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

A report investigating the ROI schools and trusts get from Arbor MIS

2024 Edition

Arbor

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Investing school resources in the right places

James Weatherill
CEO at Arbor Education

In 2023, when we released the first edition of this report, there had been no net growth in school spending per pupil for the previous 14 years.[1]

A year later, funding per pupil is still 9% lower in real terms than in 2009-2010 as a result of cuts throughout the 2000s.[2] Plus, many schools are still working through the knock-on effects of the cost-of-living crisis, ongoing budget cuts and the Covid-19 pandemic. This has put even more pressure on schools to divert their resources to where it matters most.

We understand in this context that every pound and every minute in school matters, especially given the impact this has on the education workforce. A year on from the first edition, we've put together this updated ROI report to demonstrate how investing in the right Management Information System (MIS) can and should save your school or trust money and time. We'll be looking at these savings not only through the lens of direct cost comparison with other providers, but also through:

- Auditing and consolidating systems

- Eliminating unnecessary maintenance of servers

- Saving time per staff member by removing the burden of admin

- Driving operational efficiency through the quality and depth of your MIS' features

- Reducing workload, positively impacting wellbeing and therefore retention

All of these factors combined should give you both a tangible return on investment for your organisation, and have a measurable impact on student outcomes and staff wellbeing.

I founded Arbor with the belief that having an MIS which is built to support all school staff, drive efficiency and have an unquestionable impact should be a given. I hope after reading this report, you'll see how changing MIS could achieve the same for your school or trust.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts,
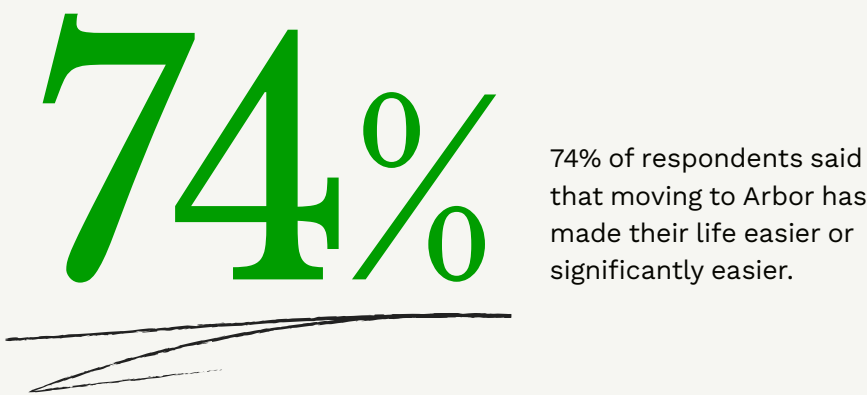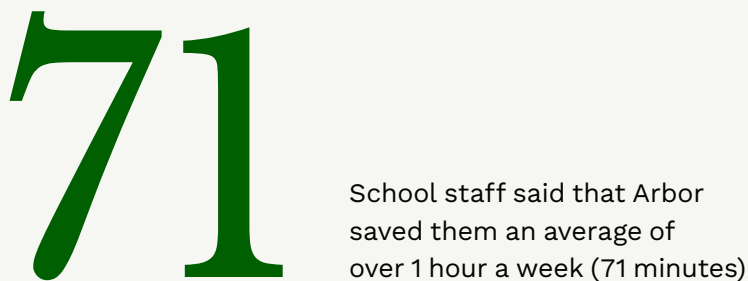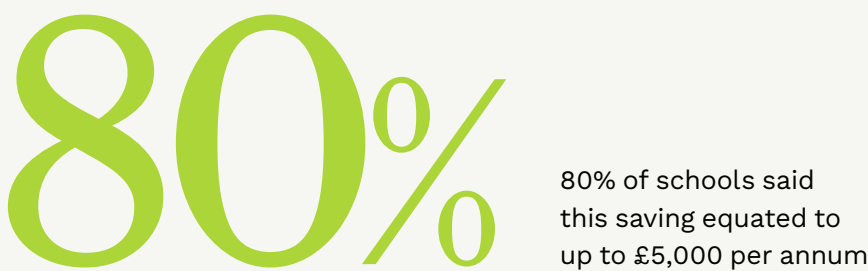
James Weatherill
CEO, Arbor Education

