

Switching Made Simple for Secondary 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



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.

Contents

- 4 Introduction
A note from Arbor's CEO

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

- 8 The impact of switching MIS for secondary schools
- 10 How to assess whether a cloud-based MIS is right for your school
- 11 How to make the case for change at your school

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

- 14 A practical timeline to finding the right MIS for you
- 16 How does migrating to a new MIS actually work?
- 18 What kind of support can I get?

Part 3: Why secondary schools love Arbor

- 24 The Arbor difference
- 26 We measure our impact so we know our MIS is making a difference
- 28 What do our secondary schools say?
- 32 How to meet us this term

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 secondary 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 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 secondary school. We've also included some stories from a handful of the 6,000 schools using Arbor on how smart, time-saving tools (like like powerful, customisable reporting, dashboards tailored specifically to your role and data-rich student profiles) 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Weatherill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

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 secondary 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.

Secondary schools are realising the real power of an 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, reporting and paying for meals.

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. Our cloud MIS is designed to join up people, systems and processes across your school, so that you can manage manage complexity and measurably improve the way your school works.

2.

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

But why have so many secondary 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

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 survey of over 300 SBMs, Bursars and COOs, over 2/3 respondents said they had been able to eliminate at least one third party system by moving to Arbor. And nearly half of respondents said they had been able to eliminate between two and ten third party systems.

4.

Future-proofing your school

With a cloud-based MIS, you'll be able to access key pupil, parent and staff information from any device with a browser. During the pandemic, our secondary schools found this particularly helpful as they could manage their schools remotely.

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.

The reason we moved to Arbor was that we wanted to simplify some of our work processes in order to save time. Our previous cloud MIS was so clunky, and there wasn't any easy visibility into our data. We wanted a transparent, more modern system that wasn't just replicating everything we did on a legacy MIS but in the cloud. You've always got an element of doubt about being sold something or moving to something new, but everything I was told when we were initially looking at Arbor has come to fruition. We're saving time, we're joining up our processes. Jobs that I allocated an hour to in our old cloud MIS are taking me minutes in Arbor — we're no longer held back by our MIS

DAVID PENDLEBURY, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT HINCHINGBROOKE SCHOOL ON HIS EXPERIENCE OF MOVING HIS 2,000 STUDENT SECONDARY SCHOOL TO ARBOR

”

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?*	<div>✓ Replace the apps you don’t like with your MIS — ensuring you can do your core work in one system, not many</div> <div>✓ Save money by reducing your software licenses</div> <div>✓ Cut down on logins and passwords to remember</div>
Do the apps you use alongside your MIS talk to each other?	<div>✓ Bringing different apps into your MIS means all the pupil information you need is finally in one place</div> <div>✓ No more exporting and uploading spreadsheets to analyse data!</div>
Do you have processes on paper?	<div>✓ Replace paper-based processes with your MIS. Our secondary schools often replace paper registers, incident forms and context sheets with Arbor</div>
Can all my staff access pupil data easily and securely?	<div>✓ Rather than relying on one or two expert MIS users, our secondary 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</div>
Are you happy with your current MIS?	<div>✓ 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</div>

* 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 secondary 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 secondary 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 secondary 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

Step 3: Initial call

15–20 minute phone call with one of your Leadership Team, Business Manager, Data Manager or IT Lead

An Arbor Partnership Specialist will book a call with you to understand why you want to move MIS, what you need from the system, when you’re looking to move and how you plan to procure. This allows us to make sure you get the right information at the right time through the process.



Find a demo that suits you here

Step 4: Deeper Discovery

20–30 minute session by video with your Head or Deputy Head

Once we understand what you need from your MIS, we’ll arrange a short session to understand your school culture, educational goals and the impact you want to achieve by moving MIS. This is so that we can make sure we show you the parts of Arbor that are going to make the biggest impact at your school.

Step 5: Demonstration

90 minute online demo with your SLT and key stakeholders

Once we’ve agreed your strategic priorities and timelines, we’ll arrange a tailored demo for your SLT and key staff members. We’ll show you how Arbor will help you solve your current challenges and achieve your goals.

