

FLEXIBLE WORKING

*EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING
PRACTICES ACROSS DIFFERENT
SCHOOL SETTINGS*

The NASUWT believes that flexible working has a vital role to play in helping schools and colleges recruit, retain and motivate teachers. There is a significant body of evidence that shows the benefits of flexible working, such as increased productivity, a more motivated workforce, greater employee engagement and greater diversity amongst the workforce.

The Union maintains that schools and colleges should positively consider flexible working opportunities for all of those working in education, irrespective of the role they play.

As such, the NASUWT has put together a set of case studies¹ below that give examples of where flexible working has been successfully adopted in schools, with positive outcomes.

There are examples that span a range of different settings, in terms of class size, geographical location and phase, which the Union believes will assist members and NASUWT Representatives when making the case for flexible working.²

¹ It should be noted that this set of case studies is not exhaustive and there may be other examples where flexible working has been adopted with positive outcomes.

² Please note that the examples provided as part of the DfE's Flexible Working Resources only relate to schools in England.

Examples from primary and junior school settings

Large infant and junior school – three-form entry – urban location, Sheffield

A primary school in Sheffield³ was struggling with a staff turnover above the national average which was also higher than the average across the Trust it was part of. The school's leadership team undertook a programme of initiatives, including a focus on flexible working.

The school engaged with the Trust's guidance on flexible working, as well as taking part in the training and support offered to them. The school's leaders were subsequently able to increase the opportunities for flexible working across all staff groups.

The school also took the proactive step of recruiting staff on a flexible basis, which reportedly increased the school's diversity and improved the inclusion and wellbeing of staff.

The school's headteacher believes that strong communication was central to the success of its flexible working strategy. A system for two-way feedback around every aspect of the school was created, so the leadership team can now monitor any impact on staff.

As a result of this approach, part-time teacher rates are now higher than the national average, voluntary staff turnover rates have reduced significantly, and recruitment costs have reduced accordingly.

Large primary school – three-form entry – urban area with high levels of deprivation, West Sussex

A three-form entry primary school, in a deprived part of West Sussex,⁴ was formed as an amalgamation of the infant and junior schools. At the point of merger, both schools were in special measures. Due to its location, and its Ofsted rating, recruitment and retention was particularly challenging for the school.

³ High Hazels Academy, published as part of the DfE's Flexible Working Resources.

⁴ White Meadows, published as part of the DfE's Flexible Working Resources.

School leaders used flexible working as a way to attract and retain passionate and resilient teachers. The drive for flexible working was initially led by the school's headteacher (now its executive head), who set out to create a culture in which people's lives did not take second place to their jobs. In practice, this meant the school taking the approach to accommodate flexible working requests, for whatever reason.

The school's leadership team openly champions flexible working. For example, the current headteacher worked a four-day week in her previous role as the school's deputy headteacher. As a result, staff are confident that they can be honest about their need for flexible working.

Staff who are due to take maternity leave are asked about their return plans before they go, giving the school time to work out the best way to accommodate their wishes. Those staff who work flexibly are celebrated, not tolerated. Candidates are told about the flexible approach as part of their tour of the school.

Leaders are open about how the school benefits from flexible working. For example, they are positive with staff and parents about how job shares provide a 'fresh' teacher part-way through the week, as well as providing some pupils with a mid-week chance to start again. As a result, parents are generally supportive.

In addition, staff are allocated three days' personal leave to allow them to attend their own children's school events or take care of other personal priorities.

Large primary school – approx. 800 pupils – Wembley

At a large primary school in Wembley,⁵ a third of the teachers have historically worked or currently work part time. This is for a numbers of reasons – caring responsibilities, undertaking further studies, and preparing for retirement.

The school sees part-time working as a long-term investment. Not only does this approach help to retain staff and maintain stability, it encourages diversity and allows the collective knowledge of the staff to continue to grow. The school also feels that there is more goodwill and commitment from staff because of this approach.

Examples from secondary school settings

Large secondary school – 1,700 pupils – Shoreham-by-Sea

With a high proportion of teaching staff approaching retirement, the senior leadership at a large secondary school⁶ decided to adopt flexible working practices. The school encouraged those who were considering stepping down to opt for phased retirement, which allowed them to continue working in a part-time role, while at the same time benefiting from being able to draw part of their pension.

This has helped the school to retain the experience and skills of these teachers, while supporting their wellbeing and reducing budget costs.

Alongside this, flexible working is now open to all staff. The school leaders report they are able to meet the needs of the staff in the overwhelming majority of cases. Part-time teacher rates are above the national average, and informal flexibility is also treated positively.

The school's vice-principal works three days per week, with some responsibilities passed to the assistant principal. This has supported the assistant principal's continuing professional development (CPD) and the school's succession planning.

