Switching Made Simple for Primary Schools

How does moving to a new MIS actually work?

What do schools like yours need to do with SIMS contracts coming up for renewal in 2025?

And why is switching MIS important?

We've used our experience helping 6,000 schools move MIS to put together this handy, step-by-step guide

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

A note from Arbor's CEO

Most SIMS contracts are set to renew in 2025 and 2026, so lots of schools have already started to research alternative MIS providers in order to avoid being trapped into another three years in a legacy contract.

Many, however, don't know where to start when it comes to thinking about a new MIS. Why have the majority of primary schools moved away from SIMS already? What does the moving process look like? How do schools make sure they pick the right MIS provider for their unique needs?

Given that most contracts are up for renewal so soon, we've put together this guide to answer these questions and demystify the process of moving MIS. We think this is the best time to do so, to help make the process as stress-free as possible. And to give schools maximum flexibility when it comes to migration.

Inside this guide, you'll find recommendations on what to consider when you're choosing a new system, how to kick-off the process,

and how to manage the change at your primary school. We've also included some stories from a handful of the 4,500 primary schools using Arbor on how smart, time-saving tools (like registers, simple parent communication and assessment tools) have transformed the way they work.

We understand moving MIS can feel like a big change. Many schools we speak to are putting off switching because they feel their staff are too busy and just don't have time to re-train on a new system — when in fact a new MIS is the one change that will save your staff the most time. We're big believers that switching MIS is an opportunity to make a lasting, positive change to the way you work at school, and we support you every step of the way.

We hope this guide simplifies how and why so many schools have made the switch. If you have any questions at all, feel free to reach out using my personal details below.

All the best,

James Weatherill

James Weatherill
Co-Founder and CEO, Arbor Education
james@arbor-education.com

Part 1:
Switching MIS is worth it — here's why

The impact of switching MIS for primary schools

Over 10,000 schools have moved from legacy, server-based MIS systems to the cloud. And, according to the latest DfE census data, 3 out of 4 schools choose Arbor MIS. But why are so many schools switching now?

1.

Schools are realising the real potential of MIS

Cloud-based MIS systems are no longer just pupil databases — they can help with everything from planning interventions, tracking attendance patterns and monitoring behaviour, to booking parents evenings and paying for meals.

In busy primary schools where staff wear many hats, we know how important it is that everyone has the right tools for their roles. We've designed Arbor with features tailored to office staff, teachers and SLT — so you can work together in one, shared system.

2.

With most contracts up for renewal, the time is right!

But why have so many primary schools chosen to move MIS over the past year or are looking to move now?

Most SIMS contracts are ending in 2025 or 2026, so lots of schools are starting to research different providers now.

It might seem quite early to start looking at your options, but there are lots of reasons we would recommend beginning your research as soon as possible:

- SIMS contracts for most UK schools will be ending at the same time. Opening conversations with different MIS suppliers now will mean you will have more choice over your preferred migration and onboarding slots
- Moving to a cloud MIS saves time and money — so why wait?
- It's important to take the time to find the best MIS for your school. Starting now means you won't rush the process.

> We 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.
>
> Not only were the additional subscriptions and applications costly, but also labour intensive from an administrative 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.
>
> **KIRSTEN BEAVEN**
> **SBM AT VAUGHAN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

3.

Consolidating systems = saving money

Most cloud-based MIS systems give you the choice to bring many of the third-party apps you use for things like comms, assessments and payments under one roof. That means you can save money when you move! In our recent report, we found that 67% of schools who said they saved money from switching to Arbor, save up to £5,000 year.

4.

Greater flexibility for all your staff

With a cloud-based MIS, you'll be able to access key pupil, parent and staff information from any device with a browser. Give staff the flexibility to work remotely, or have access to key information when on the playground or moving around the classroom.

Plus, it means no more patches or waiting around for time-consuming updates. At Arbor, we update our MIS fortnightly, based on feedback from our schools.

5.

Reduce admin, save time and improve staff wellbeing

As well as saving on costs, an MIS can and should save your school staff time. By empowering everyone with direct access to the tools and information they need, you can break bottlenecks, let staff be self-sufficient and rely on your MIS to do the heavy lifting when it comes to administrative tasks. This means your staff get the time back to focus on what matters most.