Step 6: Deep Dives

2–4 online sessions with your key teams including SLT, Support Staff, Data, Assessment and School Improvement

If you’re happy with the overview demo, we’ll then arrange a series of deeper demos for your main stakeholders. We’ll show you key areas of the system that you’d like to see in detail, such as timetabling, assessments and exams.

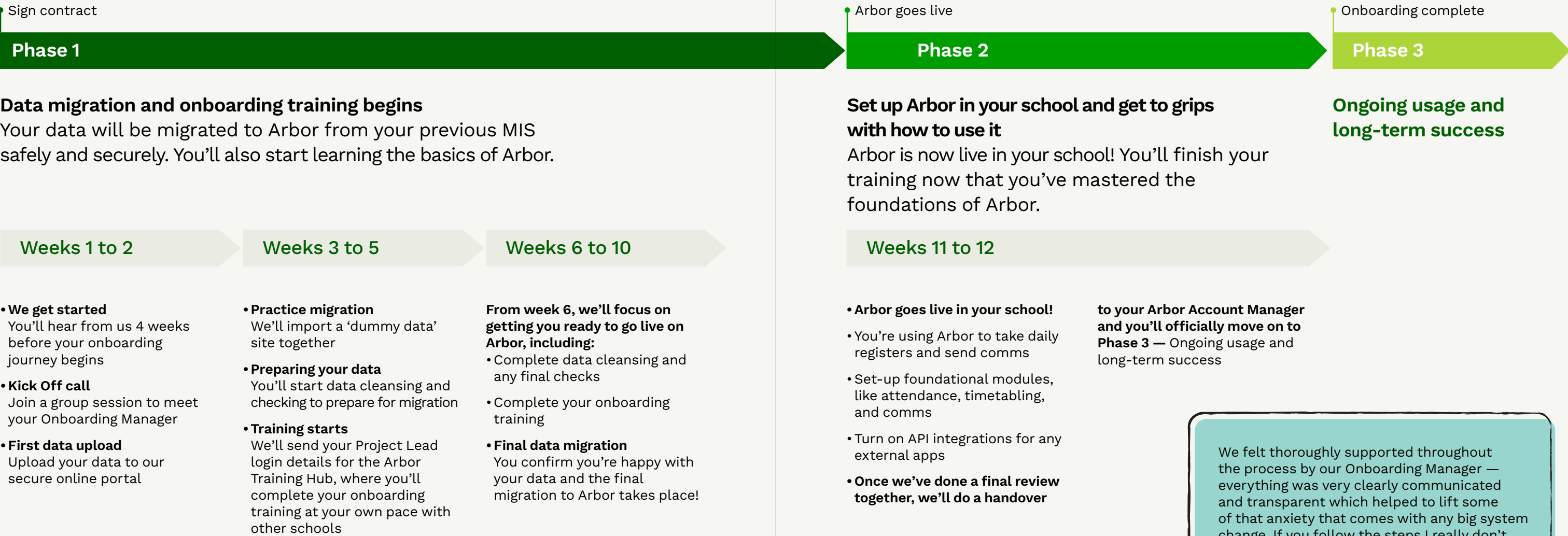
Step 7: Proposal

30 minute video chat 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.

How does migrating to a new MIS actually work?

We know the process of moving from your old MIS to a new one can seem daunting, so we've explained how we do it at Arbor below. We've now successfully migrated over 6,000 schools (more than any other cloud provider), so we're confident our process is as easy as it can be! We don't know exactly how other providers do it, but it's worth asking them as part of your research.



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!

CLAIRE CLAYSON, SENIOR OFFICE MANAGER
AT PRESTON HEDGE'S MAT

We felt thoroughly supported throughout the process by our Onboarding Manager — everything was very clearly communicated and transparent which helped to lift some of that anxiety that comes with any big system change. If you follow the steps I really don't know how it can go wrong.

DAVID PENDLEBURY, ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER
AT HINCHINGBROOKE SCHOOL

What kind of support and training can I get?

