Cost, time, value: Arbor's ROI in schools and trusts

Discover the returns that schools and trusts can achieve with Arbor MIS

2026 edition



Arbor

arbor-education.com

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Unlocking long-term value for schools and trusts



James Weatherill
CEO, Arbor

Since we first reported on the impact of Arbor MIS in 2023, school budgets have stayed broadly flat in real terms, while costs and pressures keep rising.[1] This year, funding per pupil is nominally going up, but falling rolls mean most schools won't feel the benefit.[2]

We know schools are already making every pound and every hour go as far as they can. Your MIS should take work off staff across registers, behaviour, parent messages, payments, assessment and everything else you and your staff do to keep your school running.

More than 13,000 users representing 7,700 schools responded to our survey this year, telling us that, for the fourth year in a row, Arbor MIS is saving time and money, replacing third-party systems and putting admin on autopilot:

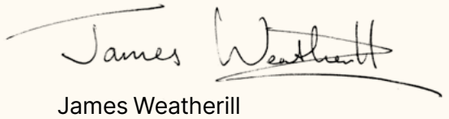
- 83% say Arbor saves their school money, around £6,200 a year on average. That rises to 89% among schools using Arbor for more than three years.
- 79% say Arbor saves them time, an average of 101 minutes per staff member each week, or 10 school days a year. That rises to 89% among schools using Arbor for more than three years.
- Schools using Arbor for more than three years have replaced more than three other systems on average, cutting both costs and admin.

AI is adding to those time savings. Twice as many schools use Arbor's AI features every week as a year ago, more than 7,000 in total. And for nearly three in four staff who use them, that means around an hour and a half back each week.

Our mission is to transform the way schools work for the better, so every member of staff spends less time on manual, repetitive work and more on the parts of their job that need them. The longer you use Arbor, the lighter that admin burden becomes. If you're not already part of the Arbor community, I'd like to show you what more time, real savings and happier teams could look like for your school or trust. Email hello@arbor-education.com to book a demo. We'll show you Arbor in action and how it would work for your school or trust.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts,

James



James Weatherill
CEO, Arbor

1 ifs.org.uk, School funding per pupil set to rise by 9% in real terms, 24 September 2026

2 teachingtimes.com, Outlook on school funding in England improves, September 2026

Executive summary

We wanted to find out how Arbor MIS saves schools and trusts time and money, and helps schools transform how they work. This report, which was compiled from a survey of over 13,000 Arbor users, plus an annual MIS sentiment survey by The Key, found that:

83%

83% of respondents save money with Arbor.[3]

84%

84% have stopped using at least one other digital tool since moving to Arbor.[4]

71%

71% said that moving to Arbor has made their working life easier.

101

101 minutes are saved each week, on average, by those members of staff.

79%

79% save time with Arbor.

90% agree that: "The Arbor Team builds the features schools want and need."

90%

3 Note that all stats in the report exclude people who answered "I don't know".

4 Among respondents who have used another MIS previously

How much could your school or trust save with Arbor? Get in touch for more information and an audit of your existing systems: hello@arbor-education.com

Part 1

Cost savings as a result of moving to Arbor MIS

How can your school or trust save money with Arbor?



> “Access to all school data across the trust centrally saves a significant amount of time and therefore money.”
>
> Data Lead, Multi Academy Trust

Are you paying for too many tools?

A good MIS should reduce the number of separate tools your school or trust relies on – and the number you pay for. Licences, updates, support, hosting, set-up and training all add up, and those costs are multiplied when you run several systems side by side.

When an MIS can’t cover the basics, schools end up buying extra apps for payments, parent communications, clubs and trips, and managing behaviour as well as assessments. As a result, spending goes up, data sits across disparate systems, and staff waste time switching between them. The question when choosing an MIS is whether it reduces workload and saves money.

The right MIS should cut out third-party costs and bring your school’s admin work together in one place, so everyday tasks are quick and simple, and people can collaborate easily.

Cost savings per school

We asked respondents whether Arbor saves them money, when considering everything their school or trust spends on servers, training and support.

83% of respondents said Arbor saves them money. And reported savings increase the longer a school has used Arbor. Among respondents in their first year of using Arbor MIS, 72% reported that their school had saved money. This rises to 81% of those who have used Arbor for one to two years, and 88% of those who have used it for two to three years.

Among respondents that have used Arbor for more than three years, 89% reported saving money.