How to assess whether a cloud-based MIS is right for your school

We've put together some of the questions schools often use to help them work out whether a cloud-based MIS is right for them

Question	How a cloud-based MIS could help
Are you using different systems for core tasks like assessments, comms and payments alongside your MIS?*	✔ Replace the apps you don't like with your MIS — ensuring you can do your core work in one system, not many ✔ Save money by reducing your software licenses ✔ Cut down on logins and passwords to remember
Do the apps you use alongside your MIS talk to each other?	✔ Bringing different apps into your MIS means all the pupil information you need is finally in one place ✔ No more exporting and uploading spreadsheets to analyse data!
Do you have processes on paper?	✔ Replace paper-based processes with your MIS. Our primary schools often replace paper registers, incident forms and context sheets with Arbor
Can all my staff access pupil data easily and securely?	✔ Rather than relying on one or two expert MIS users, our primary schools say all their staff feel confident using Arbor to get the data they need. Plus, they can work wherever they need to — all they need is a browser
Are you happy with your current MIS?	✔ An MIS is a big investment in time and money. It's worth looking for a system which you and your staff like — on average, schools say their staff are much happier after switching

* We have a simple systems audit tool — get in touch if you'd like to try using it

How to make the case for change at your school

Once you've identified the ways a cloud-based MIS could help your primary school — whether it's saving time or money, or helping you to change the way you work — it can be helpful to use a template like this to make the case for change to your team

Problem

What is the problem we are trying to solve?
Describe the issues with your current MIS
What impact is the problem having?

Suggested solution

Describe how a new MIS could solve the problem

Benefits

How will this help us as a school?
E.g. Cost saving, time saving, improved parental engagement, easier to analyse data

Resources

Which staff will work on this?
When do we need to do this?

Risk of not fixing this

What would happen if we didn't do this?

Part 2:
How do you switch MIS by April 2025?

A step-by-step guide on how to move MIS by April 2025

You've built your case for change — what comes next?

We've created this simple timeline to show you the route most primary schools take. Timelines will vary from school to school depending on your existing contract, but it's always worth getting ahead and giving yourself plenty of time to research your options.

Step 1: Find out when your current contract ends

- The first step is always to find out when your licence with your current MIS provider is up for renewal, and when you need to give them notice

- If you're unsure, you can get in touch at hello@arbor-education.com and we'll give you advice on timelines for moving

Step 2: Start doing your research

- Once you're clear on when your contract ends, it's time to research different MIS providers, and find one that's the right fit for your primary school

- We run free Arbor demos, both live and on demand, designed for schools who are starting to think about switching MIS. This is a chance to see Arbor in action and ask any questions you might have

- If you'd like to chat to a member of our team first, get in touch at hello@arbor-education.com and we'll find a time that works for you

Find a demo that suits you here

Step 3: Demonstration
90 minute demo with your SLT and Office Staff

We'll then arrange a session to understand how your school works, your School Development Plan and your current challenges. This allows us to then show you the parts of Arbor that are going to make the biggest impact at your school

Step 4: Review and feedback
Time to think about your options now that you've researched different MIS providers

- If you'd like to see any more of Arbor in detail, we can arrange further sessions on specific areas of our MIS

- You can also take some time to gather any feedback from your team after seeing Arbor, and compare it to any other systems you've looked at

Step 5: Proposal
15-20 minute online session with your Headteacher or key decision maker at your school

Once you've gathered your team's feedback from the demos, we'll present our proposal including pricing, training and implementation timelines, so you have all the information you need to decide if Arbor is right for you

