

The ultimate guide to switching your MAT's MIS

How do you pick the right MIS for your trust's unique needs?

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

And why is it important to kickstart the switching process this term?

We've used our experience helping 7,000 schools move MIS to put together this handy, step-by-step guide



A little bit about Arbor

Arbor Education is proud to be home to the UK's most-loved school software. Our MIS platforms give more than 9,000 schools and trusts the tools, technology and insight they need to work at their best, improving lives for education staff and school communities all over the UK.

Arbor MIS

Arbor MIS helps schools of all sizes work better, with intuitive tools designed to make a difference. Chosen by over 7,000 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

Chosen by over 600 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.

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A note from Arbor's CEO



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

Many, however, don't know where to start when it comes to procuring and moving to a new MIS. How do you find the right MIS to meet your MAT's unique needs? What does migration look like for a trust of your size? Why is it so important to kickstart the research process this term?

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 trusts 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 we'll support you in managing the

change across your schools. We've also included some stories from a handful of the 600 trusts using Arbor on how our MAT MIS has helped them work as one organisation, not many.

We're big believers that switching MIS is an opportunity to make a lasting, positive change to the way you work at your MAT, and we support you every step of the way.

We hope this guide simplifies how and why so many trusts and 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 Multi-Academy Trusts

Over 12,000 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 trusts and schools switching now?

1.

MATs are realising the real power of an MIS

Cloud-based MIS systems are no longer just pupil databases - they can (and should) be a vehicle for strategic change and growth in your trust, not a barrier.

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 schools aren’t all singing from the same hymn sheet.

The MAT leaders in our community tell us that having cloud-based systems is essential to any sustainable or growing trust. With Arbor, everyone is on the same page, and information can flow both school-up and trust-down.

Together, Arbor’s school and MAT MIS are designed to be your trust’s mission control, helping your trust work cohesively as one organisation, not many schools.

2.

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

But why have so many trusts 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 MATs 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 trusts and 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 trust
- 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, we found that by moving to Arbor, on average, schools:

- Eliminate over 2 third-party systems
- Save up to £5000 a year
- This could save the average MAT of 2,800 pupils across 8 schools approximately £28,000 a year.

4.

Future-proofing your trust

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 trusts 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 school and MAT leaders in our community.

5.

Reduce admin, save time and improve staff wellbeing

As well as saving on costs, an MIS can and should save your 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 burdensome administrative tasks. This means your staff get the time back to focus on what matters most.

It’s difficult to measure the time savings, but I’m reasonably confident that all members of staff would say that it saves them at least an hour or two per week, which when you scale up across the trust is a huge time saving.

As the old saying goes, time is money, and whilst it may not ring true for some educators, time is directly related to wellbeing so moving to **Arbor** has had a **positive impact on a significant number our staff’s wellbeing and mental health.**

IT DIRECTOR, MIXED-PHASE MAT

”

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

We’ve put together some of the questions trusts 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 integrate with one another?	<div>✓ Keep and integrate the third-party apps you like</div> <div>✓ Pupil information all in one place</div> <div>✓ No more exporting and uploading spreadsheets – your live data is reflected across the system</div>
Are your schools using different systems?	<div>✓ Make data and policy sharing, both school-up and trust-down, easier and more effective by having everyone on the same page</div>
Does your MIS give you the ability to make working life easier for all your staff?	<div>✓ Reduce admin, automate workflows and give staff an MIS that is intuitive and easy to use</div> <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>
Does your MIS give you the ability to see and take action centrally?	<div>✓ Our MAT MIS allows information and actions flow both ways: school-up and trust-down.</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 trust

Once you’ve identified the ways a cloud-based MIS could help your trust — 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

Aim and objective

What are the main priorities for your trust? Is your current MIS helping or hindering progress?

Suggested solution

Describe how a new MIS could solve the problem

Resources

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

Benefits

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

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 these simple guides to show how different procurement options would work for your trust. Timelines will vary from MAT to MAT depending on your existing contract, but it’s always worth getting ahead and giving yourself plenty of time to research your options.

Part 1: Pre-market engagement

Research is a key part of the buying process. Whichever route you take, you should always start by speaking to different suppliers and getting a demo. That way, you will be best informed to choose the right route for you.

