

Flexible working in Camden Schools

Full Report

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01 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why are we talking about flexible working?

During the Covid pandemic, organisations including schools had to pivot quickly to working from home. For teachers and leaders, managing online teaching alongside in-person classes for vulnerable children (often alongside supporting their own children at home) proved extremely stressful, but some changes proved helpful. These included the use of technology for parent consultations, teacher meetings and CPD, and for marking and setting assessments. Many found that working from home gave more time for learning and reflection, greater flexibility in how they used their time, and a better work-life balance. Of course, this was not true for everyone, and the impact of partial school closures was extremely detrimental. As schools went 'back to normal', and other organisations continued to offer flexible work, questions were raised about how much flexibility could be retained for education staff.

The lack of flexible working opportunities is growing as a reason why teachers consider leaving the profession - 47% of teachers cited this in 2024, up from 34% in 2023, [1]. For teachers who are mothers, a lack of flexibility comes below only workload and 'family commitments' as the top reasons for leaving teaching, [2]. Teacher supply is a struggle, and increasing flexibility appears to improve retention.

1.2 What are the benefits of flexible working?

Flexible working has clear benefits for individual staff. It allows parents to spend more time with their children, to build relationships with their children's schools and attend special events. Schools work hard to build relationships with parents, and flexible working can mean their own staff who are parents can also build those relationships. It can provide staff with opportunities to pursue further learning, hobbies, book writing, and careers or voluntary work in other areas of interest. There are benefits to staff wellbeing, to feeling valued and to managing workload, while job-sharing into a promoted post can also support career progression.

Flexible working is seen to enhance recruitment and retention, building staff loyalty, allowing a school to attract great staff and retain experienced ones (including those approaching retirement), and reducing staff absences, which benefits pupils and staff. A less stressed workforce should lead to a better learning environment for pupils, while a flexible working culture can encourage creativity and greater staff engagement. Those working flexibly are more likely to report that they feel valued by their school, and that they are trusted to work independently. Having a greater number of part-time staff could increase the breadth and experience in the school workforce and create enrichment opportunities for staff and pupils.

Flexible working is also seen as vital for the long-term health of the teaching profession. As one Camden leader put it, 'the decisions we make today have an impact on the future.' The class teacher role is increasingly demanding, in part because of the increases in pupil need and parental demand. It seems increasingly difficult to consider starting a family while teaching. Providing opportunities for flexibility seems vital to maintain a healthy and vibrant profession, and to keep parents (and would-be parents) in the classroom.

[1] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685c0d7c0433072fce0e1036/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_wave_3_-_research_report.pdf p112

[2] https://www.newbritain.org.uk/_files/ugd/8be189_06c43a81df034e6598475e2b888b0c96.pdf p15

1.3 What is flexible working?

We often default to thinking about flexible working as part-time work or working from home, but it is much broader than that. The DfE defines flexible working as ‘arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work, [3]. They suggest the following examples:

Varying the amount of work

- Part time working
- Job share
- Phased retirement

Varying the timing of work

- Staggered hours
- Compressed hours
- Annualised hours
- Personal or family days
- Lieu time

Varying the location of work

- Home working
- Remote working

Flexible working may need changes to contracts, or may be one-off or temporary arrangements. It applies to teachers, leaders and support staff. For some staff, knowing they can request ad hoc flexibility is sufficient to keep them working full-time. According to the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD, [4]), schools are ‘expected to have a clear flexible working policy in place, which responds to the needs of both teachers and leaders and the employer and promotes a strategic approach to flexible working within the school’ (Section 3, paragraph 92, p90).

The STPCD also states that ‘Where reasonably appropriate and agreed by both the individual teacher and the headteacher, PPA can be taken in one weekly unit and it can be taken away from the school site.’ (Section 2, paragraph 52.5, p52).

What’s changing?

From 1 September 2026, schools will be required to base the TLR 1 and 2 payments for teachers on the proportion of the responsibility undertaken, not the proportion of hours worked. This means that part-time teachers could, in theory, take on a full TLR - and full-time teachers could take on less. Schools may choose to pay this way from September 2025, (STPCD Section 3, paragraph 51, p80).

The Employment Rights Bill which passed into law as the Employment Rights Act [5] in December 2025 proposed that flexible working will be ‘made the default’. Employers will still be able to reject a request, based on the 8 business reasons, and will also have to show why the request is ‘unreasonable’. There is consultation on the provisions of the Bill, and the provisions on flexible working are set to become law from 2027, along with changes to make parental and paternity leave ‘day one rights’. The School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), which the Employment Rights Act provides for, could formalise flexible working for support staff.

There is a summary of DfE guidance at appendix 1.

[3] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2>

[4] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/687a6260312ee8a5f0806bb5/School_teachers__pay_and_conditions_document_2025_and_guidance_on_school_teachers__pay_and_conditions.pdf

[5] <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/36>

02 WHAT IS HAPPENING IN CAMDEN?

2.1 Types of flexible working

The most frequently identified type of flexible working practice for teachers, support staff and senior leaders in a small-scale survey [6] was the occasional variation of hours for personal or family needs. After that, for teachers it was part-time working or occasional 'wellbeing days'; for support staff part-time working or different start/finish times; and for senior leaders occasional working off-site or occasional 'wellbeing days'. For comparison, nationally part-time working is the most common. flexible working arrangement for teachers and leaders, at 21%, followed by off-site PPA (15%), ad hoc variation to start/finish times (13%) and ad hoc personal days (11%). Job shares were at 6%, [7].