Step 6: Get started

If you think Arbor is the best fit for your school, we'll start the process of getting you up and running with your new system
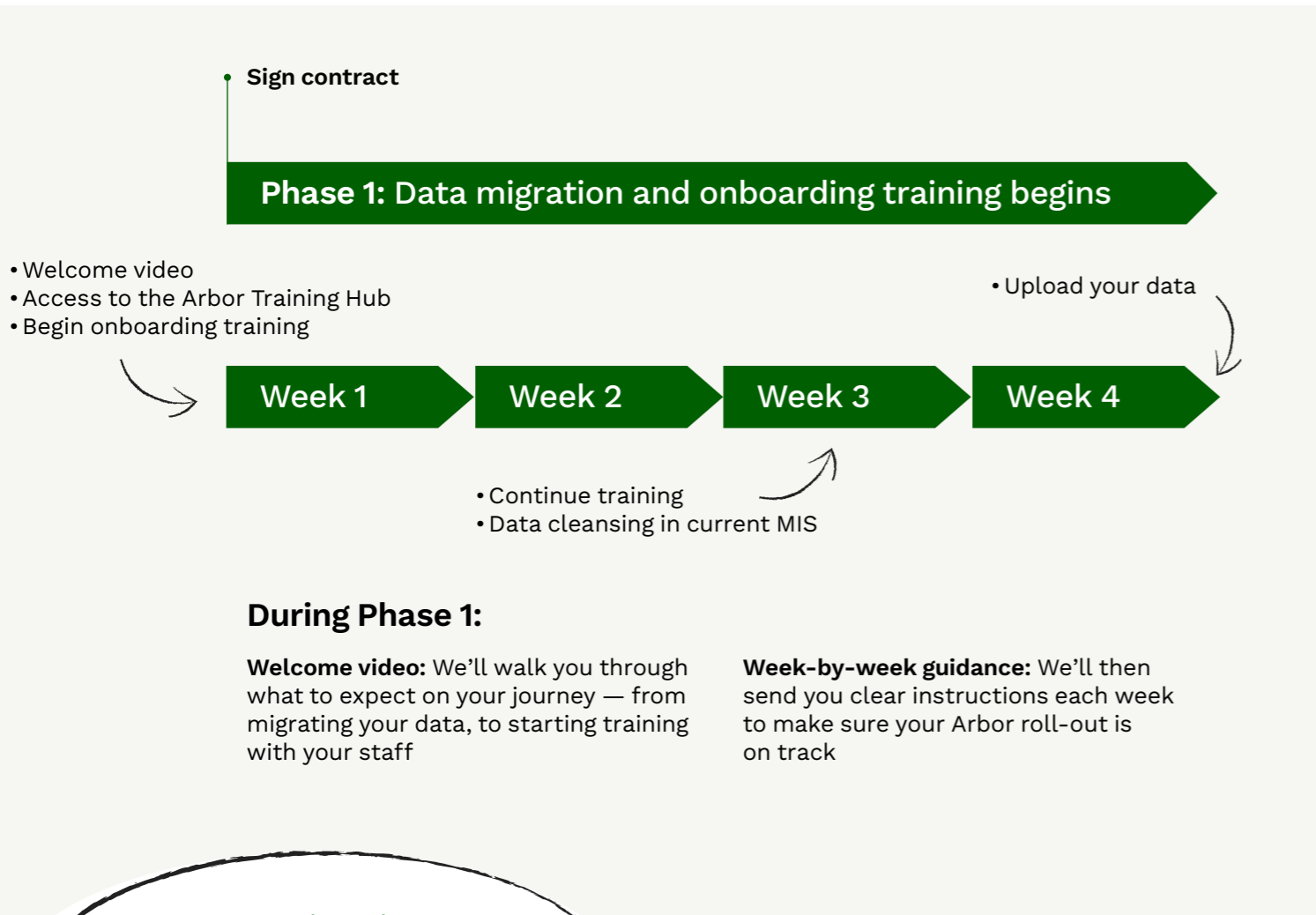
We've gone into more detail on what that looks like on the next page
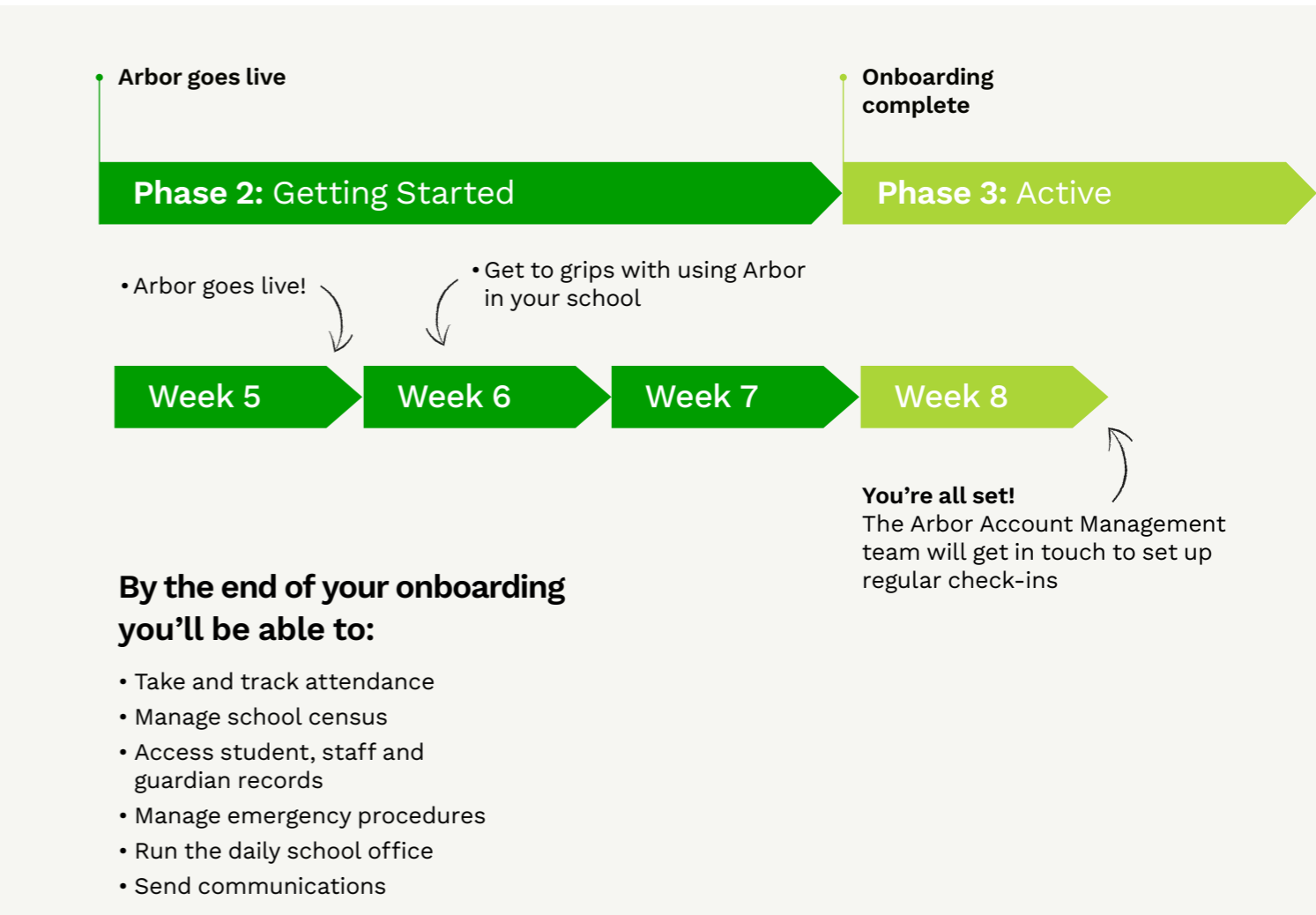
How does migrating to a new MIS actually work?

