbor. Going back to reports, if a parent now phones up and asks for some information, the staff know exactly where to go and get that data. In the past, that request would have been passed on straight away to me or Thierry. They can all do that for themselves now.

Are there any other places where Arbor has helped to reduce your workload?

Graham: We had times at the end of last year where we were trying to make sure that all the departments had the evidence that they said they had. It was difficult. We now collect that evidence solely in Arbor, which will save on workload by a considerable amount, as all the data is in one place.

Thierry: I would say it’s helped in virtually every aspect. I wouldn’t say that there’s such a thing as reducing your workload, because as soon as you have more time, it’s filled with something else. But things that were laborious tasks before are

much quicker to implement in Arbor, like setting up the assessments at the beginning of the year. Graham will ask things like ‘Are we ready for the Year 11 data collection next week?’ and the answer’s now always yes. It stays there for the entire year, too, so you can plan ahead and not have to worry about it. Instead, you can trust that everything is in its place and working.

Graham: What it means is in our free time we can say, ‘where can we use Arbor to help us next?’, or ‘how can we use it in a better way?’

Thierry: My role used to be about 80% management of the data and 20% development. It’s now the other way around. I use the live feeds an awful lot and they’re brilliant for managing live data from outside, not just into Excel but into external SQL databases and to HTML pages. That just increases what you can do, how you can do it and the ease of information flow. This means other people within the school can be using the data, rather than having bits of paper and flying around left, right and centre, which leads to things being missed.

If you missed something off a report in the past, it was quite a pain as you’d already sent everything out. Now it’s a lot easier — if I’ve missed a datapoint, I can add it with one click and bulk send out an apologetic email. It’s half an hour’s work,

My role used to be about 80% management of the data and 20% development. It’s now the other way around.

whereas it would have taken so much more time and effort before. Essentially, mistakes are far less costly.

When you had to work remotely, would you say that Arbor continued to help you work as a team?

Thierry: We only joined Arbor in January 2020, so I would say it accelerated the goals we had set in place for ourselves. It allowed us to collaborate with the entire school to manage ourselves through lockdown. So that was huge. Alongside our rollout of Teams, both systems allowed us to do a pretty amazing job in terms of keeping student learning going all the way through lockdown.

Graham: On a wellbeing and social safety aspect as well, contact with the Arbor App made it so much easier. We were doing our best to make a community effort, with food parcels and laptops being sent out. Being able to message parents so easily was a massive help.

Now, everything is in one place: the behaviour, the communications, the assessment, the reports. It seems obvious, but the more people use the system and different parts of the system, the better they become at spotting patterns across the school — all because of the accessibility and visibility of the data.

Would you say that Arbor has helped you to create a more joined up school?

Thierry: Without a doubt. It would be nice, but impossible, to take people back to three years ago and show them what it was like working with our previous MIS, just to remind ourselves of the difference. We get far fewer requests for support or reports, because all staff are finding their own way. I’ve got experience of three different MISs, and Arbor is by far the easiest to use, and for a whole series of stakeholders.

Using Arbor to collaborate on our interventions strategy



Andy Lowe

The Grove School, part of Marches Academy Trust

Age range:

11–18

Location:

Shropshire

Students:

822

Joined Arbor:

July 2019

Type:

Academy Converter



Rebecca young

Before Arbor we spent a lot of time pulling data together from different platforms.

The collaboration story: Director of Information Management and Assistant Headteacher

Can you tell me about your role?

Andy: I am the Director of Information Management and Attendance at the Marches Academy Trust.

Rebecca: I'm the Assistant Headteacher at The Grove School, which is part of the Marches Academy Trust; I oversee behaviour and rewards.

Which bits of Arbor do you use the most?

Andy: I'm constantly on Arbor. We migrated just before the pandemic and so the process so far has been to work through a full Trust migration. This has provided us with an opportunity to look at our processes in order to support driving efficiencies.

Rebecca: All of it! The main area I use in Arbor is the incident section to see how staff are logging incidents across the school and what those incidents are. I then review what follows on from that, which is where our interventions come in.

Would you say that Arbor helps you to collaborate more easily?

Rebecca: I would say that our working relationship actually formed around Arbor. Andy looks at students that have persistent absences or low attendance. Once we identify those, we can be timely with our data and analyse it in a usable way, so we can instigate interventions in a more efficient manner, rather than relying on someone to manually input that data. We've worked very closely with Arbor and each other on that. It's all about being proactive, rather than reactive. Arbor helps us to pick up some trends and pictures earlier on.

