Two secondary academies share their experience of Arbor

Glenmoor & Winton Academies are two secondary schools in the south of England, making up part of United Learning.

Representing c.1800 students, the academies started using Arbor in 2018. We sat down with Alan Pike, Data Lead, to ask about the academies' experience of moving to and using Arbor.

Why did you move to Arbor?

"There were a number of things that initially drew us to Arbor. We found it far more intuitive to use - in particular, staff and leadership teams can now use the system for smaller day-to-day tasks, and very quickly access information that they need.

In comparison to our last system, Arbor is used much more widely across the two academies, rather than having just a couple of key staff members that used to use the system. It's easier to find the information and because it's a web-based interface, staff can easily click around and find what they're looking for. We've been able to contain a lot of information in Arbor - before, we had various third-party software and Excel workbooks that were holding lots of bits of information in separate places, and we've now managed to bring all that information into Arbor."

Which parts of Arbor have saved you the most time?

"With things like data entry, extraction and analysis, because we've set up Live Feeds within Arbor, once I've done any analysis or formatting within Excel that I want to do with that data, all I need to do is click refresh, and the new data is analysed, instead of me having to spend time creating a fresh report each time!

There's been a lot of time saved there. Everybody wants something from the system - if they're unable to get it themselves, I can set up the system to send it to them, so I've got quite a few scheduled reports. Heads of year have got one that comes out weekly, and the attendance team have one that comes out daily which identifies whether our persistent absentees are in school that day or not (whereas before they had to search for each individual students' name, now a report just pops up in their inbox). That sort of scheduling and Live Feeds have just saved us so much time."

What is the biggest challenge Arbor has helped G&W tackle?

"I think a big thing that Arbor has helped us with is the speed that we are now able to respond to things. By using custom, automated workflows, particularly for things like attendance and behaviour, there's now a shorter turnaround when we need information, and we're able to respond instantly to whatever is happening across the two academies."
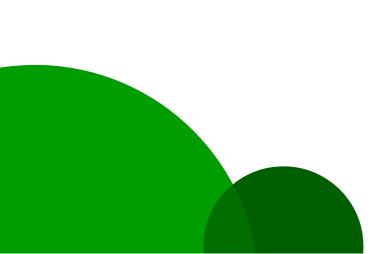
"The minute a behaviour incident is reported it gets flagged to the heads of year, so they've go instant access to information about what's happened and they don't have to wait for anybody to come and tell them that one of their children has been in trouble today, just because it's logged on the system and instantly notifies the head of year. Also in terms of tracking where pupils are, because we run our interventions and isolations through Arbor, if a child isn't in you lesson, the teacher is notified that they're not meant to be in your lesson and tells you where they are, because all the systems speak to each other. This is absolutely huge for our safeguarding because if a child isn't there and they should be there, you've got an instant flag. As a result there are a lot less false alarms!"

Are there any other parts of Arbor that you have found particularly useful?

"The communications section of Arbor has been very helpful - we didn't have this function in our previous MIS. The fact that we have the ability to quickly email all Year 7 parents each week with our electronic newsletters is fantastic, and now all our letters go out via Arbor, which means that we save money on paper (and help save the planet!). We've very excited about the Arbor App - we're launching it with the whole school soon and we think push notifications are going to save us money on text messages. That's going to be a big plus.

Another thing that is really easy to run within Arbor is the census. People used to make census into this big headache, but with Arbor we seem to find it incredibly easy. We do the dry run before the event, fix the problems, and then run the census - job done! It's just not a headache anymore.

We're also using less third party systems as a result of using Arbor. We used to have a behaviour system, a house points system, and a trips system, which we've now got rid of. Any third party systems that we are still using, like CPOMS & 4Matrix, easily integrate with Arbor, which makes things very easy."

How far do you think Arbor helped Glenmoor & Winton achieve their Outstanding Ofsted rating?

"To go back to what I was saying earlier, I think that the way that we are now able to respond to things faster and our quicker turnaround between receiving information and taking action definitely helped us in our Ofsted inspection. There was a great line on our "Outstanding" Winton Ofsted report that said that "the school effectively and efficiently uses data", and obviously our main way of using and collecting data is through Arbor, so yes, I think Arbor did have a part to play in the ratings."

How satisfied are you with the support you've received?

"The school staff find it very easy to deal with any day-to-day issues she might be having, and these are very quickly dealt with. The most impressive thing about Arbor's support, and something that I think is quite unique to Arbor is the development side of things, and how open the team is to making improvements based on feedback. I've had a lot of conversations with our Account Manager or through the support team where we've really felt that we've had a say into improving Arbor."

Would you recommend Arbor to another school or MAT?

"Yes, and I have done! We've been hosting visits to show other schools how we use Arbor. It's an ever-improving system that is always looking to impact education for the good. They're a great team to work with, who always listen and act on the feedback that we give them.

The Arbor team are a great bunch to work with - always friendly and polite, and I enjoy working on a first name basis. Our old MIS was outdated and not particularly user-friendly. We found Arbor to be far more intuitive, and easy to use. The price point was a big draw too - a far more effective use of money."

"Arbor's really helped me with information sharing and data analysis, making it more automated and efficient. This has really helped me by freeing up my time to focus on a wider data strategy."

Alan Pike, Data Lead at Glenmoor & Winton Academies, part of United Learning

Arbor