

# PSM

SCHOOL BUSINESS ADVICE

## High stakes

Is our accountability system obsolete?

## Power user

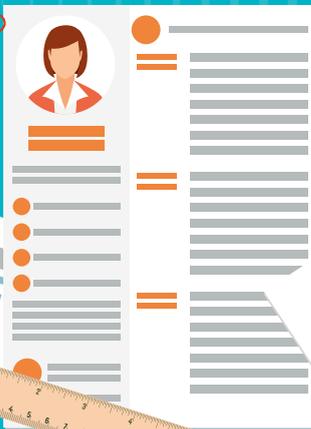
Make the most of your MIS

# Let's get personnel

HOW SAFE IS YOUR STAFFING BUDGET?

## Energy procurement

Keep your utilities spend in check



## LEADERSHIP MINDSET

### Lessons from the corporate world

### Heard, not seen

Why leaders always need to be visible

### Leave no trace

The right way to dispose of data

### Sound advice

The importance of classroom acoustics

# School Improvement

## THE TIME-SAVING SECRETS OF YOUR MIS

Richard Harley offers some advice for those schools looking to get the most out of their management information system...

**T**he management information systems used in schools have become fundamental to how they operate, helping them save time by reducing their administrative burdens. Modern MISs are typically quicker and easier to use than ever before, but the specific ways in which a school uses its MIS for data management purposes can boost this

time-saving potential even further.

MISs tend to be highly intuitive, with many offering the facility to export up to a hundred different ready-made reports in just a few clicks. This approach to data exporting will help ensure that any member of staff, regardless of their data expertise, will be able to access pupil-level data when needed, without needing to go via the school office. Allowing multiple users across the school, MAT or governing board to access the MIS will let everyone see what's really going on, and can help drive efforts at collaborative improvement. Ensure that staff are trained in how to use the basic features of your MIS. Class lists, medicals, parental contact details and SEND data should all be readily available without hassle.

### USE ADDITIONAL MODULES

Your MIS may already include a range of pre-configured modules, thus avoiding the need to purchase extra functionality from elsewhere. Modules relating to assessment, behaviour, interventions, safeguarding and communications will often be available from, if not already included in, your existing licencing. These separate functions of your system can intelligently talk to each other, saving you the effort of generating separate reports and comparing them side by side. Check which modules you've purchased and ensure you're making the most of those you have.



## CONNECT USING MULTIPLE DEVICES

Modern MIS platforms can be accessed from a variety of mobile devices, without the need for any software installation or configuration. Giving staff the option to connect using different devices will save them having to make repeat visits to offices and classrooms, while also letting them obtain information from outside school premises, thus facilitating more flexible working patterns.

## DEPLOY ELECTRONIC REGISTERS

When configured appropriately, a MIS can help schools complete their morning registration processes in just 30 seconds, while simultaneously recording accurate, real-time attendance data and feeding it straight back to the office. Office staff can then instantly contact parents – via SMS, for example – to ensure that absences are followed up.

## MOVE TO THE CLOUD

Unlike legacy systems that require access to an on-site server, cloud-based MIS systems are remotely hosted and maintained. If your internet connection is up to the task, that makes them faster, more efficient, easier to use and more reliable. Moving your MIS to the cloud obviates the need for you to manage your own local backups, patches and updates, while saving on the upfront and continuing costs needed to keep a local server running.

Academy schools, MATs and free schools have the autonomy to choose the MIS provider that's right for them. As such, the market for MIS providers is quite competitive, with each offering new technologies, richer features and more efficient ways of working. Reviewing your current system and investigating other options via a proper procurement process will ensure that you're matched with a supplier that's right for your setting, saving you valuable time in the long run. Talking to other schools in your area, or schools with a similar profile can be a good starting point for recommendations.

*Richard Harley is CEO of the cloud-based MIS provider ScholarPack*

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# WHY SCHOOLS SHOULD FEEL LIKE HOME

## How sensory-rich school environments can support mental health and optimise learning

**R**ecent scientific research shows that children learn best in sensory-rich classrooms. KS1 and Early Years environments are sensory-rich: full of colour, texture and sensory stimuli. However, as children ascend through primary and secondary school, there tends to be a significant scarcity of colour-rich walls, plants, fabric and sculpture, often replaced by desks in rows with bare walls and harsh lighting. Policymakers seem to believe that older children are in less need of sensory-rich environments. This contradicts recent enriched environment studies, which prove the vital benefits of sensory-rich environments for mind, brain and body at any age. Our failure to apply this knowledge to schools is detrimental to both pupils and staff.

What is meant 'enriched environments' (EEs), and why are they so vital? To qualify as 'enriched', environments must engage children and young people cognitively, physically, socially and on a sensory level, and they must be changed frequently – not just rely on the same old sandpit and toys.

EEs induce the genetic expression of important brain fertilisers known as neurotrophins that trigger brain growth, thus producing new brain cells in a process called neurogenesis. This takes place in the frontal lobes – the area of the brain focused on learning, planning, managing stress and social/emotional intelligence.

Neurogenesis triggered by enriched environments also occurs in the hippocampus, which is key for memory and vital for learning. One study saw rats placed in an EE with apparatus on which to run and climb, interesting food and plenty of social interaction. The Salk Institute of Biological Studies found that

“Two months later, the rats each had an extra 50,000 brain cells on both sides of their hippocampus.” Following the experiment, the animals passed learning and memory tasks with flying colours.

When schools ensure that classrooms, halls and corridors are fitted with welcoming lighting, pleasing colours, soft fabrics, plants and sculptures, children's brains will produce optimal levels of the anti-anxiety chemical oxytocin, which can significantly reduce their stress levels. With high levels of child self-harm and almost 18,000 children under 12 prescribed anti-depressants, it's time we took a neurochemical approach to ensuring that schools are soothing environments.

One approach can be to introduce a system of cognitive tasks with sensory breaks, in a designated area of the classroom containing a variety of sensory stimuli. Through a card system, pupils who are working well can be given permission for a five minute break to de-stress and emotionally regulate – such breaks being essential aids to creativity and helping pupils re-focus.

Ignoring the impact of EEs on children's minds and bodies is tantamount to social, psychological and cognitive neglect. We should strive to provide EEs for all children, not just those in Early Years. We must ensure that the 10,000 to 12,000 hours of a child's school life take place in imaginative physical environments, and are fully enriched at every stage of their learning journey.

**Dr Margot Sunderland is a child psychologist and psychotherapist, and co-director of Trauma Informed Schools UK**

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