Andy: Yes, I would agree. The main project we've worked on together is the Marches Academy Trust Inclusion Framework. This is a way of drawing together all of the activity in schools by giving us a holistic picture of each child. Before Arbor we spent a lot of time pulling data together from different platforms. We brought our ideas under five pillars: learning, health and wellbeing, safeguarding, attendance and working with home. We visualised this through what we call 'The Wave', which is an analogy of trying to make sure all children are safely on the beach. It's about knowing when to call in the lifeboats, or interventions.

It comes down to visibility, accessibility and transparency.

It became completely obvious that Arbor was perfect for all of this to occur. With Arbor, we can flag things to different teams before they become an issue, which means we don't have to play catch-up. It helps us to use all of the various strands of the inclusion framework to give each other early warnings of what's happening with the child.

How are staff members using The Wave report to help them in their roles?

Andy: You can see what each child's trajectory is. You can see their disadvantage status, whether they're involved in the school's inclusions. We can easily look at what interventions each child has had so that everyone can see what has been done. In Arbor, we can use this report alongside our other information. We can see their medical conditions, demographics, SEN status etc. We've got a user-defined field for professional SEND descriptors.

Rebecca: If teachers need to tell a student about a parental meeting, all of the information is there in one place. It's useful to see all the communications that each student has had with other members of staff. It comes down to visibility, accessibility and transparency.

Can you think of any other specific examples where having a shared workspace was useful for your school?

Andy: One of the things we've been working on together is around behaviour. In The Grove School, each lesson is graded, so we created Approaches to Learning (ATL) reports which are sent to the Head, Head of Year and Raising Standards Lead three times a day. These reports are flagged with disadvantaged and Pupil Premium students. The same applies to our Senior Leadership Team who receive a report about the students who are further out on 'The Wave.' It means, if they spot something, that they can pop their head into the class and speak to the student in question. What these reports allow us to identify are classes where there are a lot of negative ATL grades. We are then able to offer support to the class teacher if needed.

Rebecca: Another example where Arbor has helped is with the notes system (pastoral, safeguarding, anxiety etc.) Having those available on one platform is so much easier when you're looking into why a student is disengaged. You can potentially notice when something is going on at home. As someone in charge of student behaviour, this is really important, especially as I can see what's already been communicated to the

With Arbor, we can flag things to different teams before they become an issue, which means we don't have to play catch-up.

student. I can go to a meeting about a student, and I don't need to spend 15 minutes trying to put all the data together — instead I'm confident that it's all there, and can be easily printed into one report.

Another thing that we've seen with Arbor is that you can see what other staff are doing, so it's really clear if they are engaging with students. It's made us more efficient, because I can see who isn't doing ATLs. It's made us more accountable, because we can see who is giving rewards etc.

How would you have kept track of this kind of data and have these up-to-date interventions before Arbor?

Andy: I don't know, but it would certainly have involved multiple Excel spreadsheets and email trails! Now, we have a clear picture in one place. Particularly in secondary schools, there can be 10% of students who take up all your time and effort. By intervening early, we can help reduce this.

Rebecca: Previously, you had to wait to speak to people about specific students. In each of the different strands — whether it's progress or inclusions, SEN, attendance — each department had their own reports. It meant creating a picture of a single student was difficult. We would only do that for specific students who were requiring monitoring as it was a slow and timely process. Now, I don't have to go and ask for information about a student — it's just there.

Would you say that Arbor has helped you to create a more joined up school?

Andy: Yes.

Rebecca: I would say so. It's brought the different departments together so we can look at each student as a whole, which is so much easier and quicker, and without the need of so many bolt-ons. So, it's made that a lot more efficient and effective.

Our secondary school MIS features

We’ve designed our MIS with tools tailored to all the different staff in your school, meaning you can work together in one shared workspace.