We know that moving MIS is one of the biggest and most complex changes your school will go through. It's completely normal to feel a bit daunted by it all! We've successfully migrated over 6,000 schools (more than any other cloud provider), our tried and tested migration process means your data is in the safest of hands.

> The migration process was made easy by Arbor's knowledgeable staff. I like the fact that we are signposted to guides and training at every step of the way even under the current situation. There appears to be a structured network of available support which is crucial to any changeover. User friendly system. Impressive, wish I'd have known about it sooner.
>
> **WALLACE FIELDS INFANTS SCHOOL**

Sign contract

Phase 1: Data migration and onboarding training begins

- Welcome video
- Access to the Arbor Training Hub
- Begin onboarding training

- Upload your data

Week 1 → **Week 2** → **Week 3** → **Week 4**

- Continue training
- Data cleansing in current MIS

During Phase 1:

Welcome video: We'll walk you through what to expect on your journey — from migrating your data, to starting training with your staff

Week-by-week guidance: We'll then send you clear instructions each week to make sure your Arbor roll-out is on track

Our Primary Onboarding Team are on hand throughout your onboarding journey, ready to answer any questions and make sure you're hitting the ground running.

Arbor goes live

Onboarding complete

Phase 2: Getting Started

Phase 3: Active

- Arbor goes live!

- Get to grips with using Arbor in your school

Week 5 → **Week 6** → **Week 7** → **Week 8**

You're all set!
The Arbor Account Management team will get in touch to set up regular check-ins

By the end of your onboarding you'll be able to:

- Take and track attendance
- Manage school census
- Access student, staff and guardian records
- Manage emergency procedures
- Run the daily school office
- Send communications

What kind of support and training can I get?