Step 1: Initial call

15-20 minute phone call with one of your technical leads e.g. Data Director

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

Step 2: Deeper Discovery

20-30 minute session by video with your educational or operational lead e.g. CEO or COO

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

Step 3: Demonstration

90 minute online meeting with your Leadership Team

Once we’ve agreed your strategic priorities and timelines, we’ll arrange a tailored demo for your Central Leadership team. We’ll show you how Arbor will help you solve your current challenges and achieve your goals.If you need any follow-up sessions with wider stakeholders we can also arrange these.

Part 2: Procurement

Now you’ve reviewed your different suppliers, it’s time to procure your MIS. There are different ways you can do this depending on your needs as a trust.

Buying through a framework is the DfE recommended method of procurement for schools and trusts.

Direct Award

If you direct award your MIS, it means:
you award yourself, either through getting three quotes or through selecting from a compliant framework. Typically, this route saves MATs far more time and money, whilst being equally compliant. Frameworks like G-Cloud are free and have direct award processes built in.

Most often used by MATs who:
have an idea of which MIS is best for them through their research. All you need is to be able to evidence the fact you have explored your options fairly.

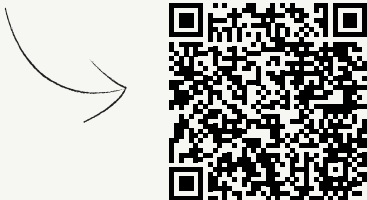
Step 4: Proposal

30 minute video chat with your decision makers e.g. CEO, CFO, COO

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 make an informed decision.

We have special additional discounts for Crown Commercial Services frameworks like G-Cloud 13 and Vertical Application Solutions.

Follow this QR code to see our public facing pricing on the government’s digital marketplace, G-Cloud.



or Mini competition

If you run a mini competition via a framework, it means:
you will have to prepare your own requirements and invite suppliers to respond, as well as decide your own evaluation matrix to judge suppliers fairly. There are several MIS frameworks you can run competitions through - just be aware that they have different levels of consultancy and costs.

Most often used by MATs who:
have done their research, but are still unsure which MIS they think would be best for their MAT.

Step 4: Design your specification

Working with the framework, you’ll build your specification

Always take the time to make sure the specification is as tailored to your MAT as possible. As specifications are weighted, you should comb through and make sure everything is weighted in the right way for your trust. It’s important to remember here that no MAT is the same, so no spec should be identical.

Top tip: features are key, but it’s also crucial that your spec considers a far wider range of things, such as useability, data visibility, or how your MIS can be a strategic tool as you grow. Make sure your spec isn’t restricted by your previous understanding of legacy MIS.

Step 5: Run the mini competition

Run the mini competition via your chosen framework and await the result.