Office Staff

Timetabling

Integrates with best in breed timetabling software, such as Timetabler and Edval

Report Builder

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

Live Feed to Excel

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

Integrations

Connect third-party systems to Arbor

Senior Leaders

Interventions

Create interventions and monitor them over time for effectiveness

SEN

Assign and report on SEN

Safeguarding

Securely permissioned access to child protection data

Payments

Online and offline payments for meals, clubs and trips

Admin automation

Automatic escalation of tasks and chasing via email and SMS

Staff and HR

Keep track of staff absences, contracts, appraisals and objectivess

Census made simple

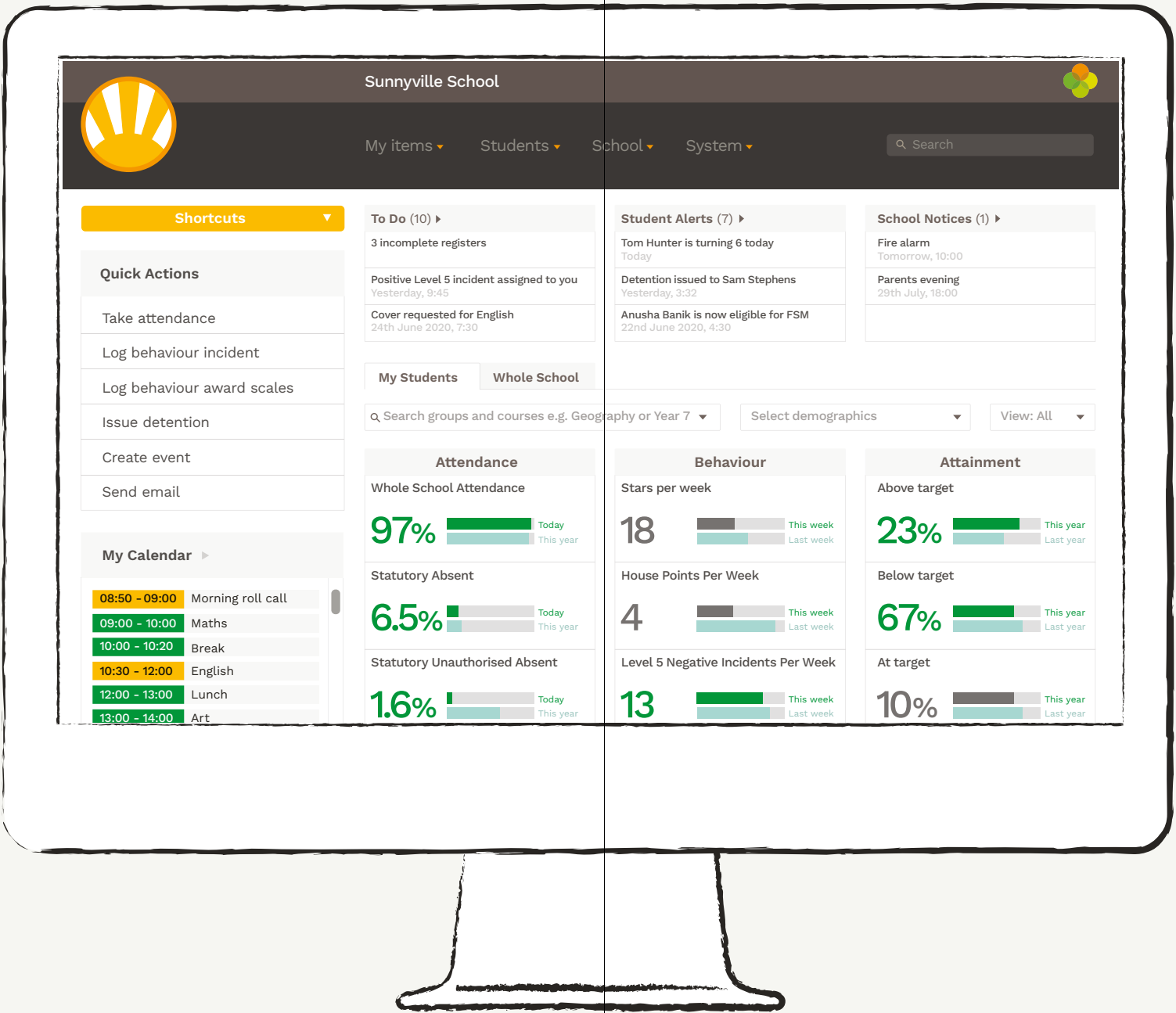
Complete your census quickly and easily without repeated resubmissions

Intuitive Dashboards

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

Communications

Send and receive SMS and email and search all school comms



Teachers

Behaviour

Record, reward and report on behaviour

Progress

Track summative progress

Cover

Scheduling, management and automatic messaging

Attendance

Take lightning fast registers and follow up with parents when students are absent

My Classroom

Create seating plans, manage behaviour, take attendance and track progress

Parents and Guardians

Clubs and trips

Easily schedule activities and link to consents and payments

Easy Assessments

Track your students' formative progress through school

Progress

Track summative progress

Parent and student portals

Log in to see updates and make payments

Arbor App

Communicate with parents on the go

Meals

Choose and manage meals across the school

Notes

We'd love to
hear from you
Get in touch

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