Once you're all set up and using Arbor in your school, we'll work alongside you to help you reach your long-term goals, and make sure you're getting the most out of your MIS.
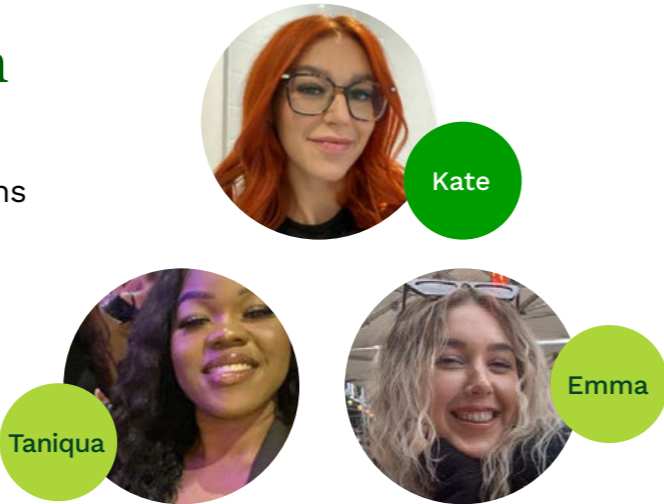
Our dedicated customer team are on hand to answer any questions, and support you as you transform the way your school works. Here are just some of the teams dedicated to making sure Arbor is a success at your school.

Primary Onboarding Team

Kate and her team are on hand throughout your onboarding journey, ready to answer any questions and make sure you're hitting the ground running.

Here for you for:
Anything during your first 8 weeks with Arbor

Best for questions like:
What training do I need to complete?
How does the data migration work?
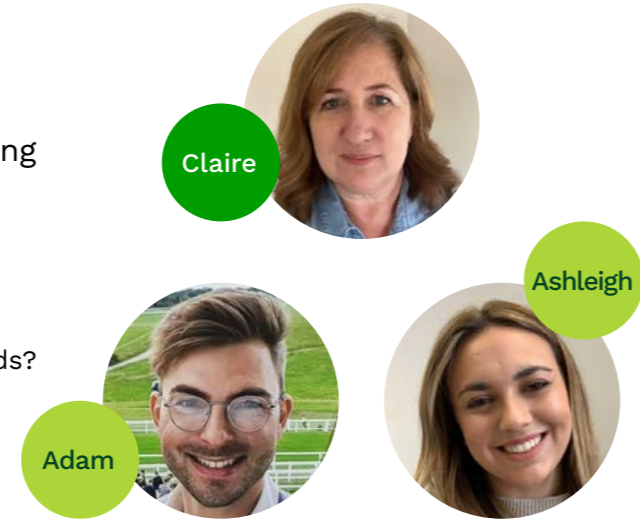
Kate
Taniqua
Emma

Customer Education Team

Claire and her expert team will deliver your training to get you using Arbor like a pro in no time.

Here for you for:
All things training and learning the system

Best for questions like:
What are the different options for emailing out report cards?
How do I set up a rotating meal menu?

Claire
Ashleigh
Adam

Account Management Team

Once you're all set up and using Arbor in your school, we'll work with you to achieve long-term goals, like increasing parental engagement, or better data reporting.

Here for you for:
Understanding your school's goals and making sure you get the best out of Arbor

Best for questions like:
How can we increase our parental engagement?
What training options are available for SENCOs?
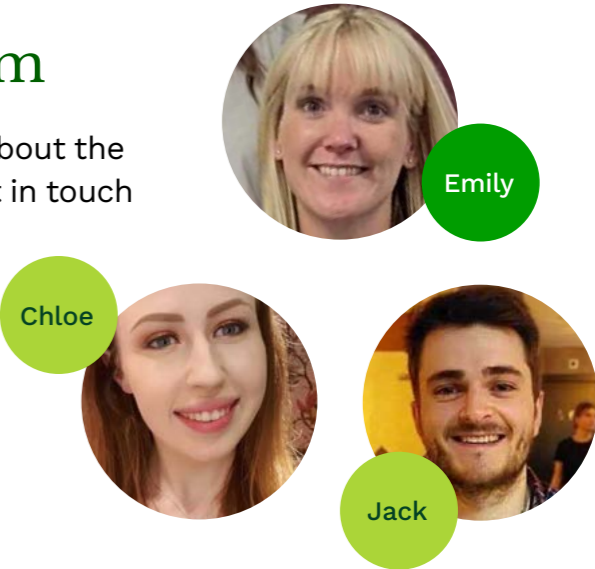
Richard
George
Molly

Customer Support Team

If you need quick answers to questions about the platform at any point, you can always get in touch with our support team.
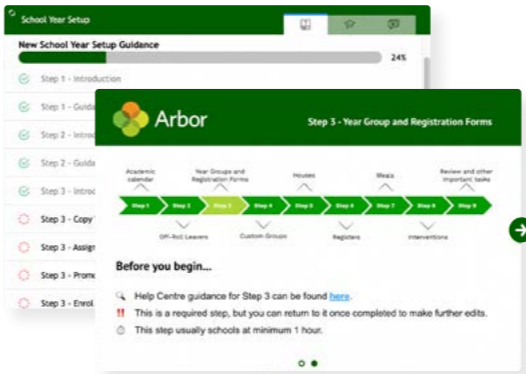
Here for you for:
Any technical bugs or questions that come up about your site

Best for questions like:
How do I complete the census?
How do I give staff access to registers?