Respondents who reported savings estimated them at an average of around £6,200 per school each year. Savings are higher in secondary schools, at an estimated £8,200 per school each year, compared with £4,600 in primary schools.[5]

For a MAT, that repeats across every school in the trust.

83%

of respondents said Arbor saves them money.

89%

of respondents who have used Arbor for more than 3 years said it saves them money.

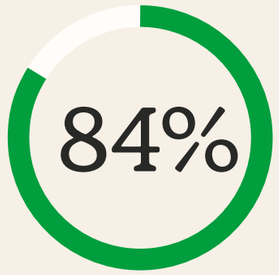
£6,200

Average estimated saving per school per year

5 Based on respondents who gave an estimated saving (n=1,007). Figure calculated using the midpoint of each answer band.

Schools are eliminating third-party systems thanks to Arbor

Many schools save money with Arbor because they've been able to get rid of other tools and apps they were using before. Arbor MIS is designed to help schools do as much as possible without switching systems.



84% of respondents who have used another MIS say they have stopped using at least one other digital tool since moving to Arbor.



80% of schools that stopped using other tools have replaced two or more.

2.8

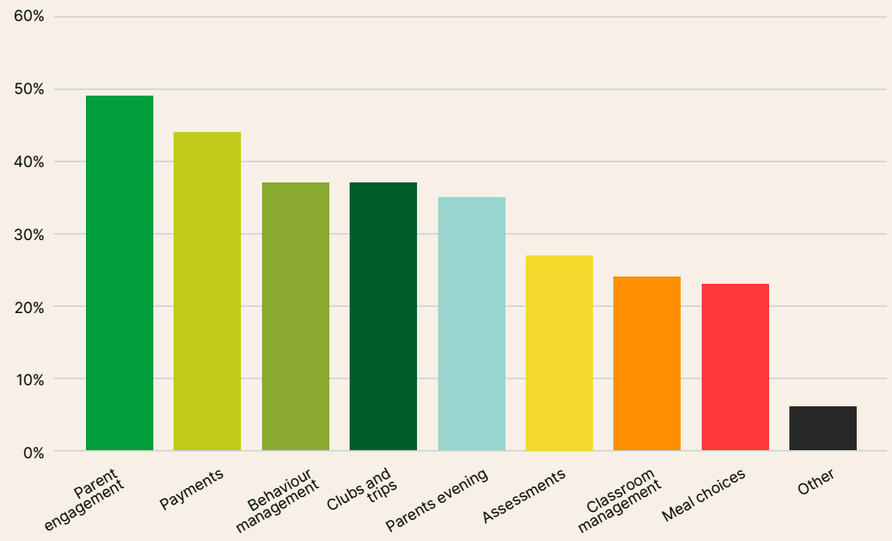
tools are eliminated on average in those schools.

Savings grow with time. Schools that have used Arbor for more than three years have retired 3.3 other tools on average, compared with 2.5 among schools in their first year using Arbor MIS.

Of the respondents who reported being able to eliminate third-party systems since moving to Arbor, almost half (49%) told us they'd cut parent engagement tools, and 44% had dropped payments tools.

> "Most of the tools within Arbor mean we do not have to purchase separate tools to use in addition to Arbor."
>
> Office Staff, Primary School

Third-party apps being eliminated:



N.B. 'Other' choices included attendance, reporting, and homework-setting apps.

Part 1
Cost savings as a result of moving to Arbor MIS

What could you save by eliminating unnecessary third-party systems?

If we estimate that the average cost of a parent engagement/communications app is at a minimum of £1 per pupil per annum, here is how much a school or trust could save on third-party subscriptions by switching to Arbor:

- The average Primary School (200 students) would eliminate £200 of annual costs
- The average Secondary School (1,000 students) would eliminate £1,000 of annual costs
- The average MAT (2,800 students across c.8 schools) would eliminate £2,800 of annual costs



And if we estimate that the average cost of a Payments app is at a minimum of £2 per pupil per annum, here is how much you could save on third-party subscriptions by switching to Arbor:

- The average Primary School would eliminate £400 of annual costs
- The average Secondary School would eliminate £2,000 of annual costs
- The average MAT would eliminate £5,600 of annual costs

Eliminating both a Parent Engagement/ Communications app and a Payments app could result in annual savings of:

- £600 for the average Primary School
- £3,000 for the average Secondary School
- £8,400 for the average MAT

These figures exclude software updates, support and hosting, set-up and training.