Schools in Camden that vary the amount of work most often offer part-time work or job-shares. This includes a primary school that employs a number of part-time teaching staff who provide specialist teaching. Because of the size of the school, there is no need (or funding) for them to be full-time, but they work across other schools. Job-shares are sometimes offered for two people working part-time.

A 4/1 split appears to be more common in primary schools, and is sometimes managed by using HLTA or specialist staff 'cover' for the single day.

Some schools offer job-shares where one of the partners is employed full-time in the school across two roles. For example in one secondary school, one member of staff is working 2 days a week as Assistant Head of Department and 3 days as a main scale teacher.

Part-time working is not always managed with respect to full or half days. In one school, an A level physics teacher works 3 days a week, working the middle of the day on two of those days so they can manage drop off and pick up.

In another school, two members of office staff work part-time, working 7 days between them over 5.

Schools that vary the timing of work offer a range of models:

- Compressed hours, for example a 9-day fortnight, 0.7 over 3 days, and a specific model known as '14 in 15' (see below).
- Term-time only working for support staff, including admin staff - I spoke to an office manager who worked 5 days a week, and had just started term-time only working.
- Expanded hours, for example a member of staff who works 3 days over 4 with 2 long days and 2 shorter days.
- Flexible start or finish times - sometimes with the same number of hours, sometimes with reduced hours (and pay). For example in one school, a job description for support staff may say 8.30-4.30 with an hour for lunch, but there can be ad hoc flexibility around the actual hours, including taking a shorter lunch in order to start later or finish earlier. This must be agreed in advance with HR/Principal. Longer term arrangements are managed through a flexible working request. During the summer holidays, for any support staff working all year round, more flexibility to start and finish times are offered and staff can finish 1 hour earlier than their normal finish time.

[6] A survey of school leaders in Camden was carried out in May/June 2025 and helped to identify leaders for further conversations - see appendix 3

[7] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685c0d7c0433072fce0e1036/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_wave_3_-_research_report.pdf p38

The 14 in 15 is a model being used at Heath School, which is a secondary pupil referral unit (PRU) and part of the H3 Federation. Full-time staff have the option of working 14 days in school and the 15th day as a flexible working day. Fridays were chosen as the flexible working day as the school finishes early that day. Every Friday, one third of staff work remotely with the remaining two thirds in school. The offer is available to all staff (teaching and non-teaching) and leadership, with part-time staff having an offer relative to their hours worked.

Most staff work remotely on that day. There is no monitoring of output on the day, but staff must have agreed tasks with their line manager, with a review of this taking place in the subsequent line management meeting. 'Planning for flexible working' is a standing item on the agendas of all staff who have opted into the initiative. Almost all staff have opted in.

The student offer has been scheduled so that there is no drop in the quality of provision they receive. For example, pre-existing mentoring from a charity has been extended and allocated to Fridays, work-experience happens on Fridays, places that are commissioned at another AP (for example construction courses) will take place on Fridays. There are no meetings on a Friday so that all staff on-site are available to support as required.

Staff are aware if there were a serious incident on a Friday that could have been resolved or had fewer consequences had more staff been on site then the practice will have to stop.

Schools that vary the **location** of work sometimes offer hybrid working, most often for support staff (HR, finance manager, attendance administrator). Some schools offer opportunities for teachers or leaders to take PPA or subject leadership time, or online CPD, at home on a regular basis. For example, one primary school allows teachers to go home early for PPA if their PPA time is in the afternoon and the timetable allows. There are rules in place to ensure that not all staff are off-site at the same time, and that the headteacher is consulted. In another, subject leaders can work from home for their subject leader day.

For teaching staff, and some support staff, there may be more ad hoc opportunities to vary the location, for example one primary school said that teachers and the SENCO can request to work from home when they are writing reports.

One school had trialled remote teaching in order to meet the needs of a particular member of staff.

Ad hoc flexibility is also offered. Schools will consider requests for days off or varied hours to accommodate staff needs. Some schools offer 'wellbeing days' - for some this is at particular times of the year (around Christmas for example, or after external exams) while others allow staff to request a day at any time. These days are paid for teaching staff while one school spoke about allowing support staff to take unpaid days, 'in order to access cheap holidays' (survey).

Some ad hoc flexibilities are covered by discretionary leave policies, which will also set out whether the time will be paid or unpaid. Many schools spoke about finding ways to give time off for staff to attend important events, particularly events in their children's lives, but also weddings, or funerals of those not covered by bereavement leave policies.

Some schools **combine** different forms of flexible working. For example, a senior leader in operations who works across two secondary schools, works on-site one day a week in each school and works from home for the other 3 days.

Beyond the idea of 'flexible working', some leaders spoke about the importance of flexibility more broadly. This included schools which offer:

- 'Early finish Fridays' or early finishes to term (either full days or ending at lunch-time).
- Time off for religious observance.
- Online parent consultation meetings, which staff can do at home and which manage time better.
- Changing open evenings (for Y6 families) to open mornings to remove the requirement for staff to work additional hours/prepare additional work.
- Early/late opening and laptop loans so staff can choose where they carry out non-teaching work.