Emily
Chloe
Jack

Arby

Our friendly knowledge bot, Arby, will help you get to grips with the system, with personalised tips and tricks, and in-app guidance.

We're proud to partner with over 60 local support teams

Did you know we have over 60 accredited support partners? Take a look at the list below to see if your local team is there. If they are, it means they're certified on Arbor — meaning you can get a new MIS but keep your trusted local support team for day-to-day help.
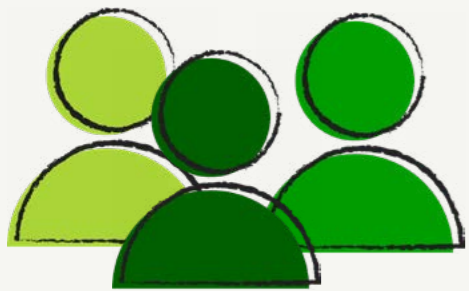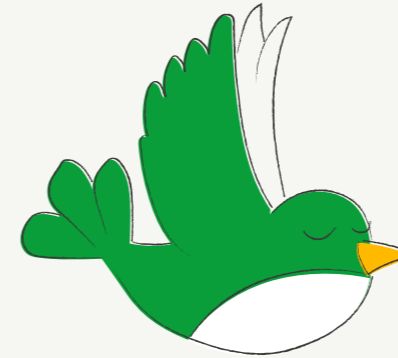
Part 3:
Why primary schools love Arbor

The Arbor difference

Why do more primary schools choose Arbor than all other MIS providers combined?

Bring everyone in your Primary School together

✔ We've designed Arbor with features tailored to office staff, teachers and SLT

✔ Consolidate multiple messy systems into one, or integrate easily with the apps primary schools love like CPOMS, Hodder and Inventry

✔ Arbor's shared workspace helps you to break bottlenecks by giving everyone direct access to the tools and information they need, when they need it

✔ Work together on the cloud, so your staff can stay connected, wherever you are

Joyfully easy to use

✔ Arbor is easy to navigate, and intuitive enough for anyone to self-teach. Your whole team will love using it every day

✔ Produce DfE-compliant reports from templates, or build them custom in n instant

✔ See the data that matters clearly, and understand what it means with beautiful visuals

We partner with your school

✔ Our top-rated support is available online, by phone, or in person, any way you need it

✔ We have more accredited support partners than any other cloud MIS — so you can stick with the local support team you know

✔ We update Arbor fortnightly, listening closely and responding to what you tell us. Help us shape the best primary school MIS on the market

We measure our impact so we know our MIS is making a difference

Every year, we survey our schools to find out what they think of our MIS

98%

CSAT during implementation and training

92%

say they save time with Arbor compared to their legacy system

92%

say Arbor has transformed the way they work for the better

81%

say Arbor has improved how they analyse and understand their data

We also surveyed 338 SBMs and COOs to find out exactly how Arbor saves schools time and money