These figures are derived from publicly listed framework prices, our own internal pricing models, and this survey, in which budget-holders who reported both their annual saving and the number of tools they retired implied around £1,250 per tool per year.

"Arbor has helped save money by reducing the need for paper-based processes and printing. ... Having pupil information, communications and reporting in one system reduces the need for multiple software platforms, helping to lower overall costs for the school."

Office Staff, Special School

"SAVES TIME, AND TIME IS MONEY!"

Finance, Primary School

"Time optimisation has been the biggest cost saving at an individual level... As a data manager, I've been able to automate a large amount of tasks."

Data Manager, Secondary School

"The speed and efficiency helps me to be more productive and get through more work – although this sounds small, over the course of a school year it can be measured financially."

Office Staff, Alternative Provision School

Part 2

Saving time & driving efficiency with Arbor

Discover how Arbor MIS can make life easier for your staff.



Part 2
Saving time & driving efficiency with Arbor

Can you save time with your MIS?

Every minute a member of staff spends chasing data, re-entering information or switching between systems is a minute not spent on the essential work of managing a school and supporting students.

When an MIS is hard to use, everyday jobs take longer than they should. Pulling a report means exporting data and piecing it together by hand. Logging absences, sending reminders, and updating records become repetitive chores, and staff hop between systems to find the information they need. Across a whole school or trust, those lost minutes add up to hours every week.

The right MIS should give time and power back to staff. It should make routine admin quick and simple, put the right data at their fingertips, and free them to spend more time on the work that really matters.



> "Arbor saves us time by automating routine tasks, reducing manual data entry, and making information easier to access and manage."
>
> Office Staff, Secondary School

Part 2
Saving time & driving efficiency with Arbor

Time saved by different school roles

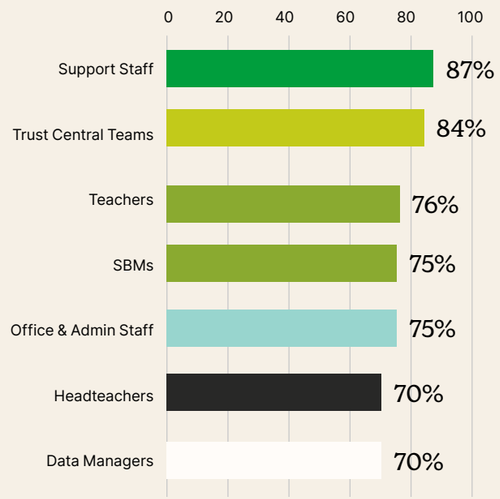
We asked our users whether the Arbor MIS saved them time, and how much time they save each week.

79% of respondents say Arbor saves them time

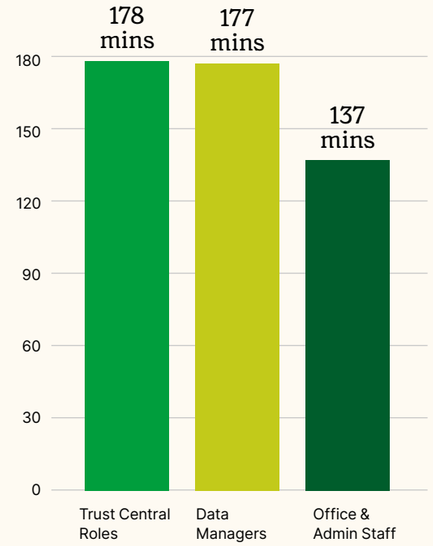
10 school days saved annually* by respondents who said Arbor was saving them time.

*Assuming 6.5 hours worked per day over 39 weeks per year

% of each role saying Arbor saves them time:



Time saved in minutes per week by role:



The longer schools use Arbor, the more time they get back. More than two thirds (69%) of respondents in their first year say Arbor saves them time, rising to 89% among those who have used it for more than three years.

The amount of time saved grows too: almost half (46%) of longer-term customers save more than an hour a week, compared with 28% of those in their first year.

101mins

Of respondents who said they saved time as a result of using Arbor, the average time saving was an estimated 101 minutes per week — the equivalent of 10 school days a year.