2.2 Who works flexibly?

For most survey respondents, flexible working requests came from mothers returning from maternity leave, closely followed by women with other caring responsibilities including small children. Some requests were from men with small children or other caring responsibilities. Requests from parents were often for time to settle a child, build relationships with the school or attend events or appointments. A few requests came from staff moving towards retirement or those with disabilities. Others were from staff wanting to reduce workload or improve work-life balance or wellbeing, those who want to work fewer days but not drop hours, younger staff who don't want to work 5 days, and support staff on low incomes who don't want to lose benefits. Occasionally, staff request flexibility in order to pursue training or further education that is not specifically related to their current roles.

2.3 How are requests managed?

Policies - Very few schools have a flexible working policy. In the survey, one respondent said they had a stand-alone policy and one had it as part of another policy. In conversations, some leaders said they used the Camden policy. This reflects what is happening nationally: IFF [8] reported (in 2023) that only one of 40 schools interviewed had a formal flexible working policy in place, 31 said they did not have one and 8 used a Trust or LA policy. Some flexibilities are covered by other policies (eg dependents, disability support, bereavement, pregnancy leave, domestic violence).

Formal/informal requests - Those spoken to did not particularly differentiate between formal and informal requests when talking about how they managed flexibility, except to note the requirements for responses to be made within a particular timeframe for formal requests. Some schools mentioned that they use Camden's model guidance and its form for formal requests.

Proactive approaches - Mostly, the leaders I spoke to were reactive rather than proactive in their approaches. However, many spoke to staff going on maternity leave to remind them of what could be available when they returned. Some schools had conversations at, or before, interview. In some places, roles (particularly for support staff) were advertised as 'family friendly'. In others, candidates were encouraged to discuss flexibilities as they went through the process. In one school, candidates who applied for part-time roles were encouraged to apply even if they would prefer a full-time role, and the school worked with other schools to offer work that would build up to a full-time role.

Initial approach by staff - Most schools were open to requests at any point in the school year, with ideas often raised during appraisal meetings. Staff were often asked to put requests (both formal and informal) in writing, and there were varying requirements for the level of detail needed whether written or not.

Some leaders asked staff to come with a clear idea of the benefits for both school and individual, and a plan of action detailing how they will manage the flexibility and, if possible, how the school could manage it (make it easy for us to say yes). Others felt too much detail limited the conversation that could be had following a request. Staff might be asked to think carefully about what they were asking for, because the school could only accommodate flexibilities that were absolutely necessary. All those spoken to asked for as much notice as possible for requests with some asking staff to link requests with resignation deadlines where possible.

Conversations about flexibility - Many leaders said they tried hard not to say no to a request, although they might ask the requestor to come back with different options. They had conversations with the person making the request, and with others, including the person's line manager, and the leadership team. Those conversations would help to flesh out exactly what the person was looking for, understand the impact on others in the team, and come up with alternatives if the request was not possible. For example, a teacher who wanted a few days to undertake work associated with a Masters was happy to undertake some of that work during holidays, and then to take half days rather than full days in order to meet the needs of the school. One leader said they gave an idea of the flexibilities that could be offered and invited staff to pick something to trial.

Further conversations were had before decisions were made. These were sometimes with HR, Executive heads or governing boards, and occasionally with other school leaders or with specialist organisations to give ideas of arrangements that could be used. Conversations were also used as a kind of 'moderation' of requests and decisions to make sure that decisions are made fairly.

Agreeing flexible arrangements - In almost all instances, arrangements for long-term flexibility are made on a temporary/fixed term basis, with time built in for review and change. These were mostly for a year, although sometimes for two - and occasionally for a shorter period, perhaps a term - in order to make sure the arrangement works for both the staff member and the school. There are too many factors that can change - for the school, the children or the staff - to make it longer. Staff surveyed reported the dangers of setting up arrangements which are impossible to change, even under new leadership. Some schools set up agreements as trials, sometimes for shorter periods and often as a way of understanding whether a given method of flexibility could work longer-term or for more staff. If a request could not be met 'right now', staff were often told that this was not a permanent decision, and that they should continue to discuss future possibilities.

Heath School, which set up a particular model ([see case study in appendices](#)), consulted staff on the idea before the model was proposed to governors as a trial. A lot of work went into planning before the trial began, and it was a standing item on SLT meetings every week, for the first year of the pilot, in order to review and adapt as necessary. Governors wanted to make sure there would be no drop in the quality of provision, and work was done to reassure them that the model would be an enhancement to students. The model has held up to scrutiny, with both internal and external quality assurance not noting any decrease in the level of provision as a result. In fact, it is routinely referred to by staff as being a significant component of the school's programme for supporting staff wellbeing.

Promoting flexible working - Very few survey respondents actively promoted opportunities for flexible working. Some had crafted roles for senior leaders, teachers or support staff so that they could be worked flexibly. Others occasionally reminded staff of the opportunity to request flexible working. Even fewer identified that they advertise flexible working as a benefit in job adverts. Nationally, NFER reported that approximately a quarter of schools mentioned flexible working in their job adverts.