Large secondary school – 1,500 pupils – York

A large secondary school in York⁷ has managed to achieve an incredibly low staff turnover rate of 7%, in part thanks to its progressive approach to flexible working. Around half of the teachers work part time, including members of the SLT. Contracts range from 0.2 to 0.8 FTE, and there are several job shares.

A driving factor of the school's successful approach to flexible working has been building a supportive culture. The school has spent time challenging the myth that part-time teachers have a negative impact on students, and that the timetable can only accommodate a few part-time jobs.

6 Shoreham Academy, published as part of the DfE's Flexible Working Resources.

7 Huntingdon School, published on Timewise.

The school leadership understands that teachers are happy and stay in their role and in the profession if their requests can be accommodated.

A key part of their approach is building in extra time to make timetabling a more effective process. They begin the process in September for the following September, asking staff to make their flexible requests by November. Staffing requirements are confirmed in February, following confirmation of Year 10 and 12 options, after which the team starts building the timetable with these requests in mind.

Small secondary school – approx. 650 pupils – village setting, East Sussex

At a small 11-16 secondary school in an East Sussex village,⁸ flexible working practices are accommodated as much as possible. When four of five members of staff returning from maternity leave requested to work part time, all of the requests were agreed as part-time or job-share arrangements, including that of the assistant headteacher.

By ensuring that all roles can be covered, an added benefit is that greater leadership and career growth opportunities have been made available for other staff.

The school has stated that it would rather retain staff and have a happier and more productive workforce, which is something that flexible working arrangements enable the school to do.

In addition, the school has used the financial flexibility to appoint additional Early Career Teachers, which has supported those coming into the profession and increased staffing capacity.

Secondary academy school – co-headship arrangement

At a secondary academy school, the school is led by co-headteachers – with a leadership team of three assistant headteachers.⁹ The co-heads retain half a deputy head role each, ensuring the structure is budget neutral compared to a single head with two deputies. One acts as the accounting officer and the other acts as the returning officer. Other than that, the two heads are jointly responsible for the running of the school.

The co-heads report that they share the emotional burden of headship. They have also been able to develop their own CPD from one another. In addition, as co-heads, they are able to teach – which maintains their credibility in the classroom and ensures they do not lose sight of what it means to be a teacher.

Secondary in an Academy Trust – Head of PE job share

The Head of PE in a secondary school within an Academy Trust¹⁰ works flexibly through a job share. They also job share as the Head of Year. With a working week of just under four days, they work a shorter day on one day a week to accommodate the school drop off and pick up of their own children.

Flexible working has allowed the Head of PE to progress to more senior roles, while still maintaining work-life balance. They feel that being granted flexible working, which has allowed them to stay at their school, has provided consistency for pupils in relation to their experiences and expectations.

9 Anne Kennedy and Katie Pearce, published as part of ASCL's Flexible Working case studies.

10 Lisa Strange, published as part of ASCL's Flexible Working case studies.

Examples from alternative provision settings

Alternative provision – Buckinghamshire

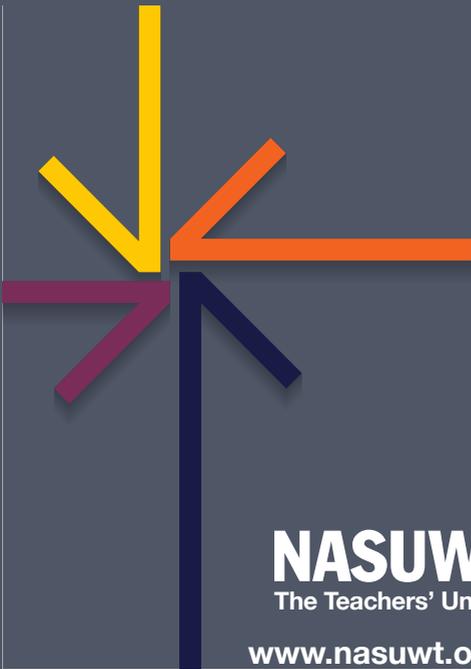
At an alternative provision setting in Buckinghamshire,¹¹ all staff review their contracts annually, which gives them the opportunity to request flexible working. The school adapts their working practices to meet the needs of the team, such as providing flexible working so that a teacher who was close to retirement only worked four mornings per week.

The schedule of meetings is planned a year in advance, so people can arrange childcare and only have meetings on two days a week.

In addition, all staff have up to five days' paid leave for family reasons, such as a sick child, and the school offers staggered start times for some staff to drop their children at school by putting planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) first thing on their teaching timetable for that day. Everyone has collective PPA clustered on one day a week; people are trusted to use this appropriately as long as the planning and work is done.

Methods of communication have been set up to accommodate flexible working. For example, any issues with young people are written up at the end of the day, so anyone coming in the following day who has not been at work can read up before they begin their classes.

As a result, those running the alternative provisions do not have a recruitment issue, which is unusual. The school attributes this to their flexible working policy, as well as the ethos that staff who are well looked after are able to perform better.



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