13days

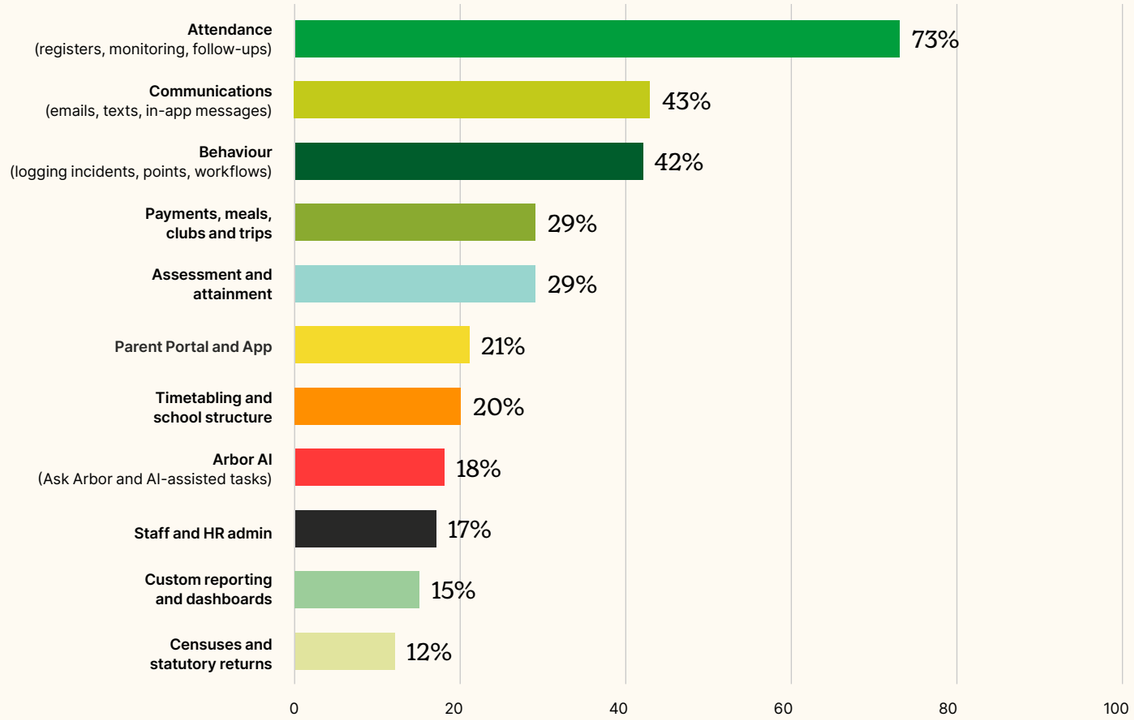
Among the office and business team (School Business Managers, office and admin staff, finance staff, data managers and exams officers), respondents who saved time with Arbor estimated they saved 136 minutes per week, on average — or 13 school days a year.

> "Arbor saves me time by providing instant access to pupil information, behaviour records, attendance data and communication tools all in one place. It reduces duplication of work, allows reports to be generated quickly, and makes it easier to communicate with parents and colleagues. As a result, I spend less time on administration and data gathering and more time supporting pupils and staff."
>
> Office Staff, Special School

> "Staff can access the data they need for their class in a simpler, quicker way than our previous MIS. The Workflows are reducing our admin time significantly and enabling reporting systems that we previously didn't have."
>
> Data Lead, MAT

Where are schools and trusts saving the most time?

Where Arbor saves time*



*Based on respondents who said Arbor saves them time and ticked at least one area (n=6,079)

Beyond specific features, respondents repeatedly mentioned that Arbor brings tools together in one system, so staff aren't switching between platforms or re-entering the same data.

They also frequently noted that the system is straightforward to use, which also cuts down on training time.

"It's brilliant having everything in one place, from being able to do meal registers, check attendance, message parents, set up parents evenings/IEP meetings and track medical conditions to analysing statistics and spotting trends in our data."

School Business Manager, Primary School

"The biggest plus for me is having access to all school data in one place. We are saving lots of people lots of time across the Trust."

Data Manager, Multi Academy Trust

"Arbor saves me time by bringing multiple processes into one system, so I no longer need to switch between different apps. Tasks like attendance, reporting, parent payments, and behaviour tracking are much quicker because data updates automatically across the platform."

Teacher, Primary School

How different roles save time with Arbor

Attendance is the single biggest time-saver across almost every role, but beyond that, each role gets time back in different places.