Crafting flexible roles - Those who had crafted roles to be worked flexibly identified different patterns of working in the main. These included:

- A SENDCO role over 3 days per week because of the size of the school and the need
- An Assistant Headteacher with a 3-day leadership contract and a 2-day teaching contract, with the teaching offset by offering part-time working to teachers.
- Roles that allow staff to work 4 days over 5 - for example an out-of-class SENDCO.
- Pairing part-time TAs together so that they can swap days in order to take a longer holiday.
- A primary school that has designed roles for subject specialists so that they can work across different local schools.

One secondary school crafted an Associate Head of Faculty position: when a Head of Faculty went to 4 days a week, the school appointed an Associate Head of Faculty to cover the fifth day. This person was appointed internally, offering career progression, and giving them an idea of whether the Head of Faculty role was something they would like to pursue in the future.

2.4 Beliefs about flexible working

Nationally, 24% of leaders and 33% of teachers agreed that flexible working is compatible with a career in education [9], while only 19% agreed that it would not affect career progression. In the Camden survey, respondents suggested that compatibility depended on the needs of pupils and the school (it has to keep the smooth running of the school for the children at its core), on the staff involved (their willingness to work together) and on the roles (there are some roles which lend themselves to flexible working or part time working more than others). Others said interest in how effectively someone works, not whether they are present and the importance about being flexible to the needs of staff so that they can care for families.

In conversations with school leaders it was clear that some types of flexible working were seen as incompatible, particularly routine working from home. Others felt that working part-time would make it difficult to take on leadership responsibilities and encouraged teachers returning from maternity leave to limit the time they worked part-time to maximise their career prospects. Where staff worked part-time to pursue other interests, including further training or education not directly related to their roles, it was often the case that their learning brought value to the school.

2.5 Challenges and barriers to flexible working

In the Camden survey, the most frequently identified barriers were continuity for pupils, timetabling, staff perceptions and cost - particularly where staff working flexibly could not be covered in-house. A report by Timewise [10] identified the following nationally:

- **Timetabling** - (at secondary school).
- **Staff /student ratios** - and providing cover for absence.
- **Budget** - flexible working can involve extra costs, although costs may be offset by savings on recruitment and on supply cover.
- **Workload and intensity** - teachers worry that part-time working will mean full-time work with part-time pay, while managers fear part-timers will not be flexible when needed.
- **Culture and attitudes** - many still believe that flexible working is not feasible in schools, because it will 'open the floodgates', it won't be fair or equitable, it will have a negative impact on pupils, and a flexible workforce will be too difficult to manage.

[9] [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6989d70c85bc7d6ba0fbc7d7/Working_lives_of_teachers_wave_3_research_report.pdf%20\(p40-41\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6989d70c85bc7d6ba0fbc7d7/Working_lives_of_teachers_wave_3_research_report.pdf%20(p40-41))

[10] <https://timewise.co.uk/article/building-flexibility-secondary-schools/>

These concerns were reflected in conversations with leaders.

The need to be on site - Varying the location of work was seen to be challenging for some because of the need for jobs to be done in person, whether that is teaching, in-class support or in-the-moment advice and support for other staff. Teaching is inherently performative, personal, and live. Children need to see and hear their teachers; they need to be guided, managed, encouraged, and sometimes challenged in the moment. Supervision, safeguarding, and student behaviour all require an adult presence in the room. Many leaders spoke of the need to have enough staff (teaching and non-teaching) on site during the day to manage pupil behaviour and safeguarding and to be on playground duty and 'visible' around the school. In small schools, there is a need for enough people with staff assuming multiple responsibilities which may be distributed in a larger setting. Some primary school heads spoke about the difficulty of offering PPA time at home because of the need for teachers to be available to parents at the start or end of the day.

The need for continuity and consistency - According to many leaders, flexible working is difficult to implement because children need continuity and engagement with regular, familiar adults. This was seen as particularly important for young children, those with SEND (especially autism), and those who have suffered trauma or disrupted family lives. Leaders spoke of the difficulties for some children when the teacher doesn't know what happened the previous day, and how this can disrupt behaviour and learning for the whole class. Those surveyed identified that students thrive on routine and consistency which flexible working could erode. Many parents welcome a single point of contact for their child and having more than one teacher or support worker can also mean that parents' expectations of immediate responses to concerns are harder to meet. Some parents are anxious about their children having 'too many different adults' in the class. Many families depend on the predictability and structure that schools provide. Support staff can find it disruptive to work with two different teachers. And some leaders were concerned about the difficulty of maintaining lesson sequencing or behavioural expectations across two different teachers in a class. This can be disruptive to teachers as well as the children. Some primary schools had moved to a model where a class teacher taught for 4 days, and the class was covered by other staff within the school for the fifth day. But this meant that the class teacher was still responsible for all marking and report-writing for example, making it a high workload.

Subject leadership - One primary leader was concerned that it can be difficult for teachers working part-time to manage a subject. A teacher had felt they were less able to monitor their subject effectively and provide the necessary support and challenge to staff while working 3 days a week, and had expressed a wish to increase their working days to provide a more rigorous approach.