43%

of users said Arbor had directly saved their school or trust money. This increased to 62% when looking at users who have been using Arbor for over 36 months.
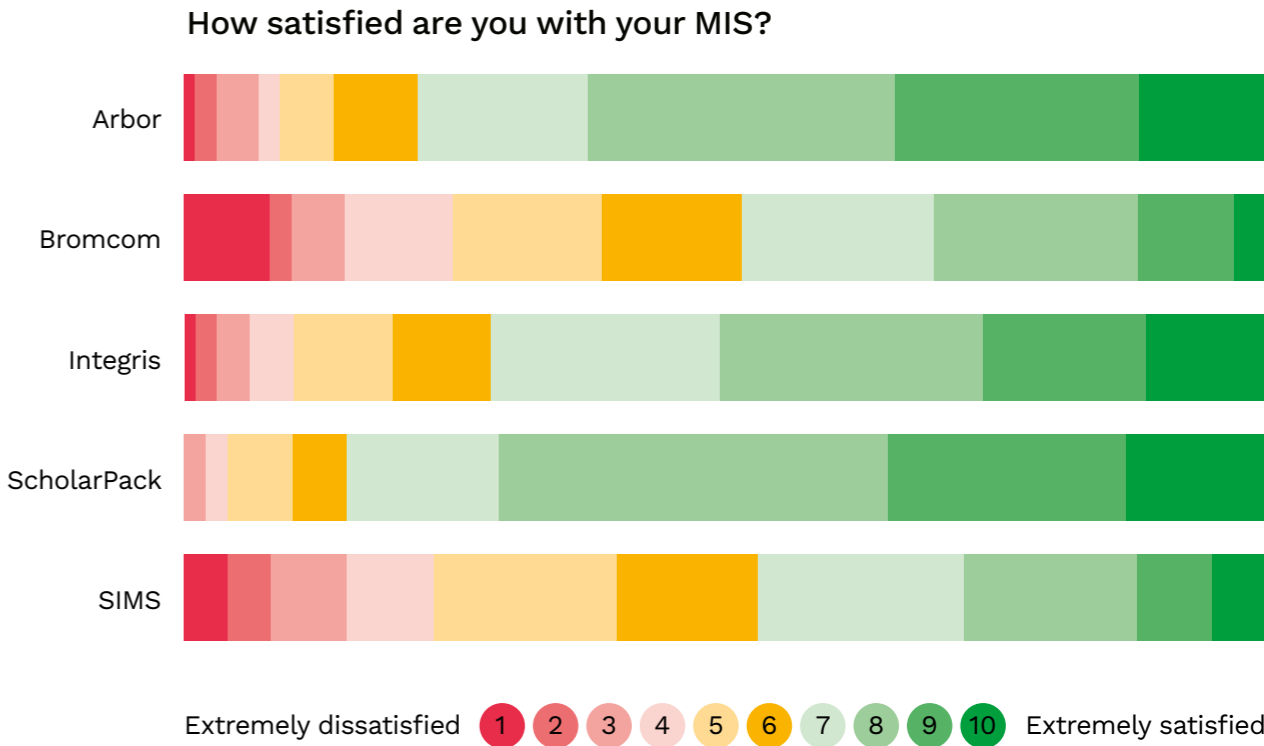
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Third-party systems

Respondents who've used Arbor for over 24 months were able to eliminate, on average, 2 third-party systems

67%

of schools said this saving equated to up to £5,000 per annum.

In September 2023, The Key Group also published the results of their survey of over 1,000 schools. Arbor and ScholarPack remained the most-loved MIS for the third year running

How satisfied are you with your MIS?

Arbor

Bromcom

Integris

ScholarPack

SIMS

Extremely dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely satisfied

What do our primary schools say?

We're proud to have 4,500 primary schools in our growing community

"I can honestly say, hand on heart, that Arbor is the best MIS system I have ever used... I would highly recommend Arbor to any school. Don't hesitate in switching to them, they are fantastic. It's a great system, and the team behind it are brilliant."

REDBROOK HAYES PRIMARY SCHOOL

"Arbor is a school-wide tool, not an office-based MIS System. The first word that comes to mind is 'simplicity'. It's easy to grasp, and new users can quickly work their way around the system's functions – you don't feel like you need hours of training."

PARKROYAL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

"From an SLT perspective, it is far easier to use compared to our previous system. Hugely more efficient, quicker to get things done. For instance: registers for different clubs, pulling up contact details of parents, and analysing data... In terms of where we were before, it's such a huge time saver."

COPNOR PRIMARY

"Since we moved from our old MIS we have never looked back and there isn't a day that goes by without someone saying 'God, I just love Arbor!' Nothing is ever too small of an issue when you call. Arbor flows so much better than [our previous MIS]; it's user-friendly while giving you vast information but at the same time it doesn't overwhelm or confuse. Arbor is that good you actually want to spend time playing on it creating custom reports, finding out what it can do."

PLANTATION PRIMARY SCHOOL

"Arbor has transformed the way the school works by having everything in one place. It's easy and intuitive to use, allowing us to focus on what matters most in the school, the students."

KEMSLEY PRIMARY ACADEMY

"If every implementation process was as seamless as Arbor's, no one would have sleepless nights over such a big organisational move. The support and direction throughout has been brilliant!"

PRESTON HEDGES ACADEMY TRUST

"Arbor is where we can evidence core learning and the effectiveness of our policies around attendance, behaviour etc. We can get the data we need rapidly to show where we are, how things have changed over time, and which students are behind the trends, which is vital in Ofsted conversations."