Spotlight on Support

School staff are stretched: 61% of senior leaders, and 75% of teachers and middle leaders, feel they spend too much time on admin, according to a government survey.[6] Every minute spent stuck on a problem is time taken from something more important, so our Support Team is there to provide helpful answers, quickly.

- Our Customer Satisfaction Score YTD (2026) is 95%
- Arbor's training programme has a satisfaction score of 99%
- We aim to respond to all requests or questions within 24 hours
- Our Help Centre has over 2,000 articles and resources, available 24/7

Source: Arbor's own service data

6 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-2/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-2-summary-report

7 Based on respondents who said Arbor saves them time and ticked at least one area (n=6,079)

Headteachers
value having the information they need in one place, with attendance (73%)[7] and communications (46%) at the top of their list, followed by assessment and attainment (34%).

"Tasks that used to be so time consuming can now be automated with scheduled reports or live feeds."
– Headteacher, Primary School

Deputy and assistant heads
point to attendance (76%), communications (44%), and behaviour and assessment (both 36%). Having everything in one package, rather than combining information from different systems, came up repeatedly.

"The mark sheets are so much easier to set up for assessments!! Thank you so much!!"
– Assistant Head, Primary School

Trust central teams
save time on communications and attendance (both 60%), with half citing custom reporting and dashboards. Live feeds, workflows and automated reports were singled out, with one respondent calling them "game changing for our organisation".

"We've been able to build numerous bespoke tools to enhance attendance, attainment and safeguarding utilising live feeds and the API."
– Data Lead, Multi Academy Trust

School Business Managers
save time on the tasks that land on their desks: censuses and statutory returns (57%), communications (54%), and payments, meals, clubs and trips (50%). Several noted that the census is much easier to complete, and that teachers can now look things up for themselves instead of asking the office.

"Saved time by having most information in one place, easily accessible by staff members. Much easier to do the Census."
– School Business Manager, Primary School

Office and admin staff
save most time on attendance (70%), communications with parents (57%) and payments (42%), and often described Arbor as simple and easy to navigate.

"Arbor has saved me time in a lot of ways: setting up spreadsheets, parents' consultations, searching for parent contacts, printable class sheets instead of me typing them up."
– Office Staff, Primary School

Support staff
save time on attendance (73%) and behaviour (52%), and value being able to find information about students quickly, from timetables to medical needs.

"Arbor has significantly improved my ability to engage with parents and efficiently access and manage information regarding clubs, trips, and attendance, streamlining administrative processes and saving valuable time."
– Support Staff, Primary School

Data managers
report the biggest time savings of any school-level role, with two thirds (66%) saving more than an hour a week. Their list is the most specialist: custom reporting (57%), communications (56%) and censuses and statutory returns (54%). Live feeds, which let them check data across the school without loading and filtering page after page, were a particular highlight. They also see the knock-on benefits when parents can do more for themselves.

"The parent app allows us to encourage parents to book and pay for after-school and residential trips, fill in consents and notify us of individual needs as well as auto-absence, which we've recently taken on board and works really well."
– Data Manager, Primary School

Teachers
save time on the everyday: taking registers (81%), logging behaviour (50%), and communicating with parents and recording assessments (both 40%). Many mention the benefits of having everything in one place.

"I do a lot of trips, and I find Arbor super efficient for trip payments, management and consent."
– Teacher, Secondary School

Part 2
Saving time & driving efficiency with Arbor

Time saved by AI features

In our survey, we asked about our AI-powered features separately: did people use them and, most importantly, did they help users save time on admin?

Arbor's product team works hard to ensure any new AI-powered features are safe, secure and impactful. We know that, applied in the right context, AI can make administrative work easier and quicker. Our users agree!



"It is quick and easy to use, and having Arbor AI is very helpful when I can't find what I am looking for."

SENCO, Primary School

"Love the Ofsted companion. Can quickly identify possible areas for explanation and can spend time finding evidence."

Headteacher/Principal, Primary School

"I like how accessible most things are, and how it is easy to use the in-built AI to find an answer if you do not already know."

Careers Lead, MAT

73%

of the survey respondents who are already using Arbor's AI features say the features save them time.

For those saving time with Arbor's AI features, 32% say they are saving more than an hour per week.

93mins

saved per week by Arbor's AI features, among those giving a figure.