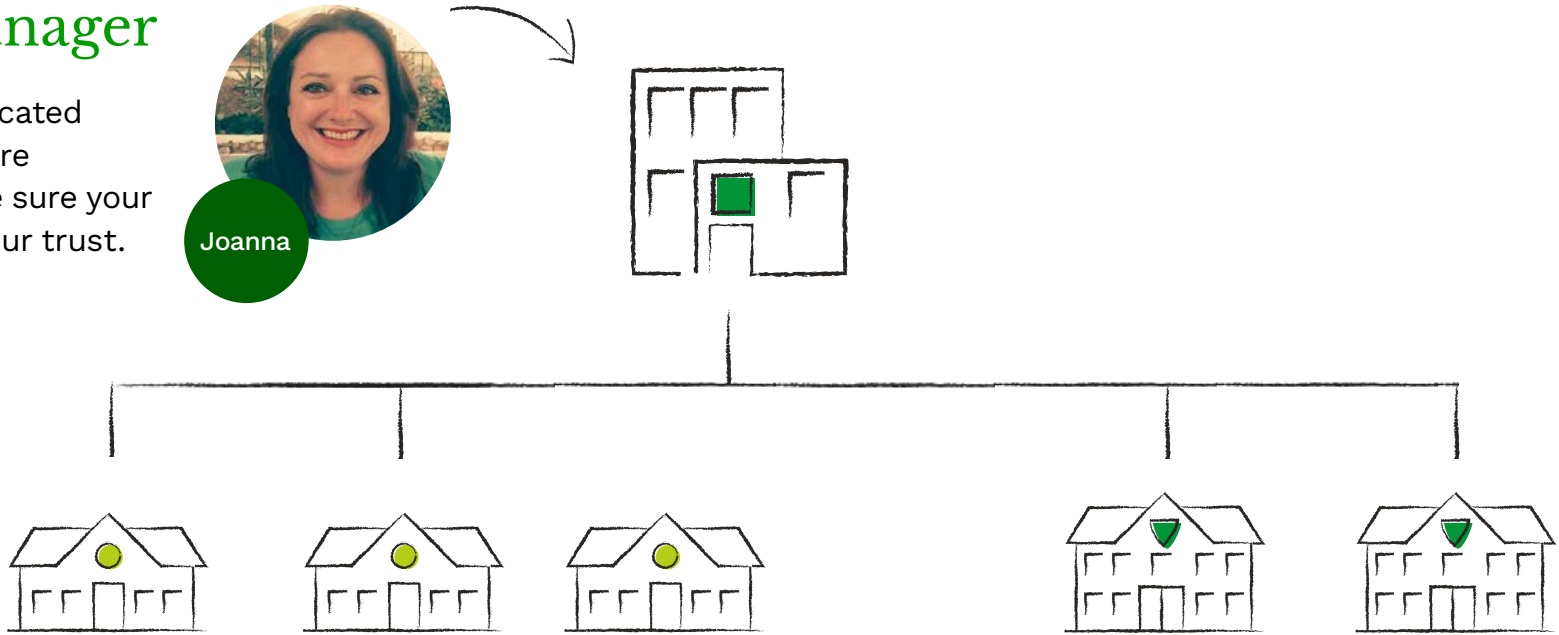
Making sure your trust vision becomes a reality

When your trust is procuring an MIS, your team will do lots of research on which provider will help support your trust’s long-term vision and strategy. At Arbor, we want to make sure that those initial goals become a reality. That’s why, when your MAT joins the Arbor community, you have a dedicated team to ensure success.

Your Programme Manager

Your Programme Manager is your dedicated point of contact whilst your schools are onboarding, working with you to make sure your Arbor rollout goes smoothly across your trust.

For example, **Joanna**. With over 10 years experience in project management across different sectors, Joanna works with MATs to coordinate the rollout of Arbor, taking care of all admin and keeping progress on track.



Primary School Onboarding Team

The team is on-hand to support your primary schools through the transition to Arbor.

Meet **Kate**, who before joining Arbor worked in implementing healthcare systems in GP practices and hospitals. Kate leads our **Primary School Onboarding Team**.



Secondary School Onboarding Team

They work with each of your secondary schools to support them through the move.

Meet **Eva**, who has over 10 years experience in customer service in a range of industries, including corporate and hospitality. Eva leads our **Secondary School Onboarding Team**.



Plus support from our:

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

Customer Success Analysts
Provide ongoing support for your staff, with the option to book a dedicated MAT support slot.

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

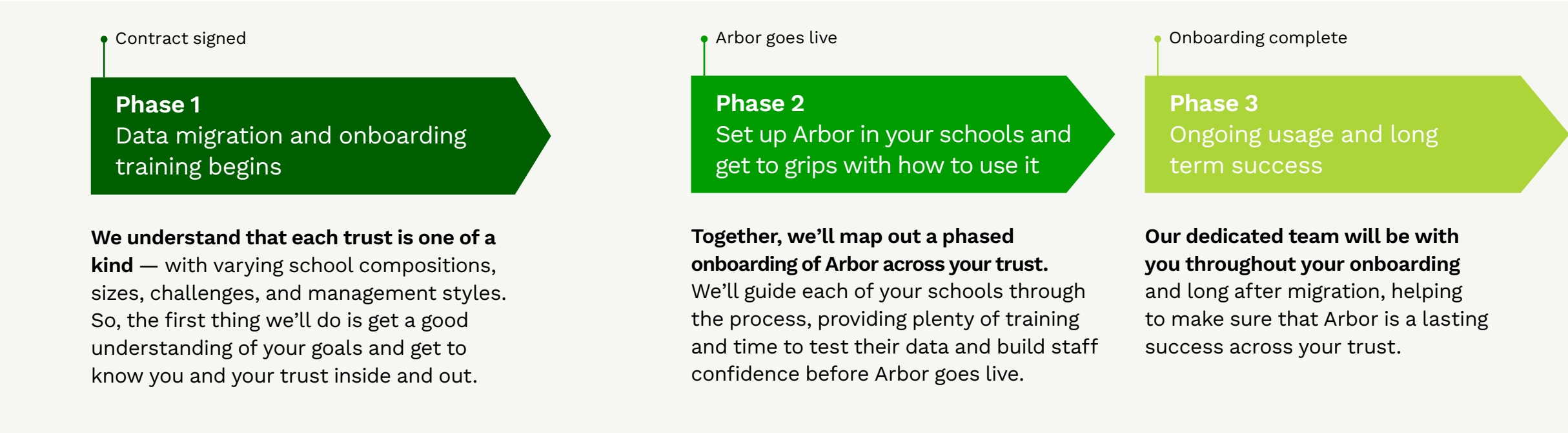
What does moving to a new MIS look like at trust-level?