The challenges of job shares - There were challenges identified for job shares, particularly the need for handover periods. To do them well, staff need to be given regular time to plan and evaluate together, which has an impact on the budget: one primary school had two part-time deputies, who worked 6 days a week between them, but this became too expensive to continue. Leaders must also plan carefully so that partners can both attend meetings and training, and talk with parents and colleagues. This can make handover days overcrowded with meetings, causing problems for other staff. Leaders also spoke about the difficulties of matching job share partners, and supporting them to work well together.

Timetabling - This was more of a problem in secondary schools, where timetabling would be easier without flexibilities. Timetables can be changed, with notice, although it can be easier if the person requesting flexibility is part of a large department rather than the only teacher of a subject. Requests for temporary changes can have an impact on budget, or on colleagues, as schools would need to use other staff to cover, or bring in supply staff. One school teaches its sixth form over 4 days, so that year 12 is not in school on a Wednesday and year 13 off on a Friday. This makes the time in the building more purposeful but it compresses the flex available for timetabling teaching time. This, alongside managing the timetabling of part-time preferences, adds extra limits to the timetable, ultimately making it more challenging.

Problems of parity - Leaders were particularly concerned about parity and equity in their decisions about flexible working. They were clear that opportunities for (some kinds of) flexible working are role-dependent so that not everyone can have the same arrangements. Schools employ a range of different staff - teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral leads, administrative staff, technicians, site team and more - with diverse roles and on different contracts with different terms and conditions making it difficult to apply rules and opportunities consistently. Off-site PPA time was a cause for concern for some smaller primary schools. It only really works if PPA time is at the start or the end of the day, but in order to have sufficient staff on site not every member of staff can have their PPA time then. This was felt to be a problem of equity. Some leaders were concerned that they could only offer flexibility to a limited number of staff, and that this could mean that those with small children were given priority. Leaders were clear, for example, that staff who requested time off to visit a child's school would be given it, but felt it might not be as easy to offer time off for a festival or hobby. In other instances, leaders were worried about 'setting a precedent', where staff would expect to have similar requests granted. Schools where flexible working was becoming part of their standard practice were also concerned about parity. For them, it might be a question of determining the work that can be done flexibly in different roles - for example, what will support staff do on a day where they work remotely? Elsewhere, while staff who see colleagues taking up flexible working opportunities may be more inclined to request those opportunities themselves, this can limit requests to particular departments or pockets of the school if other staff don't see the opportunities. Some leaders found it difficult to request flexible working as they felt they had to be on-site at all times, and yet other leaders were managing part-time hours or off-site working with no detriment.

The impact on other staff - Although it is becoming more culturally acceptable to take up flexible working options, some leaders find there is opposition from colleagues who feel it may impact on their own work and workload. Others were concerned that it took away opportunities for collaborative working and learning.

The impact on leaders - School leaders spoke of the time it takes to manage flexible working, both discussing, agreeing and evaluating flexible working practices and managing unplanned absence when there are a lot of staff already working flexibly. This also took a toll on their mental/emotional capacity. In small schools, leaders would often find themselves covering for occasional planned and unplanned absences, with a knock-on impact on their own work and workloads.

03 FUTURE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING IN CAMDEN

3.1 Different approaches to flexible working

While all school leaders spoken to offered forms of flexible working, three different, sometimes overlapping, approaches were identified:

- Some leaders felt that flexible working was difficult or not appropriate in their setting. Flexible arrangements were available, but to a limited number of staff, perhaps within groups, for short periods of time or within tight parameters.
- Some focused on flexibility more than flexible working, designing ways of working that addressed workload and working hours for all staff, and building wellbeing approaches into the rhythms of school life.
- In some schools, there was a clear intention to design flexible working into the whole-school approach. This could involve developing and trialling particular models, or in being proactive in considering and trialling a range of options to meet different needs.

3.2 A culture of flexibility

Teachers know that fully remote working is not compatible with teaching. While some would like to work part-time, many would rather not cut their hours (and their pay). Teachers who are parents say they appreciate the benefits of sharing school holidays with their children. What staff often say they would like is ad hoc flexibility to attend significant events in their children's lives, and to build relationships with their children's teachers [11]. It is possible that staff request part-time work because they think it is the only flexibility available to them. Schools need an approach to flexibility that is suitable for the types of work that take place, and the real needs of employees.

The individual approach

A focus on employees' right to request flexible working, while important, can lead to an approach that views flexibility as an individual problem to solve whenever a request is made. This can put huge pressure on school leaders to manage each request and can lead to a culture where staff feel the need to make their requests very specific (for example, I want to work 3 days a week) and may feel they are in competition with colleagues for limited opportunities.

The solution-focused approach

A focus on solutions sometimes goes together with the need for equity. It can mean attempting to offer fixed solutions for everyone, for example everyone has PPA time at home, or developing a particular model for all staff, such as a 9-day fortnight. This puts different pressures on school leaders and can feel like a top-down approach to staff. It can end up being quite inflexible, giving the same ('equitable') offer to everyone, rather than an equitable approach that seeks to find offers that work for each member of staff and the school.

What helps to implement flexible working

Harland et al (2023) identify ten 'enablers' for flexible working [12]:

- Supportive leadership and school culture.
- A proactive rather than reactive approach.