Data managers are among the heaviest users of Arbor's AI features at 71%, ahead of School Business Managers at 62% and Deputy Heads at 59%.

The AI adoption challenge

Across everyone who answered, only 36% said they had used Arbor's AI features. (54% of those who had not said they simply didn't know such features existed.) We are keen to ensure that as many Arbor users as possible are acquainted with our AI features in the coming year – if three quarters of those already using them are saving time, the schools yet to try them stand to get the same time back.

Part 3

Investing for the future



Happier staff, stronger schools

In a survey by TES,[8] "workload" came out as the top cause of negative wellbeing among teachers, with 71% calling their workload unmanageable and 45% regularly working at least nine extra hours a week.

At Arbor, our goal is to reduce your workload by putting your admin on autopilot, and making our products easy to navigate and use. As well as saving schools' time and driving efficiencies, we see that this has a positive impact on staff wellbeing, which can improve staff retention, saving you money on recruitment and training.

It also gives teachers and school staff more time for the work that matters.

In addition, Arbor gives schools and trusts better access to useful data, leading to streamlined operations, less stress around inspections, and insights that can improve student outcomes.



8 https://www.tes.com/en-gb/for-schools/blog/article/state-teacher-wellbeing-schools

"Arbor has had a positive impact on my working life by streamlining administrative tasks, improving access to data, and reducing the time spent navigating multiple systems."

Support Staff, Alternative Provision School

Part 3
Investing for the future

Improving wellbeing by reducing admin

The impact of a good MIS goes beyond time and cost savings.

We asked respondents what impact, if any, had Arbor had on their working life, compared with their previous MIS.

"It's so simple to use, so this in itself makes usage more streamlined and less stressful, and frees up some time."

Office Staff, Special School

"Arbor is exceptionally intuitive and enables admin staff to carry out their roles with time effectiveness."

School Business Manager, Secondary School

"I work across five schools... It's easy for me to switch between schools. Arbor is easy to use and can easily go back and forth between screens. It's so easy to use."

Teacher, Primary School

"The ability to automate and standardise data across a large group of schools has transformed how we work with data."

Data Lead, Multi Academy Trust

"Reporting enables quick collection of relevant data and can show governors up-to-date results without time-consuming data collection."

Office Staff, Secondary School

"Arbor gets rid of the need to have an on-site server for an MIS and therefore installation of an application onto members of staff's devices, making access & user deployment easier."

IT Manager, MAT

"Having everything in one place and not having to juggle various portals with different ways of logging in has been really helpful. A lot of the benefit of Arbor is the intuitive presentations and UI. It didn't take long at all for me to pick it up."

Support Staff, Secondary School

71%

of respondents said that moving to Arbor has made their working life easier.

78%

of special school staff agree Arbor has made their working life easier.

71% of respondents said that moving to Arbor has made their working life either easier or significantly easier. This number jumps to 80% for Support Staff and 86% for Data Leads, our power users. Arbor is the home of school data: combining MIS, HR and finance data together with national datasets — providing a clear, single source of truth for the whole school or trust.

And, again, the benefits appear to build over time. 59% of staff in their first year with Arbor say it has made their working life easier, this rises to 84% for those who have been customers for more than three years.[9]

9 Of people who had used another MIS.

Part 3
Investing for the future

Built with schools, for schools

The demands of schools are constantly changing, affected by political and social developments as well as technological advancements.

Systems play an important role in changing times: if your systems are not adaptable, then schools will incur costs from having to procure new technology or retrain staff.

At Arbor, we believe in innovating and developing new features that will make a measurable difference to the way schools and their staff work, working closely with our community of users.



90%

of respondents in our survey agree or strongly agree that: "The Arbor Team builds the features schools want and need."

"You really respond well to your customer feedback, and as the demand of work evolves it's great to know the Arbor team will help Arbor evolve with us."