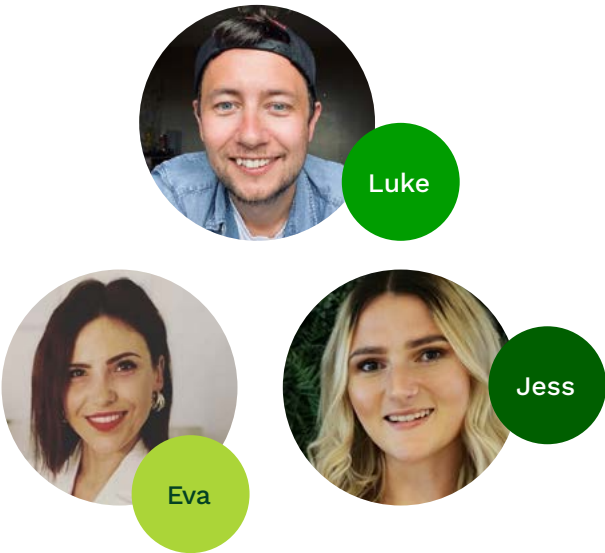
Once you're all set up and using Arbor in your school, we'll work alongside you to help you reach your long-term goals, and make sure you're getting the most out of your MIS.

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.

Your Onboarding Manager

In your first week with Arbor you'll meet one of Luke's team, who will be your Onboarding Manager. They'll be your dedicated point of contact throughout your onboarding and will work with you to make sure everything goes smoothly.

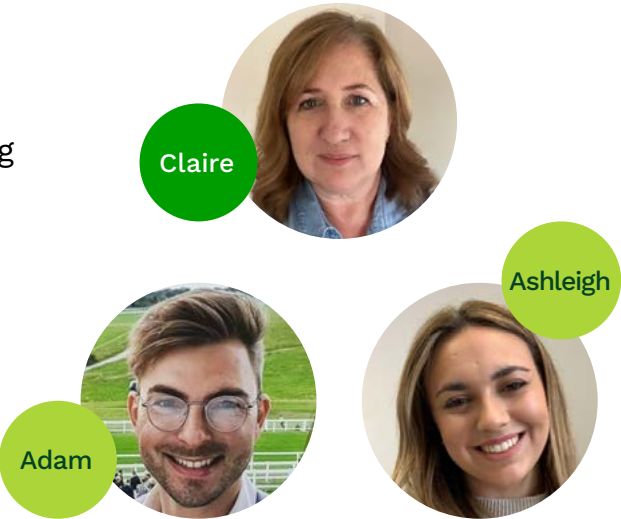
- Here for you for:**
Everything during your onboarding process
- Best for questions like:**
When is my data migration happening?
What training do I need to complete and when?



Customer Education Team

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

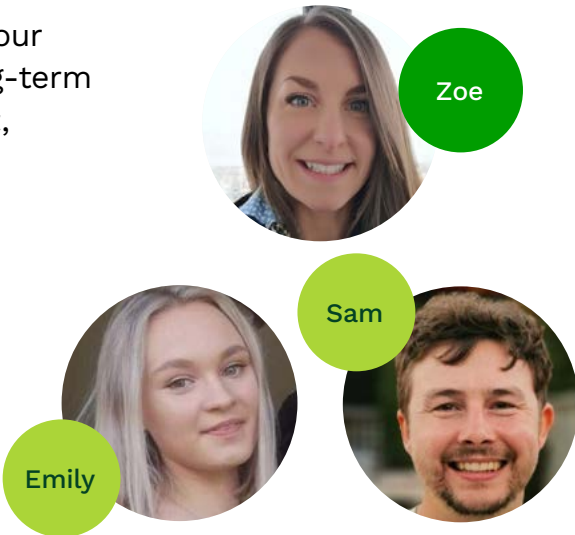
- Here for you for:**
All things training and learning the system
- Best for questions like:**
How do I set up a parents evening?
What kinds of custom reports can I create?



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.