[11] https://www.newbritain.org.uk/files/ugd/8be189_06c43a81df034e6598475e2b888b0c96.pdf%20p18

[12] <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-flexible-working-approaches.pdf?v=1753786115> (page 30)

- A fair and transparent process for requesting flexible working.
- A willingness to negotiate and compromise (from both leaders and teachers).
- A clear and accessible flexible working policy (the report includes an analysis of existing flexible working policies in schools).
- Consideration of flexible working requests at recruitment.
- Piloting flexible working arrangements.
- Creative timetabling.
- Managing and defining the responsibilities and workload associated with flexible roles.
- Training and resources for senior leaders and HR teams.

Leadership is key for flexible working to flourish. Flexible working needs to be embedded in school development plans, policies and strategies. Leaders need to be proactive in finding out what staff would like and think creatively about how to match staff needs with school requirements.

Communication is vital throughout, both to bring everyone on board with the what and the why of flexible working and, as flexibility becomes embedded, so that those who are not physically present 5 days a week continue to be included.

Being open-minded helps leaders to see obstacles as problems to overcome rather than roadblocks. It can also help leaders to think about designing roles differently - and help staff to be open to different options.

3.3 What support do school leaders need?

Leaders must plan carefully to make flexible arrangements work. In Camden, this includes:

- Setting parameters (e.g. a class teacher needs to work at least 4 days a week; a class with a job-share in one year will have a single teacher the next).
- Looking at any staff changes needed.
- Planning timetabling - subjects, PPA time, start and end of day, tutor time.
- Thinking about how to manage leadership responsibilities and TLRs.
- Inviting non-teaching staff to cover 'amongst themselves'.
- Finding staff to cover ad-hoc flexibilities - including leaders taking classes themselves.
- Finding ways to manage the work of those who cover, particularly the leadership team.
- Thinking long-term.

Leaders spoke of the decisions that needed to be made about flexible working - where to place a member of staff who wanted to work part-time, how to balance the needs of particular cohorts of children, how to manage the timetable, how to end flexibilities that weren't working well, and how to manage staff expectations and concerns about the impact of flexible working on their own work. There was also the impact of changes to the policies they already had in place - for example requests to take PPA time at home that would cut across the culture of collaborative working during that time. In one school, more PPA time is offered than the usual 10%, but this would not be possible if staff also wanted to work from home.

Leaders spoke about the need for clear policies and an understanding of the policies that are already available - for example leave of absence policies to cover bereavements. Support from HR (and for Church schools, the LDBS) is vital, both in managing practices such as varying contracts and in building supportive staff cultures. Some leaders also used HR services to extend their knowledge of options that are available, while others approached other agencies or other school leaders to discuss options. HR was also used to support the review of decisions made, while some leaders carried out reviews with their senior leadership team and/or with governors.

3.4 Working towards a whole school approach

Many of the leaders spoken to talked about the importance of culture. Sometimes this was about attitudes - compassionate leadership stemming from a desire to enable all staff to have what they need to work well; knowing staff well so that decisions are made with discretion rather than a mechanistic interpretation of policy; a culture of trust, where staff believe the leadership will work creatively and collaboratively to design flexibility that works for them and for the school.

Leaders also talked about the principles that underpin these cultures:

- **Clarity** - about the parameters within which flexibility will operate.
- **Transparency** - having clear processes that all staff know, and clearly communicating decisions.
- **Collaboration** - being open to discussion and working together to build an approach that works.
- **Flexibility** - staff and leaders willing to make changes, staff willing to wait to achieve the best approach.
- **Learning** - making time to review the approaches taken and learn from what's worked and what hasn't.

Some were concerned that flexible working can lead to an inflexible culture, and it is possible that models such as compressed hours or routine homeworking could stop staff from requesting other flexibilities. Schools which are moving towards flexibility are more focussed on understanding what their staff need and working collaboratively to find creative ways to meet those needs. This is much more about the processes used than the models developed and can be more sustainable in the longer term.

A specific model, such as Heath School's 14 in 15 model, is one way to develop a whole-school approach. The process is key of course, and flexibility is encouraged by developing, evaluating and iterating the model collaboratively with staff.

At Regent High School, while they don't offer formal flexible working such as compressed hours, routine home working, or wholly adjustable timetables, they offer a fluid, humane, and wellbeing-led approach to how our staff experience the rhythms of school life with a staff wellbeing working party giving staff a voice in shaping working life and priorities. Deliberate scheduling of CPD days and the protection of PPA time are fundamental.

It can also involve actively promoting part-time and job-share roles, integrating the request process into timetabling; advertising positions as open to flexibility; and reviewing arrangements for when staff can work from home. Overall, a whole-school approach starts from an expectation that teachers will want flexibility, and managing timetabling and staffing allocations accordingly, with an annual review and clarity on what's possible for each subject or key stage.

FWAMS guidance [13] suggests that a whole school approach starts from the assumption that flexible working can work unless there is a genuine operational reason why it could not; should maintain a balance between the needs of pupils, the team and the school; and should be separate from the drive to reduce workload. It should be built on trust and transparency, be fair and robust, and offer flexible progression for all.