We know the process of moving from your old MIS to a new one can seem daunting, so we've shown you what this looks like at a glance 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.

"You get the feeling with Arbor that you all clearly want us to be getting the best from the system. From start to finish, conversations we've had with everyone, whether it was the people that started the project with us, account managers or frontline support, have made us feel like Arbor understands the needs of our organisation. Moving MIS as a trust wasn't a decision to be taken lightly, but we're really pleased with the process and the outcome."

ASPIRE ACADEMIES TRUST



"We moved all 57 schools within our MAT to Arbor. Switching was done in a short timeframe and we were fully supported throughout, all of which ensured our schools have seen a positive impact in using the system from day one. We would recommend Arbor to anyone looking for an intuitive and powerful MIS for primary, secondary or special schools."

JAMES BROWNING, COO AT
ACADEMIES ENTERPRISE TRUST

Support and guidance, every step of the way

At the beginning of Phase 1, your Programme Manager will hold a Discovery Session to get to know your Central Team and key stakeholders, and to plan your onboarding programme together around what you want to achieve with Arbor.

Together, you'll formulate plans for staff training, handling third-party systems, and a "Shared Success" plan to agree on how to collaborate with Arbor. They'll oversee your schools' data migration and work closely with our school onboarding teams to make sure everything's on track.

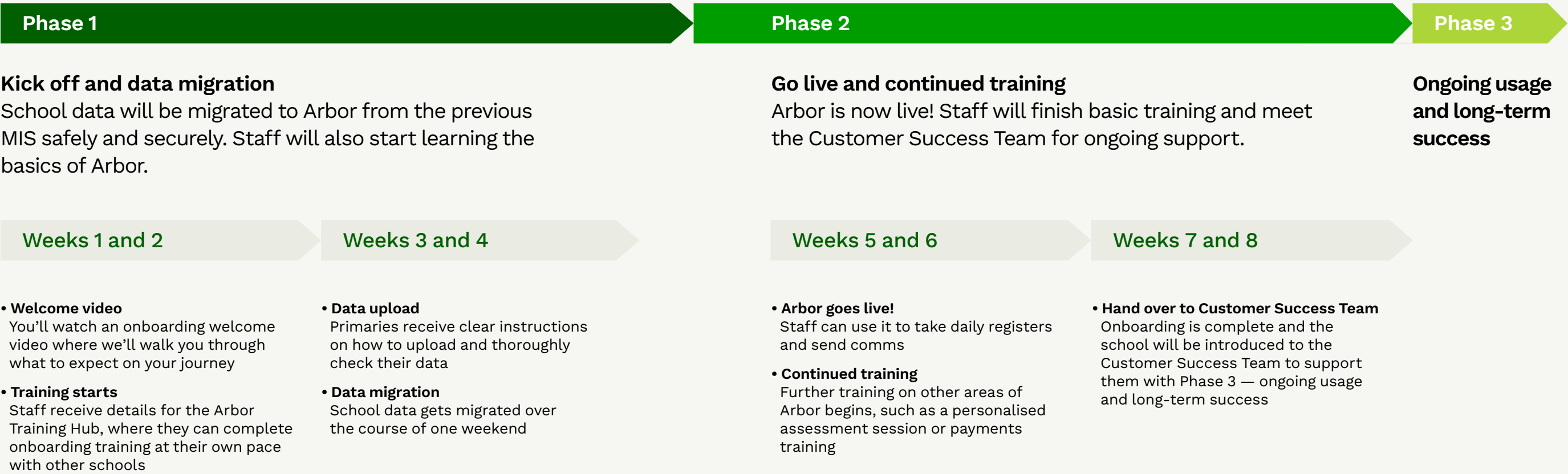
What does moving to a new MIS look like for your schools?