1 https://ifs.org.uk/education-spending/schools#

2 https://ifs.org.uk/articles/uncertain-course-school-and-college-funding-over-next-parliament

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

Executive summary

We wanted to find out exactly how Arbor saves our community of schools and trusts both time and money. Findings from our survey of over 7,300 Arbor users, combined with those from our annual NPS survey of all school staff who use Arbor, showed that:

80%

80% of schools said this saving equated to up to £5,000 per annum

71

School staff said that Arbor saved them an average of over 1 hour a week (71 minutes)

-2

On average, schools are able to eliminate over 2 third-party systems (2.3) as a result of moving to Arbor

74%

74% of respondents said that moving to Arbor has made their life easier or significantly easier.

53%

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

If you're interested in finding out how your school or trust could save money or you would like an audit of your systems as a result of using Arbor, get in touch at hello@arbor-education.com

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

Discover how your MIS can and should save your school or trust money through elimination of unnecessary annual costs

How much do schools spend on MIS, on average?

Average spend on MIS in England

In England, the average spend on an MIS is £10–£20 per pupil per year, depending on the functionality in the software and level of support.[1] This includes the cost of licenses, software updates, support and hosting, but doesn't include the initial setup and training costs.

- In an average primary school of 200 pupils*, the spend on an MIS is between £2,000 and £4,000 p.a.

- In an average secondary school of 1,000 students*, the spend on an MIS is between £10,000 and £20,000 p.a.

- In an average Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) with 2,800 pupils across 8 schools†, the spend on an MIS is between £28,000 and £56,000 p.a.

1 Arbor research and analysis

2 ibid

*We have estimated the average sizes of schools by taking the total number of students in the phase (primary or secondary) and dividing by the number of schools in the same phase.

†We have estimated this average by taking the average number of students per MAT (2,836), and dividing it by the average number of students per academy within a MAT (463).

Additional spend on third-party applications

However, when schools also have to purchase additional apps for Assessment, Analytics, Timetabling and Safeguarding, this can mean that spending on MIS stretches to approximately £20–£30 per pupil per year.[2]

- For an average primary school, this could extend the spend on internal systems to £4,000–£6,000 p.a.

- For an average secondary school, this could extend the spend on internal systems to £20,000–£30,000 p.a.

- For an average MAT, this could extend the spend on internal systems to £56,000–£84,000 p.a.

Your MIS can and should be able to help eliminate some of these third-party costs and join up working across your school.

Potential immediate savings from system consolidation:

Primary Schools

£2,000+ p.a.

Secondary Schools

£10,000+ p.a.

MATs

£28,000+ p.a.

How schools are eliminating third-party systems with Arbor

We surveyed 397 School Business Managers, Bursars and Chief Operating Officers across MATs, Primary, Secondary, and Special Schools who are using Arbor. We found that these schools are saving money by replacing third-party apps with Arbor's built-in functionality.

73%

Nearly 3/4 (73%) of respondents said they had been able to eliminate at least one third-party system since moving to Arbor
Compared to 69% in 2023

75%

Of those, 75% said they had been able to get rid of between two and sixteen third-party systems

