

Flexible working in schools

Why we need it
and how to do it



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An Introduction to flexible working

One of the biggest things that can help schools create a *psychologically safe workplace* is introducing measures that help teachers work flexibly and manage their work life balance, to meet their professional goals and requirements in a mentally healthy way. Trusting people to get their work done but in a way that also allows them freedom to manage other priorities too, like children or caring responsibilities, goes a long way to promote a culture where people can be their whole selves and know their employer supports and believes in them.

Like all employees in the UK, school staff have the right to request flexible working arrangements. Reasons behind these requests vary greatly but achieving an appropriate work / life balance is often cited as a main driver. The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown up new challenges for the education sector, but it has also crystallised issues which have had a long term impact on the working lives of teachers and education professionals. This includes the subject of flexible working. There is an opportunity to learn from the enforced flexibility that Covid-19 has brought upon the sector, and turn this into a positive – a chance to try out flexible ways of working that suit staff, students and schools alike, better.

In research carried out in 2019:

Nearly **three-quarters of senior leaders** who had implemented flexible working in their school (74% of 1,314) **felt that these arrangements had helped staff to manage their workload/work-life balance.**



89% of 766 teachers working flexibly also agreed with this statement.

The large majority of teachers working flexibly felt that doing so improved their well-being (85% of 766).



Despite research findings such as these, some schools are opposed to the idea of flexible working such as part time working or job sharing, because they view it as inconvenient, more expensive and perceive that parents do not like it, particularly in primary schools. However, there is no conclusive evidence that splitting responsibility for classes in any way impacts detrimentally on pupils' education.

Why introduce flexible working in your school

The positive benefits of flexible working reported from schools (from senior leaders, teachers and other staff) include:



Retention of skilled and experienced staff

Enabling flexible working can help schools retain teachers who would otherwise leave the role, or retire early. In one survey across industries, 76% of employers said that they felt that implementing flexible working has a positive impact on staff retention. Retention of skilled staff benefits both pupils and the wider school.



Better and more experience for pupils

Implemented well, flexible working can provide pupils with the opportunity to learn from different teachers (e.g. through job shares). It also provides students with different options should they need additional support and helps teachers and pupils alike maintain good relationships.



Ensuring a school has a diverse range of staff

Enabling flexible working could help schools access a wider pool of potential employees; or a more diverse range of skills and experience within the workforce. This helps pupils who have backgrounds not represented in the current teaching workforce, and also helps schools to provide equality of opportunity.



Improved well-being, work-life balance and morale

Flexible working gives staff the chance to better manage their work-life balance, enables them to feel listened to, and like they can balance work and home commitments in a way that doesn't

harm their mental health. Supporting flexible working can improve staff wellbeing.



Additional capacity in the school workforce

Flexible working can improve and increase capacity within the school workforce, through skills development, team-working, increased sharing of practice, workforce planning and strategic succession planning.



Reduced sickness absence

Flexible working can also help reduce ill-health absence; or enable a quicker return to work after absence of any kind e.g. parental leave, extended sick leave.



Progression opportunities and staff development

Flexible working may offer development opportunities for existing staff (e.g. through part-time job share in a leadership role). Supporting and facilitating flexible working practice has been reported as a strategy used by some employers to try and help reduce their gender pay gap.



Ensuring your school is an attractive place to work

An increasing proportion of teachers are working part-time (but far fewer men are doing this than women in the profession). With the changing demands of workers in our 21st century economy, and the impact of Covid-19 on all workforces, it is more important than ever that teaching is compatible with family life and work life balance more broadly in order to be attractive to aspiring, current and inactive teachers.

Flexible working – what does it mean

Flexible working can mean many different things. All of the flexible working arrangements below have been, and are, implemented in different schools across the country:

- **Working part-time:** working less than full-time hours and/or working fewer days.
- **Job share:** two or more people do one job and split the hours.
- **Split shifts:** a working shift comprising two or more separate periods of duty in a day.
- **Staggered hours:** the employee has different start, finish and break times from other staff or all employees have different start and end times to suit both staff and school needs.
- **Compressed hours:** working full-time hours but over fewer days.
- **On and off site presence:** enabling teachers to go off site e.g. at lunchtime, or during the school run for their own children, if they aren't teaching
- **Home/remote working:** regularly or formally agreed as part of directed time/timetabled hours.
- **Phased arrangements:** this can be when an employee returns from absence (e.g. after parental leave or period of sickness, or a bereavement) or used for things like retirement - where working hours are either gradually increased from part time or decreased from full time, depending on the arrangement.
- **Annualised hours:** working hours spread across the year, which may include some school closure days, or where hours vary across the year to suit the school and employee.
- **Sabbaticals:** where the employee takes a period of time away from work and their job is kept open for them to return.
- **Career break:** employee takes unpaid time off work. Contract is suspended or ended, without a guaranteed return, depending on policy and individual agreement.
- **Personal/family days:** days of authorised leave during term time to which all teachers in a school are entitled.

Flexible working - more ideas for your school

Given the requirements of the teaching timetable, and the core responsibilities of classroom teachers and support staff, flexible working for teachers and education workers is often found in the form of part-time work or job sharing, but there are a wide range of flexible working arrangements that can be put in place.

All of the flexible working options listed above have been used in schools. It is possible to give staff flexibility whilst at the same time benefiting your school- after all, the two are closely connected!

On the next page you'll see some other specific ideas and models of flexible working that have been used successfully in a range of different schools. You can click on each of the case studies to read more about them, and the benefits they've brought to the school where they've been implemented. The case studies are short, have been written by school leaders and teachers, and have contact details included in case you want to find out more about how these flexible working arrangements have been implemented.

Job sharing at different levels

Linton Village College
Aspire Alternative Provision
Little Ilford School
Robertsbridge Community College
John Taylor Free School
Furzedown Primary School

Working from home / PPA offsite / being able to go off site when not teaching

Linton Village College
Aspire Alternative Provision
Robertsbridge Community College
Latimer Primary School

Staggered school day

Aspire Alternative Provision

Co Headship

The Holt School
Little Ilford School
Mayfield Primary School
Saffron Walden County High School
Seely Primary and Nursery School

Flexible and part time working in job adverts/ recruitment materials

Aspire Alternative Provision
Little Ilford School

Flexible working models

Nursery provision

Saffron Walden County High School

Compressed hours and timetabling

Linton Village College
John Taylor Free School
Furzedown Primary School

Part time working for teachers and staff at all levels

Elsley Primary School	John Taylor Free School
Linton Village College	Furzedown Primary School
Aspire Alternative Provision	Saffron Walden County High School
Little Ilford School	Latimer Primary School
Robertsbridge Community College	Oxted School
Oasis Academy Shirley Park	Cheltenham Bournside School & Sixth Form

Special leave

Linton Village College
Aspire Alternative Provision

Sources:

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938784/Exploring_flexible_working_practice_in_schools_-_interim_report.pdf
2. <https://neu.org.uk/advice/flexible-working>
3. <https://chartered.college/flexible-working/>
4. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/845932/Flexible_Working_Benefits_A3.pdf



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