MONKEN HADLEY & ST PAUL'S PRIMARIES

What to do next

Decided that switching MIS is right for you?
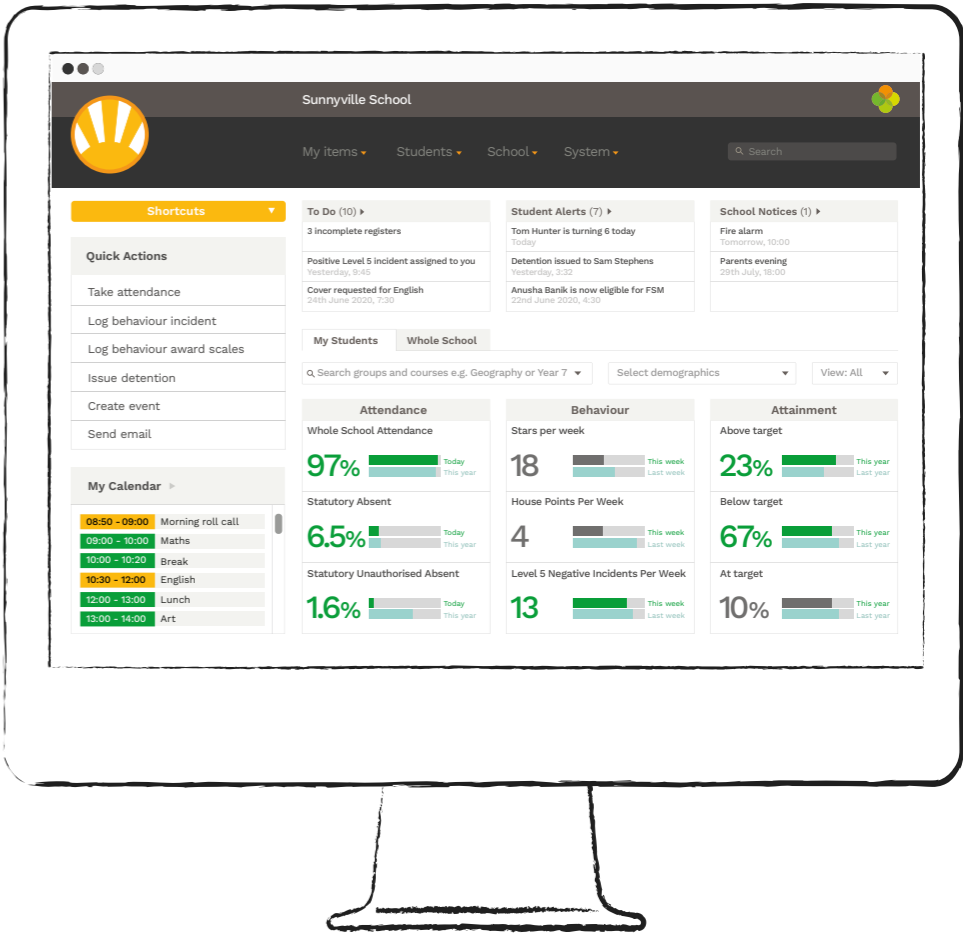Here's a simple checklist to get started

Check list

☐ Find out when your contract with your current MIS provider ends

☐ Identify problems which switching MIS could help with

☐ Complete the Case for Change template

☐ Shortlist the different systems you want to see

☐ Attend an introductory webinar with each one

☐ Book phone calls with the systems you like the most

☐ Have a personalised demo

☐ Discuss which system you prefer with your team

☐ Choose your new MIS!
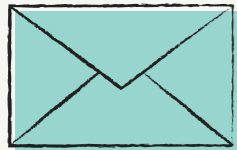
See Arbor in action

Come along to one of our free demo webinars this term or watch one on-demand!

You'll get to see the core parts of the system, ask any questions you might have and get a sense of whether Arbor is the right fit for your primary school.
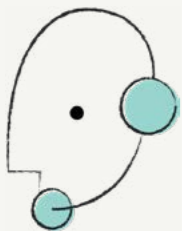
How to meet us this term

What to do if you're ready to speak
to someone about moving to Arbor

Get in touch with our team. Email
us at hello@arbor-education.com

We'll ask you some questions
around how you're running your
school right now, and what your
main challenges are

**We'll book in a one-on-one,
online demo** for you and the
rest of your team

Book a free demo
or get in touch
to find out more

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

Arbor