2.3

On average, those that had been able to get rid of a third-party system, actually were able to eliminate 2.3 third-party systems per school
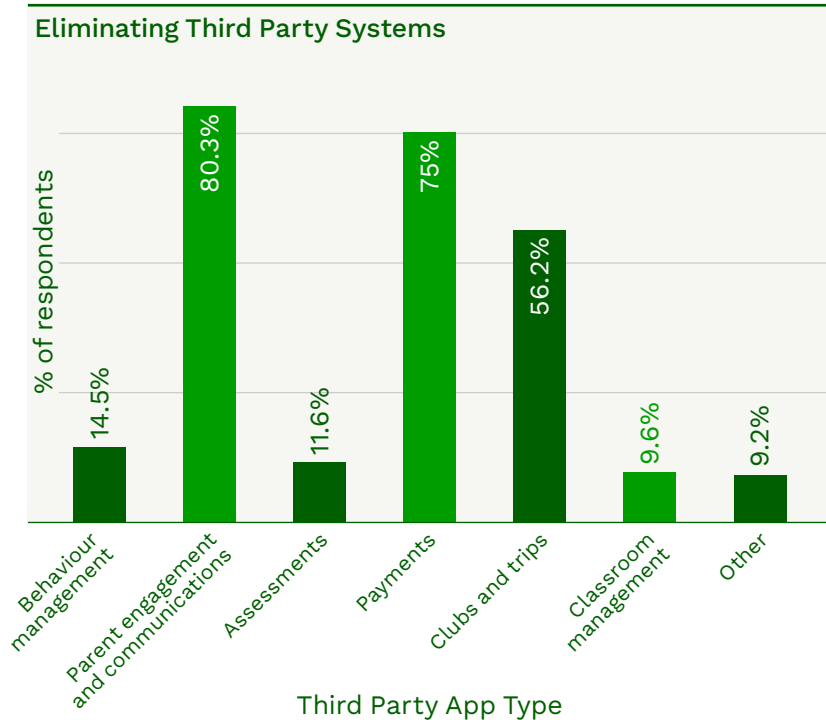
Of the respondents who reported being able to eliminate third-party systems since moving to Arbor, we asked which categories those systems fell into.

80%

80% said that they had been able to eliminate apps for parent engagement and communications
Compared to 70% in 2023

75%

75% said that they had been able to get rid of payment apps
Compared to 50% in 2023

Eliminating Third Party Systems

% of respondents

- Behaviour management: 14.5%
- Parent engagement and communications: 80.3%
- Assessments: 11.6%
- Payments: 75%
- Clubs and trips: 56.2%
- Classroom management: 9.6%
- Other: 9.2%

Third Party App Type

N.B. 'Other' choices predominantly referenced parents evening bookings and meal choices

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

If we estimate that the average cost of a parent engagement/communications app is a minimum of £1 per pupil per annum:

- The average Primary School (200 students) would eliminate £200 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

- The average Secondary School (1,000 students) would eliminate £1,000 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

- The average MAT (2,800 students across c.8 schools) would eliminate £2,800 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

If we estimate that the average cost of a parent engagement/communications app is a minimum of £2 per pupil per annum:

- The average Primary School (200 students) would eliminate £400 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

- The average Secondary School (1,000 students) would eliminate £2,000 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

- The average MAT (2,800 students across c.8 schools) would eliminate £5,600 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

Given that the majority of our schools were, on average, able to eliminate 2.3 third-party systems by moving to Arbor, and that the majority of these were parent communication and payment applications, we can therefore estimate that, combined:

The average Primary School (200 students) would eliminate £600 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

The average Secondary School (1,000 students) would eliminate £3,000 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

The average MAT (2,800 students across c.8 schools) would eliminate £8,400 of annual costs on third-party subscriptions by moving to Arbor

This doesn't include costs for software updates, support and hosting, initial setup and training, meaning we would estimate that savings would be even higher.

In our previous survey (2023) of SBMs, COOs and CFOs, we also found that the the amount of apps a school or trust had eliminated as a result of moving to Arbor increased by 70% after being an Arbor customer for 24+ months.

70%

We carried out detailed system analysis and 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.** Back in February 2022, we were having to interface all these additional apps into our MIS, sometimes having to export and import continually to allow for the most up-to-date information. Not only were the additional subscriptions and applications costly, but also labour intensive from an administrative and organisational point of view.

When we looked at what we currently bought into, there was over **£19,000 worth of additional subscriptions and costs per annum** that we could effectively eliminate by moving to Arbor.

SBM, Primary School

Since using Arbor, our school has been able to reduce the amount of IT software packages we use, most notably, behaviour, communications and a school payment system — which is actually new for our school.