We work with you to make sure your schools' transition onto Arbor is as seamless as possible. Migration timelines are different for primary and secondary schools — we've shown you what this looks like below.

Your primaries will have access to our expert Onboarding Team to help guide them through implementation.

Primary school onboarding typically takes **8 weeks**

Primary school onboarding timeline



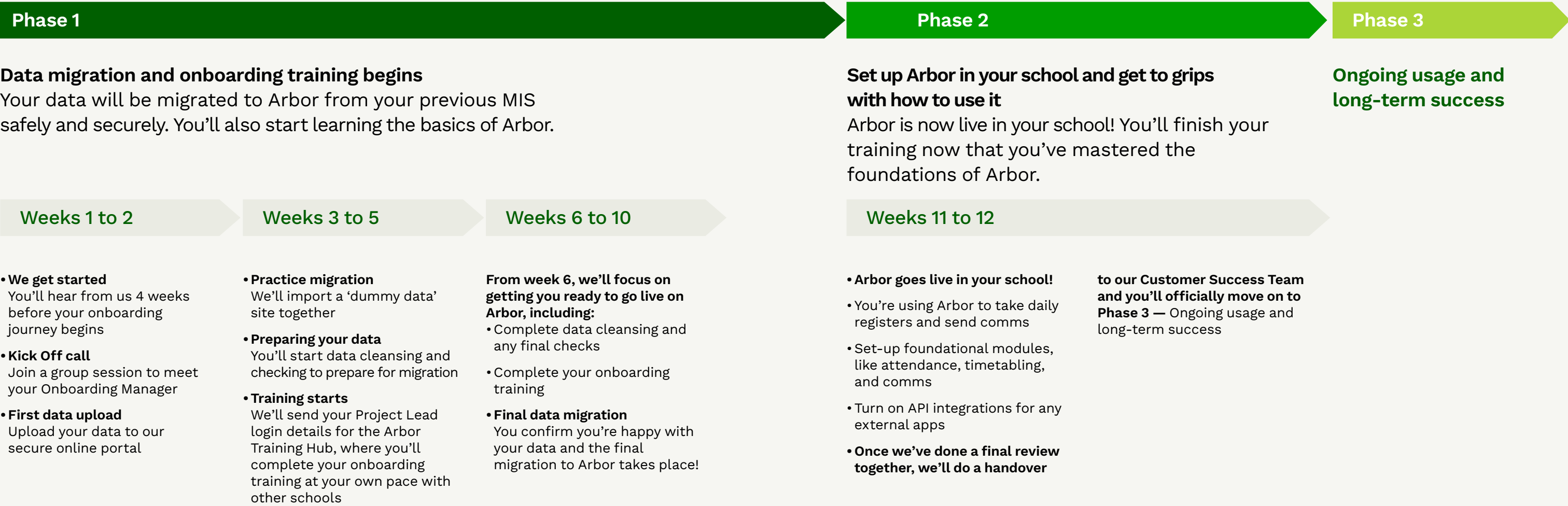
We felt thoroughly supported throughout the process by our Onboarding Manager — everything was very clearly communicated and transparent which helped to lift some of that anxiety that comes with any big system change. If you follow the steps I really don't know how it can go wrong.

DAVID PENDLEBURY, ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER
AT HINCHINGBROOKE SCHOOL

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

Secondary school onboarding timeline



Life after migration

Once you’re all settled into Arbor and you’ve mastered the basics, our team will work alongside you to help you reach your long-term goals.

Staying on track

To make sure you’re making progress towards your goals with Arbor, you’ll have check-ins with our Customer Success Team. These sessions are your opportunity to discuss how you’re using Arbor and how you can get the most out of your MIS.