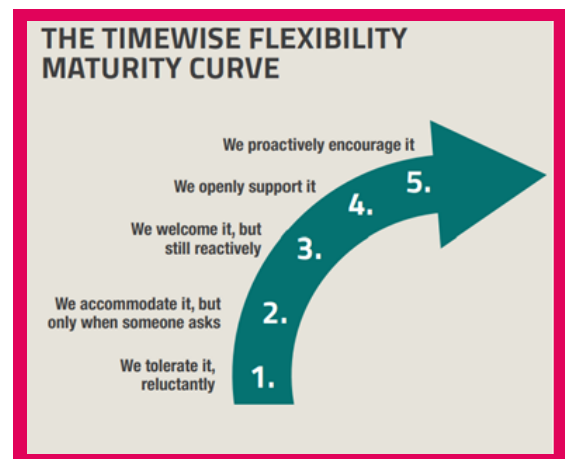
[13] <https://flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/resource-library>

04 QUESTIONS AND PROVOCATIONS TO HELP SCHOOL LEADERS CONSIDER NEXT STEPS

4.1 Explore - what would staff like to have?

Schools which have embedded flexible working have this conversation early and collaboratively. They invite staff to reflect on what kinds of flexibilities could be helpful, and how those could work in their context. Communication throughout this process is key, and leaders need to clearly identify who to speak with to understand the demand for flexible working and the concerns of the school community. This is also the time to think creatively about problems and possible solutions.

Change team - this is a team of leaders and staff who will lead and drive change by building the business case, looking at barriers and thinking about how flexible working could reflect the school's aims and values. They can help to determine feasible goals - Timewise [14] have set out a 'maturity curve' and suggest using it to identify where the school sits (between 'we tolerate it reluctantly' and 'we proactively encourage it') and which step they could realistically work towards.



Working parties - to carry out initial conversations. This encourages a wide scope of discussion, enables a deeper understanding of staff needs, and allows you to consider a whole-school approach to developing a flexible working policy and practices. It can be helpful for ensuring staff understand the difficulties, and have ownership of the decisions made. It could lead to dissatisfaction if few options can be taken further, or if some staff feel their needs can't be met.

Review of individual requests - where staff are invited to request flexible working arrangements individually and with long lead-in times. This gives time for conversations (both individually and in teams or departments) and enables a whole-school approach to timetabling and staffing decisions. It may put additional pressure on senior leadership to hear and manage a large number of requests.

'Stay' interviews - regular planned meetings with staff to understand their needs. These conversations can also explore wellbeing issues, and short and longer term ambitions. Schools which use these say they would rather work together to find solutions than find out too late at an exit interview [15].

Staff surveys - some schools use regular surveys to understand the needs and perceptions of staff around flexible working as well as any future intentions. This allows them to understand more clearly what staff would like and what support they need, so that they can plan bespoke responses rather than blanket decisions. Surveys also allowed schools to track the progress and effectiveness of their approaches to flexible working but may only give a snapshot of views at a particular time [16].

[14] https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Timewise-Now-Teach-Report_2019.pdf

[15] https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/62128bb5151a711b076f2549/6324731a4538300f70942cb7_Top%20Tips%20for%20School%20Leaders%20-%20Staying%20Meetings.pdf

[16] See Nexus Multi Academy, using surveys <https://flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/resource-library>

Consultation - In some cases, the leadership team decide to use a particular model, and their explorations will focus on how this can improve flexibility for staff and benefit (or at least not disadvantage) pupils. This can be a helpful focus and can reassure staff that their work-life balance is important, but it can also limit flexibilities that might better meet particular staff needs.

Who could be part of the discussions?

- Teachers, middle leaders and both classroom-based and administrative support staff
- People at different stages of their careers and lives
- Staff who are enthusiastic about flexible working and those who are more sceptical.
- Anyone already working part-time or flexibly
- Union representatives
- Parents and/or governors
- Pupils

What parameters will you set for these discussions?

- Broad parameters could include being clear that these are initial conversations and the school may not be able to accommodate everything that is proposed
- More specific parameters will set out constraints that must be met
- Groups can be asked to build a business case, look at barriers, identify how flexible working will reflect the school's aims and values, and think about what success might look like

What is the process?

- How can all staff be involved in the conversations? If you have a working group, how will they engage with other staff?
- How frequently and how formally will conversations be reported?
- Who will consider suggestions - the headteacher, senior leadership team, governors?
- Do you need a staff 'flexible working champion' to lead conversations and to work across other schools? How about a governor with responsibility, perhaps alongside wellbeing?

4.2 Experiment - what can we try?

Most schools implement flexible working arrangements on a fixed term basis, building in periods of review, and ensuring that individual arrangements do not become permanent immediately. It also mitigates the problem of a 'first-come-first-served' approach to flexible working. It allows leaders to reflect on the impact of practices on staff and pupils, and to change as needed.

Whether flexible working is managed on an individual basis or more holistically, setting shared success criteria and agreeing how and when to review is important both for individual staff and for the school to learn and iterate.

As well as the examples from schools in Camden, other approaches [17] which could be trialled include:

'We care' days - many schools offer wellbeing days, reason-neutral days off that acknowledge the commitment of staff.