Bringing these three things into one great system like Arbor saves us time, money and improves staff efficiency immeasurably. We are so pleased that Arbor can offer this type of flexibility and functionality – I just wish it could make a cup of tea and then we'd have the whole package!

Data Systems Administrator, Special All-Through School

When the LEO Academy Trust was looking to move to a cloud-based MIS, financial savings and value for money was hugely important. Having moved to **Arbor, we have saved money on third party products** which we no longer require as they are included in the core functionality of Arbor.

Director of Technology, MAT

Cost-savings per school

In our survey of Business Managers, Bursars and COOs, we asked how much money Arbor saves them per year, when considering everything their school or trust spends on software, servers, training and support.

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

Compared with 42% in 2023

53%

Of those that said Arbor saves their school money, over

80%

of respondents from primary and secondary schools said that they save up to

£5k

per year.

Over

16%

of primary and secondary schools said that they save between

£5k–15k

per year as a result of moving to Arbor.

The remaining respondents (over 2%) said that their school saves between

£15k–25k

a year.

How much money does Arbor save your school per year?

Money saved p.a.	% respondents
Up to £5k	80.1%
£5k–£15k	14.1%
£10k–£20k	2.5%
£20k–£40k	0.8%
Not sure	2.5%

*Please note, the data of those who responded 'I don't know' to this question have been removed for accuracy

Eliminating Third Party Systems

% of respondents

Savings per year (£)	
0–5,000	80%
5,001–10,000	14%
10,001–15,000	2.5%
15,001–20,000	1%
20,001–25,000	2.5%
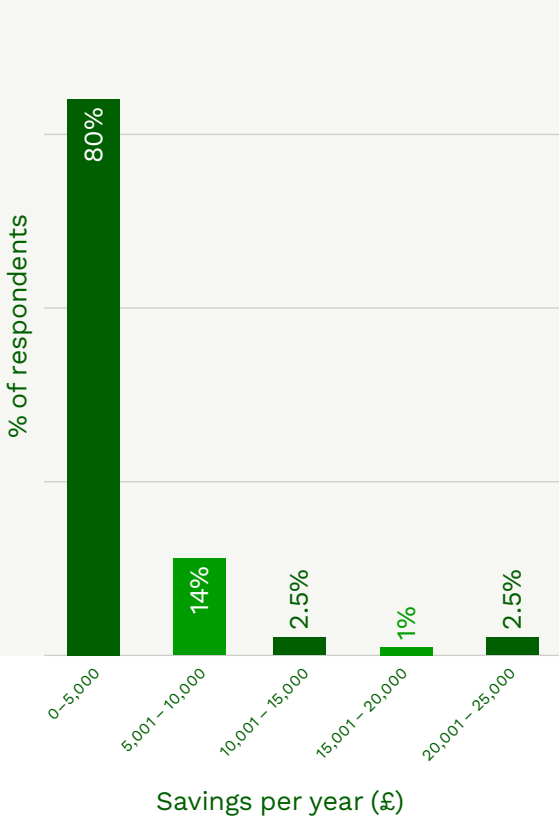
Part 2
Saving time, driving efficiency with Arbor

Our MIS is designed to save all staff time and drive efficiency in your school, so you can spend the time where it matters most

Time saved by different school roles

We surveyed 7,306 Arbor users to find out how much time they save with Arbor per week. On average, we found that:

69% of respondents said that they save time per week with Arbor

84% of headteachers/principals said that they save time per week with Arbor

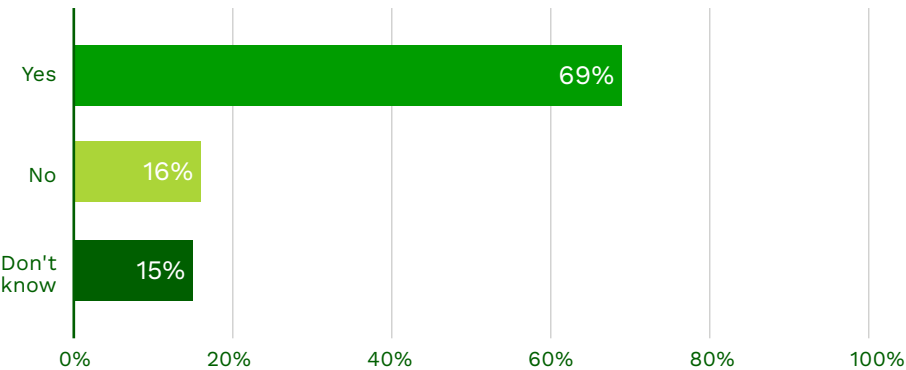Of those that said they saved time as a result of using Arbor, our respondents saved, on average, over 70 minutes per week — see how this increases for different roles on the next page

2% of respondents said they saved between 6 and 8 hours a week, equivalent to one whole school day

Areas that were quoted as saving schools and trusts time included:

- Day-to-day tasks such as following up on attendance and reporting

- Bigger tasks, namely the Census

- Intuitiveness of the system means less time training staff or waiting on support

- When support is needed, the efficiency of our Support Team saved respondents time

Do you save time using Arbor compared to your previous MIS?

Yes	69%
No	16%
Don't know	15%

Role	Average time saved per week	Most mentioned tasks
Headteacher / Principal (equivalent)	98 mins	Dashboard and information at a glance, reporting, scheduled reports, accessing behaviour records, ease of use — it's 'stress-free!'
Deputy / Assistant Headteacher	83 mins	Generating reports, accessible analysis and data comparisons for attendance and attainment, attendance dashboard, live feeds, report cards
MAT Central Team	105 mins	Reporting, support, integrations, data across all schools
School Business Manager	113 mins	Managing payments and trips, excellent reporting system', 'census is a breeze', school admissions, finance reporting on weekly income, correcting mistakes and inconsistencies
Office / Admin Staff	113 mins	'Easy to use', communications with parents, mail merging, behaviour workflows, student information e.g. medical conditions, reporting, detentions, 'speedy and responsive', easier for staff to get information for themselves
Data Manager / Exams Manager	141 mins	Attendance and behaviour reporting, admissions, importing and extracting data, assessments, user-defined fields, student demographics, scheduling exams and seating plans — '99% of the processes that I do for my schools are easier in Arbor.'
Teacher	48 mins	Seating plans, 'extremely easy to navigate', can see everything in one place, no 'faff', contacting parents, data input

Spotlight on Support

With 32.7 hours a week lost to non-teaching tasks in an average school, we know the importance of timeliness across our Support Team.[1]

- Our Customer Satisfaction Score YTD (2023) is 94%

- 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

Part 2 Saving time, driving efficiency with Arbor

> Arbor has been an incredible investment. It saves time every day. We find it easy to use, easy to train staff to use, it assists with absence tracking, staff contract calculations and the logging of SEN / behaviour etc (all previously paper / admin tasks). In addition the amount of time saved when preparing a census in comparison to Arbor is incredible. On the whole
>
> Arbor is more user friendly, makes more sense and is easier to use reporting etc without the use of specialist support. I am a huge advocate for Arbor and have been telling colleagues in other schools that they must make the change. We are so pleased that we moved across.
>
> **Business Manager, Junior School**

> 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.
>
> **Headteacher, Secondary School**

> **Arbor's deeper functionality, and connecting those dots across the system, relieves the administrative burden on school staff, which in my opinion, gives staff the capacity to concentrate on those higher value activities.** Those things you might not always have the day-to-day bandwidth to support.
>
> We can put more of our energy into doing things that benefit our wider community, help our families, or even simple things, like increasing our tours and marketing to make sure we receive the maximum amount of funding that we are eligible for. Because if your numbers are below pan, you've still got to staff the same classrooms, which puts the students at a disadvantage. So for me, marketing and lettings and generating additional income to supplement the school budget is critical, because it impacts student outcomes. With the right MIS, you can free up some of the administrative capacity to manage that.
>
> **SBM, Primary School**

> 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.**
>
> **MIS Leader, MAT**

Improving wellbeing by reducing admin

Every year, thousands of people start a career in schools to make a difference. But at the same time, even more of them leave. The #1 reason for staff leaving the profession is workload, closely followed by stress.