“It’s intuitive and easy-to-use and it gives the people in our trust back the ownership over the data that they need. Now, we can easily access key bits of data in a few clicks, whereas before, we had to ask someone to run a report to get basic bits of information”

PETER BRADBURN,
DIRECTOR OF IT & COMMUNICATIONS
AT ASPIRE ACADEMIES TRUST

Supported by your Partnership Manager

For any commercial questions, your Partnership Manager will be on hand to help. You can discuss your Arbor package, how to access new features, or book training sessions and courses.



Understanding your goals

Every trust is unique, with its own challenges. When you first join Arbor, we’ll work with you to identify 3-4 goals you want to achieve.

Here are some areas where we’ve often helped trusts make big changes:

Aligning schools and central teams

Lots of trusts want their schools to keep their independence. But they also see the need for some standard practices so they can understand what’s happening across the trust and support the schools better. Arbor can help with that.

Reducing systems count

If your schools are juggling lots of different third party systems, it can be expensive, hard to manage and hinders alignment and consistency. We can recommend ways to consolidate things.

Preparing for growth

Many trusts have plans for expansion in the next few years. Arbor is built to scale with your trust, so you can onboard new schools easily, establish a cohesive culture, and make data-driven decisions from day one.

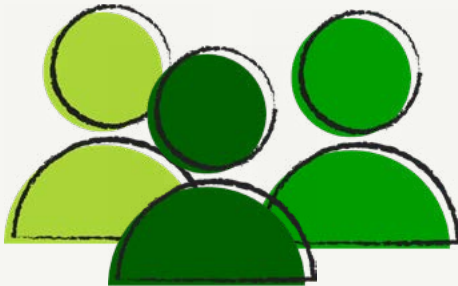
Learning from peers

We’re big believers in the power of peer support and knowledge sharing.

Our Customer Success Team will also connect you with other similar trusts to share best practices and ways of working.

Plus, you’ll have access to a community of fellow Arbor users. Thousands of MAT and school staff share their top tips, templates, and answer questions on Arbor HQ, our community forum.

We also bring together MAT leaders at events, dinners and conferences throughout the year, so you can network in person too!



Part 3:

Why MATs love Arbor

The Arbor difference

Why do more schools who switch choose Arbor over any other UK MIS?

Your MAT's mission control

Data and action taking, together at last

We make it easy for your central team to act on data within the system for fast, contextualised decision-making — with no need to log in to individual schools.

Support your schools in the right way for them

If you want to standardise everything across your schools, you can. If you just want to take care of back-office admin to free up schools to focus on teaching and learning, you can do that too.

Manage Assessments and HR tasks centrally

MAT MIS uniquely brings MIS, Assessment and HR features together. Our HR tools let your central teams access your Single Central Record and manage staff records, contracts and checks, all in one place.

In it for the long term

We'll take the time to truly understand your MAT and your goals – then help you meet them, year after year.

The only true MAT MIS for multi-academy trusts

Our school and MAT-level MIS are designed to work together as one, seamless pair of systems

More than just a dashboard, MAT MIS gives your central team a dedicated tool where information and actions flows both ways: school-up and trust-down

The data you need to make the best decisions

Out-of-the-box dashboards

View your schools' data clearly as soon as you login — no fiddly setup required. Benchmark phases, demographics and individual schools against each other.

Trust-wide assessment marks

See every assessment mark for each student in your trust, view the raw data and live feed it out for further analysis. View assessment marks over time, plot progress and identify any actions you need to take.

Flexible, painless reporting

Build custom reports in minutes and share them automatically with stakeholders on a schedule. Save time by using our ready-made report templates and customise to suit your needs.

Powerful integrations

Built-in Live Feeds allow you to explore your data in new ways with tools like Microsoft Power BI, Excel, Google Data Studio and Google Sheets. MAT MIS also integrates with leading tools like Invenry and iTrent.