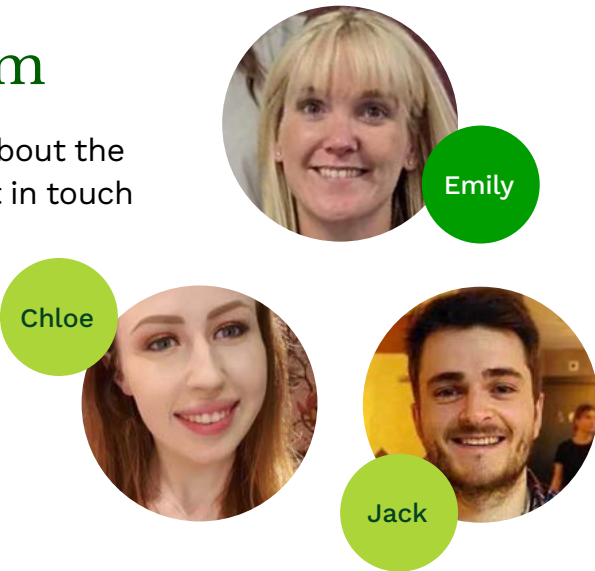
- Here for you for:**
Understanding your school's goals and making sure you get the best out of Arbor
- Best for questions like:**
How can we increase our parental engagement?
What training options are available for Assessment Leads?



Customer Support Team

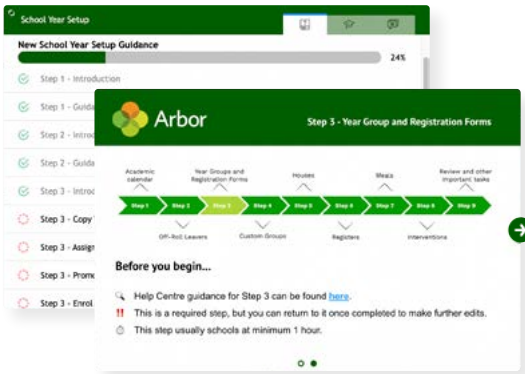
If you need quick answers to questions about the platform at any point, you can always get in touch with our support team.

- 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?



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.

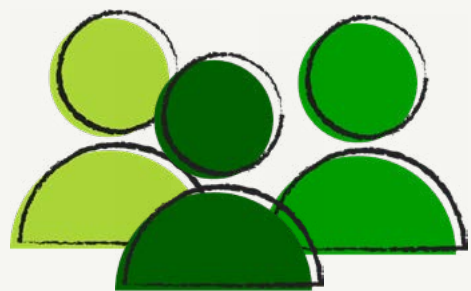


Part 3:

Why secondary schools love Arbor

The Arbor difference

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



Join up people,
systems and policies
across your
secondary school

- ✓ Arbor comes with tools tailored to teachers, office staff and leaders — supporting your whole team in one, shared system
- ✓ Consolidate multiple messy systems into one, or integrate easily with the apps secondary schools love like 4Matrix, Edval, Timetabler, CPOMS and Civica
- ✓ We're rated the UK's most intuitive MIS for secondary schools — give your staff an MIS they actually enjoy using and adopt
- ✓ With truly integrated modules and smart automation, Arbor makes it easy to standardise the way you implement policies across your school, take action, and work together



A world-class
data platform

- ✓ Build and schedule custom and templated reports, or integrate with tools like Excel, PowerBI and Google Data Studio
- ✓ Our beautifully designed dashboards are tailored to specific staff roles, showing you the information most relevant to you
- ✓ Arbor combines data from the DfE and Ofsted with your student, staff, finance and HR data in our market-leading data warehouse
- ✓ With clear call outs and analysis, Arbor helps cut out the noise so you can see what's important