Data Lead (Trust level), Secondary School

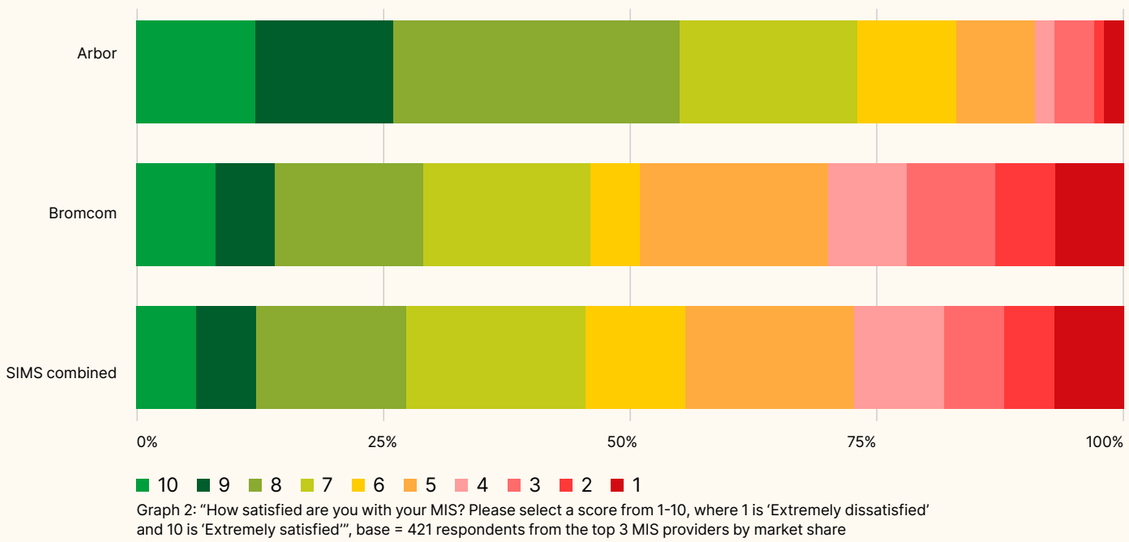
Most satisfied MIS users

The Key's MIS sentiment survey of all schools, not just Arbor users, in the UK, reports annual satisfaction levels among MIS users across the top providers in England.

The study found:

- Arbor users rate their average satisfaction at 7.25 out of 10, up from 7.2 last year, the highest score of the three leading MIS providers in England.
- 26% of Arbor users rated their MIS 9 or 10 out of 10 ("extremely satisfied"), more than double the equivalent proportion for either other provider (14% and 12%).

Arbor, Bromcom and SIMS combined



Graph 2: "How satisfied are you with your MIS? Please select a score from 1-10, where 1 is 'Extremely dissatisfied' and 10 is 'Extremely satisfied'", base = 421 respondents from the top 3 MIS providers by market share

"It has been so much easier to use than our previous MIS — it is more intuitive, it looks better, and it has increased functionality."

Admin, Primary School

We are proud at Arbor to have a market-leading retention rate of 99%, meaning schools who choose us, stick with us.

81%

of Arbor users say they're unlikely to switch providers in the next 12 months, the highest of the three leading providers.

Satisfaction by feature area
(Arbor % satisfied or extremely satisfied)

Functionality	72%
Quality of support received	69%
Provides actionable information	69%
Integration with other systems	68%
Intuitiveness for new users	65%

Spotlight on community

When you join Arbor, you join a community of thousands of other schools and trusts who share best practice on how to get the most out of our products. Our forum, Arbor HQ, has over 12,000 members sharing ideas and best practice.

arbor-education.com

Part 4

Next steps

Discover Arbor, the UK’s most-popular MIS and school management software.



Part 4
Next steps

Interested in how Arbor could save your school or trust money?

Find out more about how you can replace old third-party systems with our easy-to-use cloud-based MIS.

Our friendly team will help you audit your existing systems, so you can see how much money your school or trust will save by moving to Arbor.

> "I have yet to encounter disadvantages. Everything is an advantage so far. I wish I'd moved across earlier. Even the transition from our old MIS to Arbor was seamless and easy."
>
> School Business Manager, Primary School

Get in touch at

hello@arbor-education.com

10,000+
Primaries have chosen our MIS

1,500+
Secondaries have chosen our MIS

1,300+
Special schools have chosen our MIS

950+
MATs have chosen our MAT MIS

13,000+
schools on Arbor

NB All stats above are as of September 2026

Just some of the schools and MATs in the Arbor community:

How to switch MIS

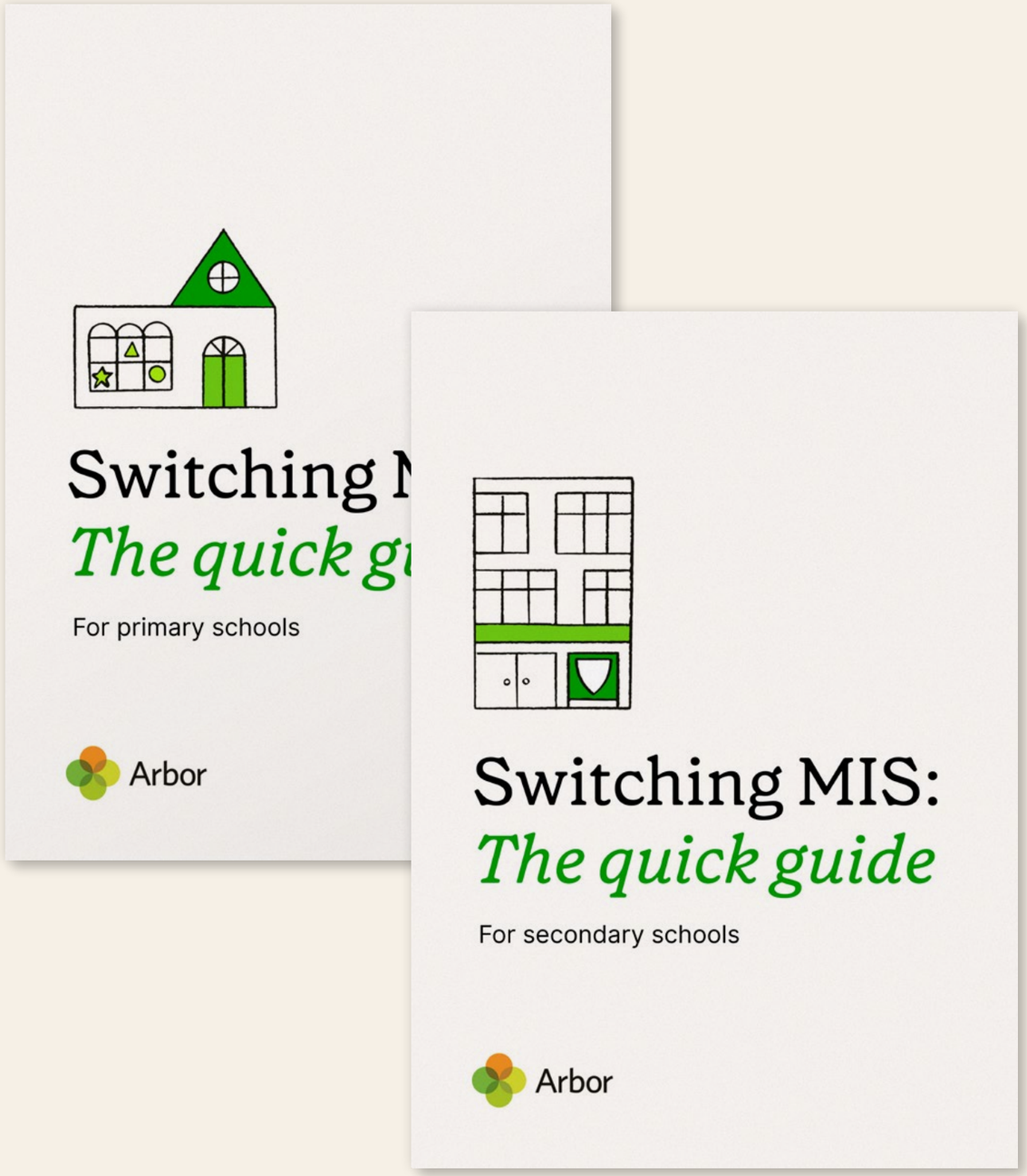
Moving MIS? We're here to help you every step of the way, from research through to implementation.

Download your copy of our free Switching Made Simple guide, and see how you can make the switch easily.



Scan here to download your copy

Or visit bit.ly/switching-made-simple



Methodology

We sent our survey to all Arbor customers and users by email and in-app notifications.

The survey ran from 18 June to 4 July 2026.

The survey had 13,159 responses.

We have also included some insights from The Key's MIS sentiment survey.

Please note that all stats in the report exclude people who answered "I don't know".

The breakdown of where our respondents work is:

Primary school (+ infants, junior)	46%
Secondary school (+ all-through, college)	38%
Special School / AP	12%
MAT Central Team	4%



Notes

We'd love to hear from you. Get in touch...

E hello@arbor-education.com
W www.arbor-education.com