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 396 SBMs and COOs to find out exactly how Arbor saves schools time and money

53%

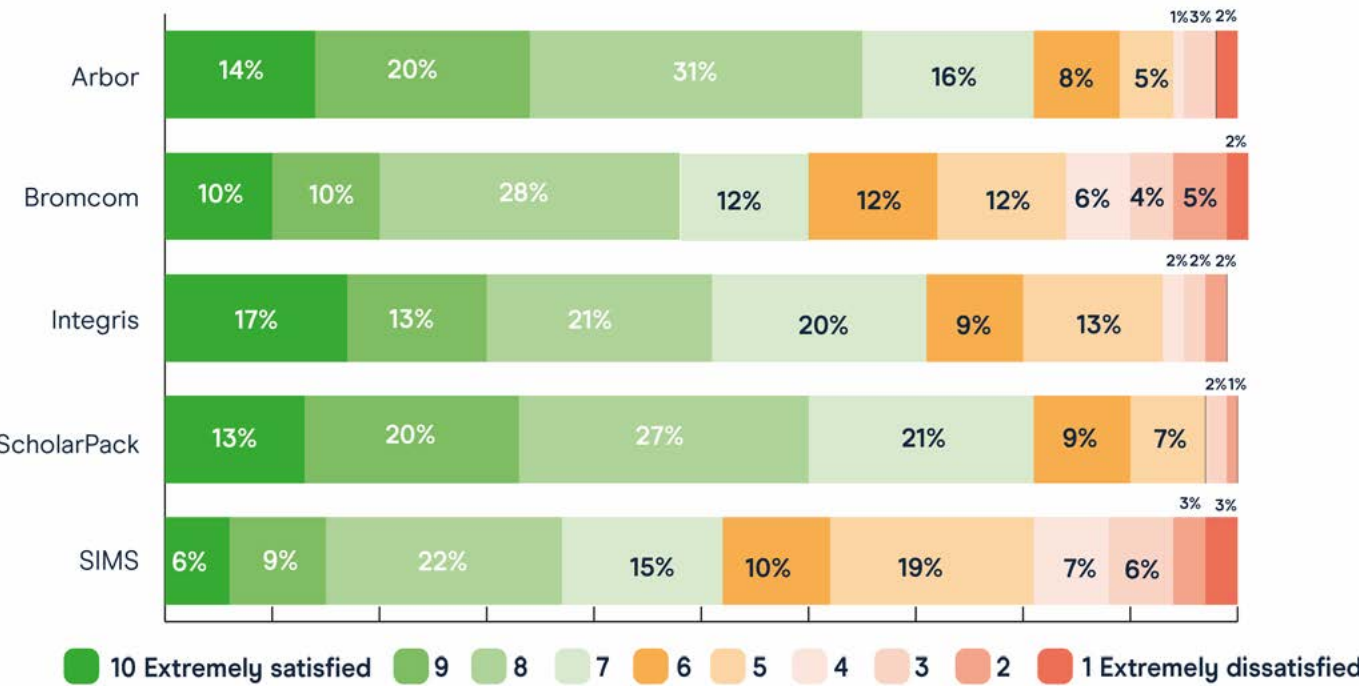
Over half of respondents (53%) said that Arbor has saved their school or trust money.

2.3

On average, respondents to our survey were able to eliminate over 2 third-party systems per school (2.3) as a result of moving to Arbor

In September 2024, 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?



What do trust leaders say about Arbor?

“When introducing a new MIS, yes, the look, feel and functionality of the system are all really important, value for money clearly matters, and customer support is critical - all of which Arbor delivers on. But, just as key to success is ensuring that the company’s values, culture and philosophy closely match your own, and it is here where Arbor really makes a difference.

DANES EDUCATIONAL ACADEMY TRUST



“Arbor has revolutionised the way we operate in schools across the MAT. It allows teachers to seamlessly and efficiently record, gather and store information whilst using their tools to analyse the data itself. Once the assessments are streamlined across localised schools within the MAT, the MAT MIS Dashboard is a brilliant location to analyse data MAT-wide across all groups and demographics. These same tools are ideal for teachers to identify groups of individuals and implement interventions accordingly and quickly. Arbor has changed the way we work; everyone from Teaching Assistants up to leadership now rely on the capabilities and tools that Arbor has to offer.”

GOSPORT AND FAREHAM MULTI-ACAEDMY TRUST



“As a trust we have been very impressed with the product and the service provided by Arbor. Their migration process is extremely effective, support is always available and they respond to users requests for product improvements. As such we have seen the product continue to evolve in our relatively short time with them.

