St Paul's Walden Primary School – interview with Sarah Brady and Margaret Cox

Sarah Brady, Office Manager

Margaret Cox, Administrative Assistant

St Paul's Walden Primary School is based in the village of Whitwell, approximately six miles south of Hitchin. Established in 1968, it is a community-based village school, with intakes from local villages and hamlets. The school currently has 15 staff and 80 pupils on roll, with four classes – Reception, Years 1 and 2 combined, Years 3 and 4 combined, and Years 5 and 6 combined.

St Paul's Walden Primary School's motto, **"Growing and learning together"**, reflects its commitment to seeking learning opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. In late 2020, the school demonstrated this progressive approach in fully embracing a changeover to a cloud-based management information system (MIS).

Administrative assistant Margaret Cox has worked at St Paul's Walden Primary School for more than 30 years. She had become confident in using SIMS, even though she was mostly self-taught. However, she admits that this trial-and-error way of learning can sometimes lead to issues.

Sarah Brady, who became office manager two years ago, had found other shortcomings with the school's previous management information system. "The interface itself was very old-fashioned. It seemed a complicated process to do anything, including any kind of reports," she says.

Together, Margaret and Sarah recognised that the school needed to combine all its different systems, to consolidate its processes and enable the school to run more efficiently.

Sarah explains, "It was clear Arbor could do that for us, covering everything from reports to making payments. It definitely seemed to make the most sense to have everything in one place, which is what we liked most."

With headteacher Nancy Adshead fully on board, the remaining staff members also fully supported the migration to Arbor. And the transition was easier than they could have

imagined. Arbor helped with the initial migration, and Herts for Learning have continued supporting the school since sign-off. The school wanted more frequent assessment points than standard, and they have been able to customise Arbor to match their requirements.

Sarah reports favourably on the support received from HfL:

"We didn't need much support during migration, although I imagine it would be a greater task for a larger school, especially if their data isn't fully up to scratch. We experienced very few minor set-up issues, which were due to user error as staff members familiarised themselves with the new system.

"Now we speak to various people from Herts for Learning, and they are always very helpful and quick to respond."

The migration and implementation process took less than a month, despite completion coming at a particularly busy time in the school year, in December 2020. The school then opted to activate the parent portal after Christmas, to reduce the risk of parents losing log-in information during the school break.

St Paul's Walden Primary School's main reason for switching to a cloud-based MIS was to have everything in one place, including the parent portal and the parent app. They recognised the benefits of streamlining their office and communication processes, both of which have been successful. Communication with parents is very open, and the school has received no complaints at all from them about the new system.

The pandemic further highlighted the benefits of switching to a cloud-based MIS. As Sarah says,

"Time is precious because there has been so much extra to do during Covid. It definitely saved us time having everything in one place. For example, I have logged on to Arbor from home and used it without difficulty."

Now that Arbor has been successfully introduced, the school will be exploring its additional functionality and encouraging teachers to use the system more and more. Sarah and Margaret are confident that staff members will soon get used to functions such as the intervention and timetable planning tools, and using Arbor for logging behaviours and assessments.

When asked if they would recommend a cloud-based system to others, Margaret only encourages schools to get their data up to date before migration. Otherwise, Sarah says,

"I would recommend it highly and have done so to other schools who have contacted us, because it is so time-saving and efficient."