We partner with
your school

- ✓ Our top-rated support is available online, by phone, or in person, any way you need it
- ✓ Arbor has the largest team of researchers and developers in the MIS market, and works closely with the DfE and Local Authorities
- ✓ 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 secondary 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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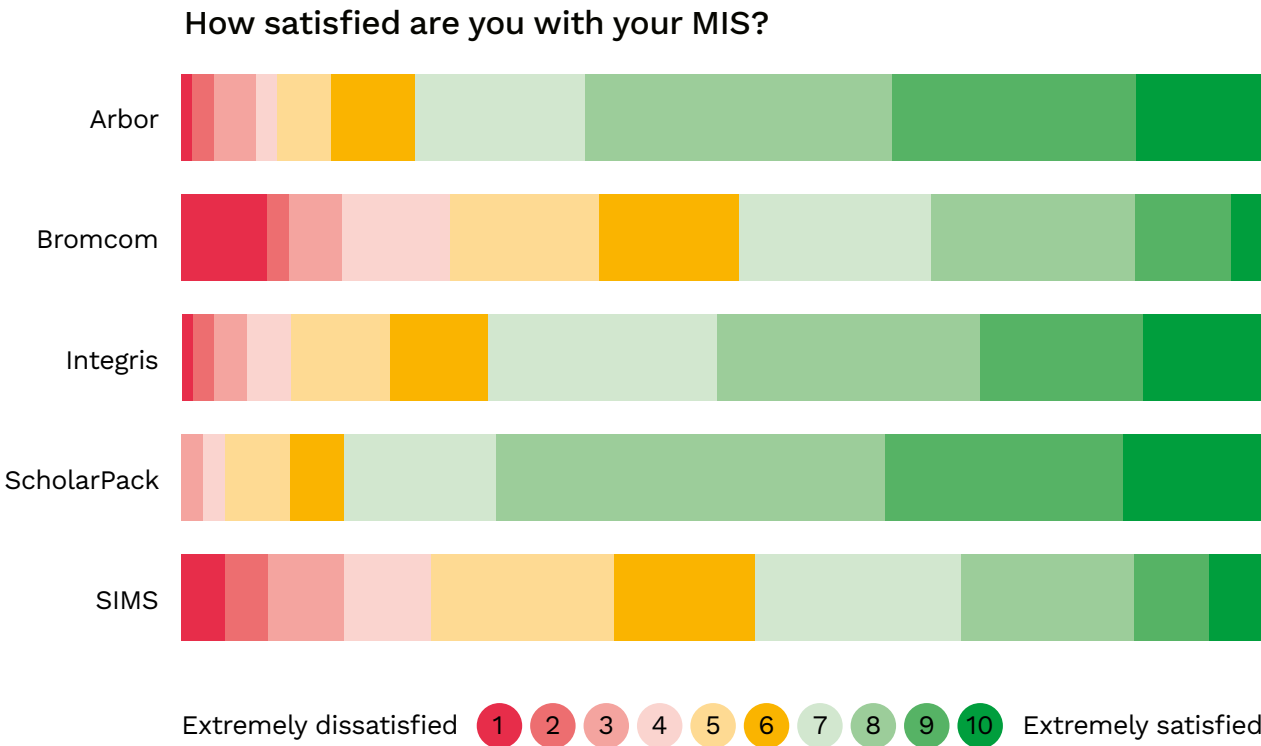
Third-party systems

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




What do our secondary schools say?

We're proud to have 200 secondary schools in our growing community


"I'd been working with our old MIS system both in support roles and as the Data Manager here for over 20 years, so I think everyone was really surprised at how I embraced the change to Arbor. But I could see at an early stage of the implementation process that it had some really powerful and easy to use features for creating custom groups and sending out communications for all the curriculum groups as well as the custom groups. I really wouldn't want to go back to the old system."

MANSHEAD ACADEMY




"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."

THE LAKES SECONDARY SCHOOL



"Arbor has improved the statistics that we can get, regarding behaviour and attendance, to allow senior leadership teams to make better informed decisions to drive improvement. With Arbor, the right information is in the right place at the right time. E.g. Detentions are automated to send a report to go to form tutors two minutes before afternoon registration session. This has helped improve students' behaviour."

IRLAM & CADISHEAD ACADEMY



"I love Arbor because the MIS and team helped us gain the GOOD rating that we so desperately deserved after a tough few years! The staff at Baxter College were able to show the amazing work they do day in and day out, to Ofsted thanks to Arbor."

BAXTER COLLEGE



"With Arbor we can evidence that we know what's going on with our students and the impact of what we're doing! Arbor made our Ofsted inspection easy — we could quickly create reports and make crib sheets for our staff by quickly drilling down and pulling out trends."