At Arbor, our MIS is designed to reduce workload by automating laborious admin work. As well as simply saving schools time and driving efficiencies, we hear directly from our community of schools that this:

- Has a positive impact on staff wellbeing

- In turn, this positively impacts on staff retention (leading to saved costs on recruitment and training)

- And gives teachers and school staff more time to focus on impactful work, rather than the burden of admin

- Plus, Arbor gives schools and trusts easier access to data, leading to streamlined operations, less stress regarding inspections and more actionable insights to improve student outcomes

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

74% of respondents said that moving to Arbor has made their life either easier or significantly easier

78% of school staff suffer with stress[1]

56% of staff are leaving the profession due to workload[2]

Breakdown of respondents who said Arbor made their working life easier or significantly easier
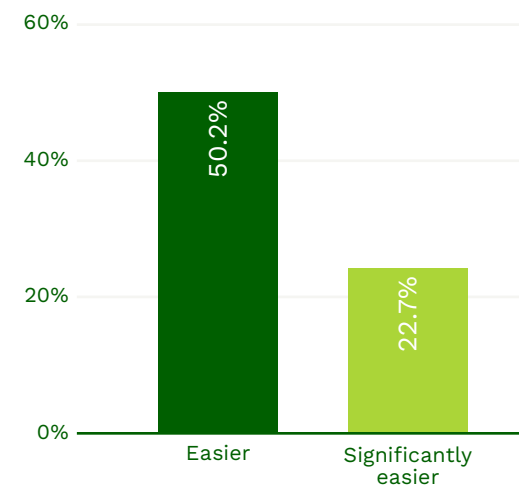
Easier 50.2%
Significantly easier 22.7%

*Please note, the data of those who responded 'I don't know' to this question have been removed for accuracy

- Amongst SBMs and CFOs alone, over 80% of respondents said that Arbor made their life easier or significantly easier.

- For headteachers and principals alone, 86% of respondents said that Arbor made their life easier or significantly easier.

- For MAT SLT (including CEO, Data Leads and Director of Education) 91% of respondents said that Arbor made their life easier or significantly easier

> You want to keep things interesting for people, which supports staff engagement too. Certain things have to happen at certain times in schools, and some of the more labour intensive work can be more monotonous, which causes peaks and troughs in terms of individual workload, particularly when we were dependent on lots of manual processes. Arbor is helping us to level off those peaks effectively.
>
> Of course, we're still busy, but not to the point where people are completely overwhelmed and where work is more interesting that supports staff development, recruitment and retention.
>
> It's evident Arbor's developers have a real understanding of education. That's one of the overriding benefits of the system - you understand what we need to make our lives easier, and that seems to naturally fall into the cycle of development. Moving to Arbor has to be one of the best decisions we've made.
>
> **SBM, Primary School**

> 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.
>
> **Deputy Headteacher, Secondary School**

> 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**

Driving efficiency through joined-up working

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

It's not as easy as "saving time = saving money" in education, as the ultimate aim of your organisation is not to make money, but to help create the best outcomes for your students as possible.

Our MIS is designed to do the heavy lifting when it comes to time-consuming manual tasks, so that staff have more time to spend on work that:

• Drives school improvement

• Drives school efficiency

• Has a tangible impact on the lives of your pupils

The total spend on 5–16 year olds in England is £7.5K per year, per student, meaning the cost of MIS and related apps make up less than 0.5% of schools' total spend.[1]

By contrast, schools spend 10x more on their admin and clerical staff than their MIS.[2] This means schools should be making sure that the tools used by these staff are designed to help make them make the most effective use of their time and energy.