Perhaps their greatest strength is the integrity with which they conduct their business. They do not, as so many do, ‘over promise and under deliver’, they are open about which areas of their product need to be improved and their senior management team is accessible, all the way through to the CEO, very refreshing indeed. Our new Arbor MIS is now integrated with our finance and HR systems to provide us with the information we need to ensure we can deliver on our trust mission.”

RED KITE LEARNING TRUST



From day one, Arbor has exceeded our expectations in every way possible, and their dedication to helping us streamline our school’s operations has been nothing short of remarkable.

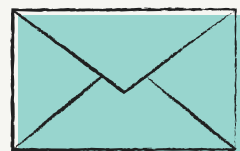
Arbor has been a game-changer for our academies. Their methodical implementation plan, excellent customer support, swift response time, and high-quality online training have all played pivotal roles in enhancing our efficiency and productivity. We are grateful to have Arbor as our educational MIS provider, and we wholeheartedly recommend their services to any educational institution seeking to elevate their operations to the next level.”

CASTLEFORD ACADEMY TRUST

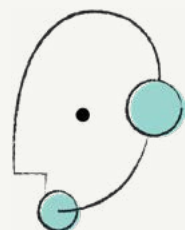


How to meet us this term

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

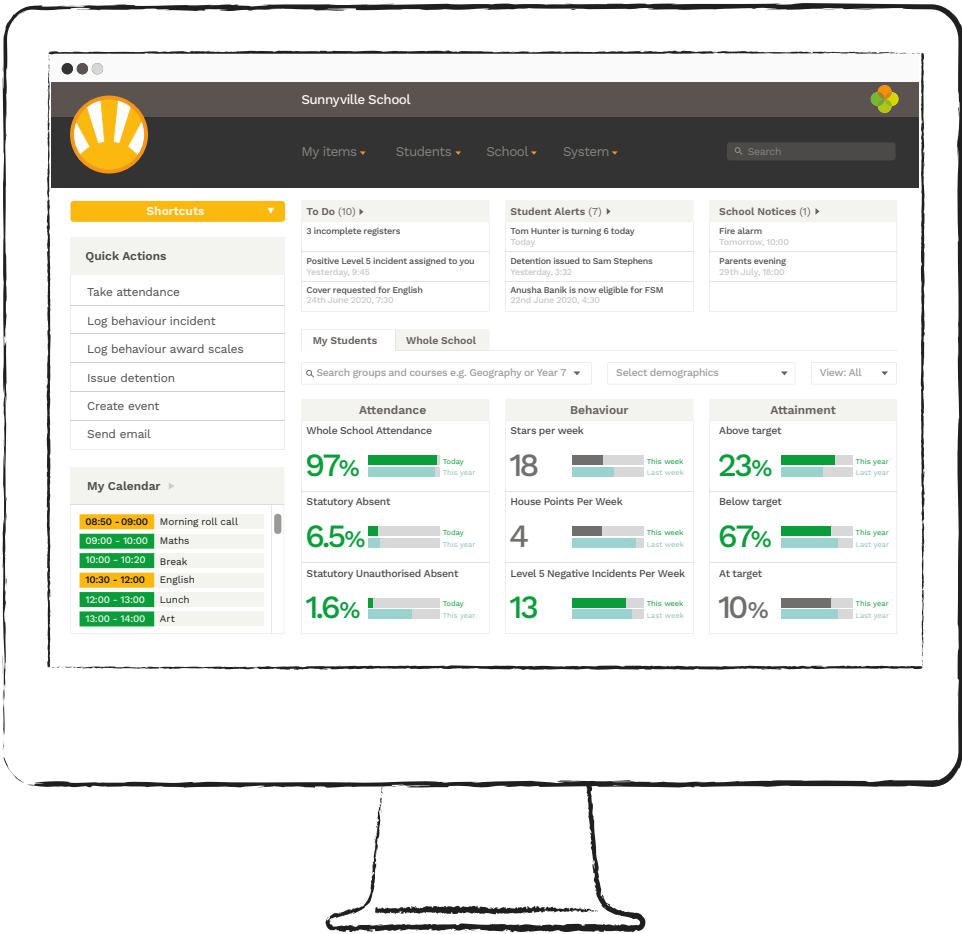


We'll take you through the next steps for you and your team

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 trust.



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