THE REACH FREE SCHOOL



"Arbor covers such a lot of ground with a lot of efficiency and the rate at which it is expanding, both in popularity and in range of functions, is astounding. What is most amazing however is the customer service for school staff. The combination of their many tutorials, active community portal, their genuine desire to receive and action feedback, and their commitment to quickly resolving any glitches and queries put to them, means I have been able to get to grips with much of the system very quickly. I've had my fingers in a lot of Arbor pies, and it has to be said they largely complement each other with great success — no aspect of school life is left behind, allowing all of our protocols and procedures to be run from one place. No system is perfect, but with a team that is visibly passionate about making life easier for educators, it's easy to understand why so many schools are making the transition to Arbor."

GORESBROOK SCHOOL



"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."

RALPH THORESBY SCHOOL



What to do next

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

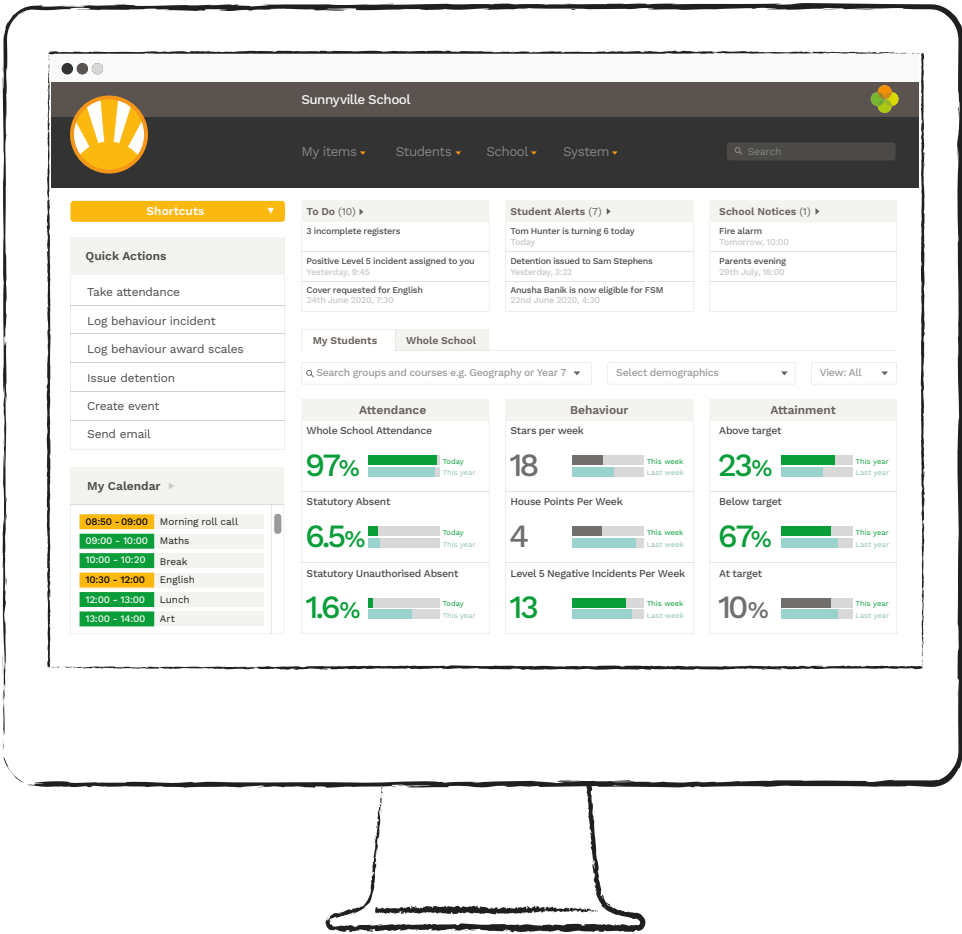
Checklist

- ☐ 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

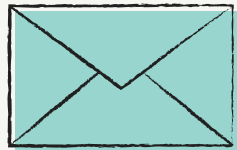
Come along to one of our free demo webinars this term or watch one on-demand!

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 secondary school.

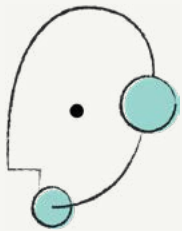


How to meet us this term

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