> " Arbor has not only completely changed the office workload and efficiency, but allows the whole school to become more efficient.
>
> **Business Manager, Primary School**

> " Lots of aspects of Arbor save time and allow us to manage things better. We are working in different ways with Arbor - doing more with the time we have.
>
> **Data Manager, Secondary School**

> " Arbor not only costs less than all the integrated platforms we were using, but has cut down the duplications of tasks and time taken to complete them. It has managed to unify the staff onto one platform where they have access to all the information they need at their fingertips. This has reduced the burden on the admin team, cutting costs even further
>
> **Senior Administration Officer, Primary School**

We asked all school staff using Arbor to look into the impact our MIS was having on their everyday lives, and thus the impact they could have on student outcomes.

92%

said our MIS had transformed the way they work for the better. 81% said Arbor had improved how they analyse and understand their data.[3]

To investigate further, we asked respondents the impact using Arbor has had on collaboration. We believe that breaking bottlenecks and reducing siloes is key when it comes to running an efficient school or trust.

2/3

of non-teaching respondents (66.4%) said that Arbor made collaborating easier or significantly easier compared with their previous MIS.

The same was echoed by MAT Central Teams, with

66.8%

of respondents stating that Arbor made collaborating easier or significantly easier compared with their previous MIS.

● Has Arbor transformed the way you work for the better?

● Has Arbor improved how you analyse and understand your data?

[Bar chart: Yes — 92%, 81%; No — 1%, 19%]
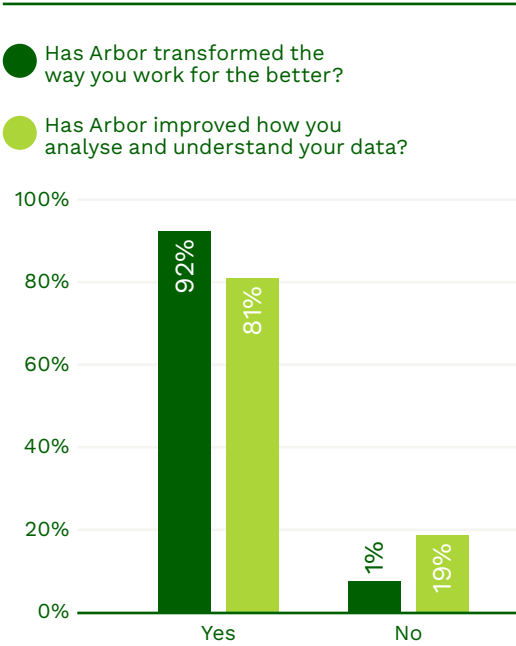
3 Annual NPS survey, Arbor Education

Unquantifiable savings

Many of the responses in our survey and interviews quoted savings that couldn't be explicitly quantified, although they still created positive impact across schools and trusts. These include, but aren't limited to:

- Costs of maintaining a server e.g. air conditioning, other maintenance costs

- Time lost to bulky updates and error-fixing

- Time lost to staff having to come into school when they couldn't access data from home

- Time lost on the phone to often unavailable support

- Time lost to figuring out workarounds in an unwieldy and clunky system

> "
> [Arbor] has given me a whole new lease of life! As someone in their 60's has been at the same school for more than 20 years, now I absolutely love coming into work and really enjoy investigating how Arbor can help the teachers and SLT in our school. I even love working with data and assessments - which I hated in the past. I can honestly say Arbor is the best thing that has happened to me at work in a very long time.
>
> **Office Staff, Primary School**

Part 3
Next steps

Find out more about how Arbor will help you audit and replace your third-party systems by moving to our cloud-based MIS

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

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.

Get in touch at hello@arbor-education.com

Just some of the schools and trusts in our community:

5,200+

Primaries have chosen our MIS*

875+

Secondaries have chosen our MIS

700+

Special schools have chosen our MIS

600+

MATs have chosen our MAT MIS
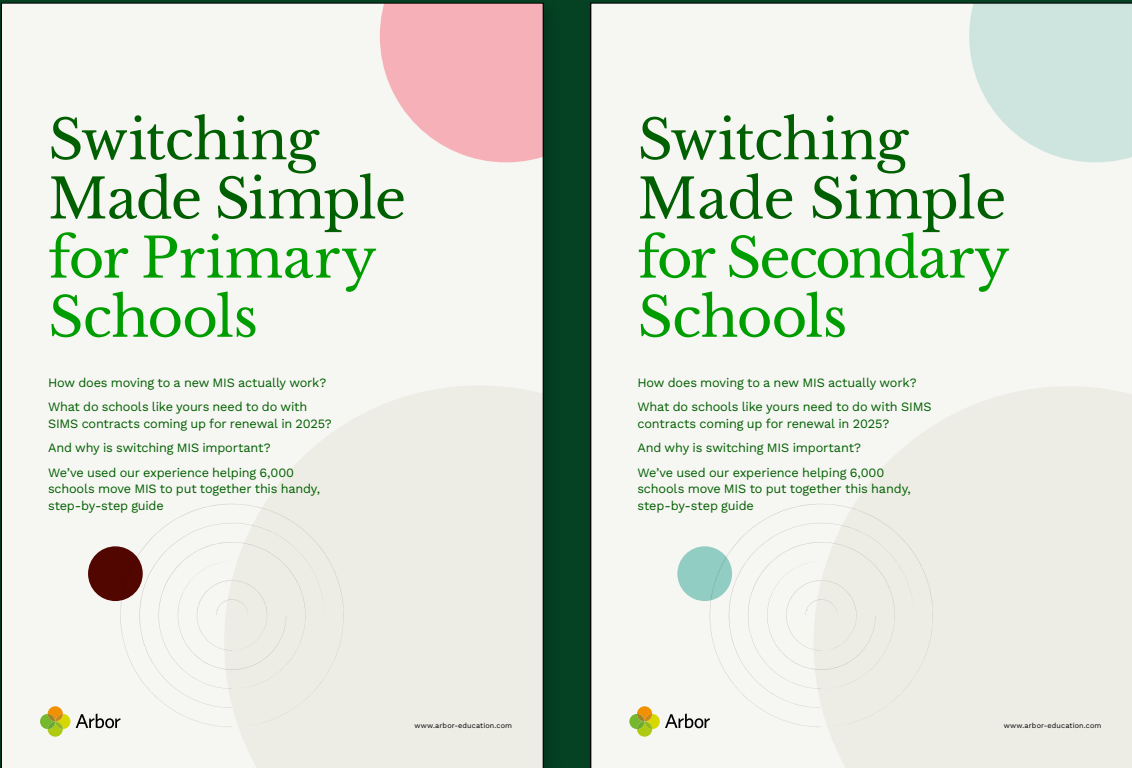
12,000+

schools have switched to a cloud-based MIS

9,000+

schools are within the Arbor Education Group

*all stats above are correct as of May 2023

How to switch MIS

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

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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

Arbor
www.arbor-education.com

We're here to help you every step of the way when it comes to moving MIS, from research through to implementation.

Download your copy of our free Switching Made Simple guide, designed to talk you through the process of switching from start to finish.

Scan here to download your copy

Or visit bit.ly/switching-made-simple

Methodology

We carried out two surveys for this report.

Survey 1 was sent to 7,225 School Business Managers, Bursars and Chief Operating Officers. 397 participants took part in the survey (5.5% of those contacted), with 83% of respondents completing the survey in full and the rest answering some of the questions but not all. Participants were given from 23 May 2024 to 7 June 2024 to take part.

Survey 2 was sent to 204,311 Arbor users, including SLT, teachers, office staff, and trust central teams. 6909 participants took part in the survey (3.4% of those contacted), with 86% of respondents completing the survey in full and the rest answering some of the questions but not all. Participants were given from 23 May 2024 to 7 June 2024 to take part.

The breakdown of where our respondents work is:

Primary school	37.8
Secondary school	38.7
MAT Central Team	8.7
All-Through School	2.3
Special school	12.5

The breakdown of Arbor's community of schools is:

Primary schools	5,114
Secondary schools	871
Special schools	730

We have also included some insights from our annual survey to all Arbor customers in this report.

Notes

Notes

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

We'd love to
hear from you
Get in touch

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