Hybrid CPD options - Staff CPD is organised so that it can be done at home or in school. Whole school CPD can be done together but in hybrid form, or modules/courses can be followed on-line at different times.

[17] See for example <https://flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/>, <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/tomorrows-teachers#promote-work-life-balance>

Rethinking PPA time - off-site PPA time can be a problem, but it could be easier to manage if it happens fortnightly instead of weekly. Some primary schools review PPA time each half term so that different teachers can take it off-site, or to make sure that the same teachers aren't missing out because of parents' evenings or staff meetings on their PPA day.

'Friends and Family scheme'- teachers are encouraged to bank cover lessons outside their directed time which they can then use to take additional flexible time off. This also has the advantage of ensuring students are taught by qualified teachers who know them.

Time off in Lieu (TOIL) - teachers in one secondary school who work part-time should only have four parents' evenings a year, but might teach seven classes within their timetable. This means they need to attend seven parents' evenings. These extra hours are outside their contracted hours so they can claim TOIL. Some teachers build up their TOIL so that they can take a day off.

Shorter school days - for example a school which closes at Friday lunchtime each week. The school has arranged childcare for those families that want it, teachers take Friday afternoon as PPA time which can be taken remotely.

Phased retirement - teachers who are thinking about retiring are encouraged to work part-time, while also drawing part of their pension. This keeps experienced teachers in the workforce, allows further flexibilities for other colleagues who want to work part-time, and can be an excellent way of sharing skills and knowledge across staff.

Rethinking timetabling - at secondary, United Learning requires teachers of core subjects to be in school 4 days a week, but other subject teachers can request to consolidate their lessons so that they are in on fewer days. In other places, staff can request to teach limited groups (e.g just years 7-9) which allows them to cut down on the days they are in school.

Rethinking roles - some roles can be split between teaching a class and leading on a subject across a Trust or group of schools. These staff may work full-time, but not full-time in one setting. This can also open up flexible/part-time opportunities for other staff.

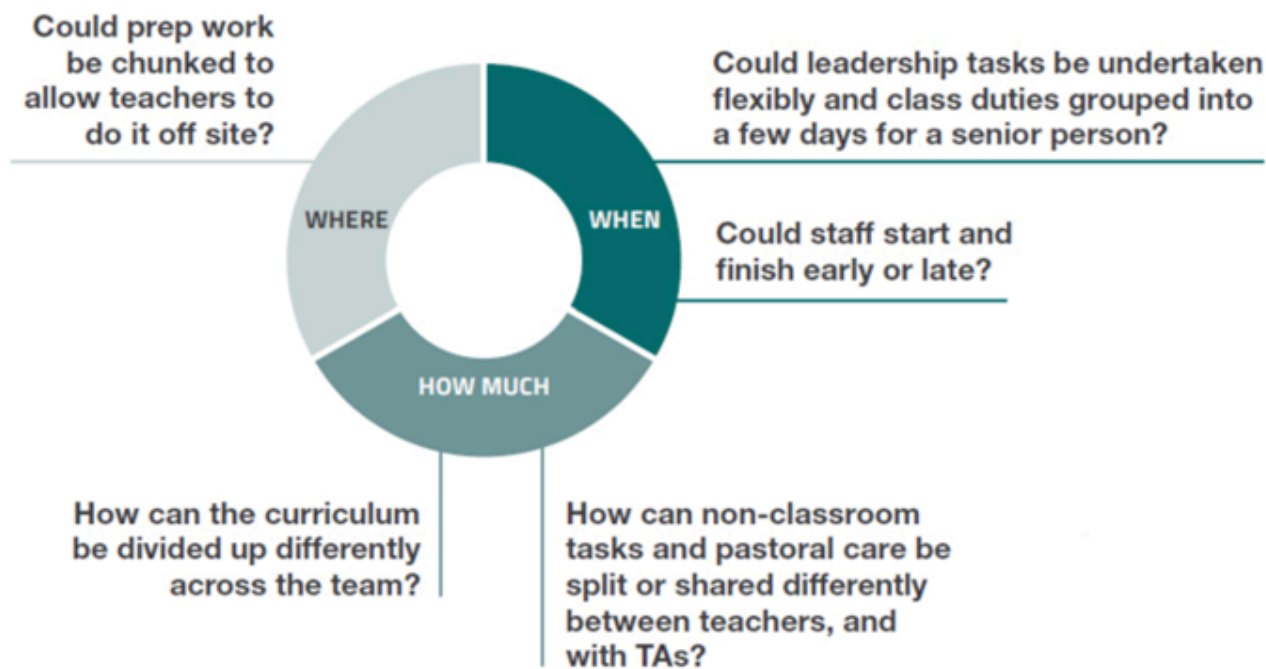
Rethinking staffing patterns - schools may be able to use resources freed up by having larger numbers (in some schools, up to half) of teaching staff working four days a week, to enhance the curriculum with specialist teachers and coaches. Other schools work to have numbers of staff working part-time and using split classes (in secondary school) to good effect.

Flexible job design - running alongside formal routes to apply for flexible working, this approach encourages a conversation at the start of the autumn term between the headteacher and a staff member thinking they might like to work flexibly in the following academic year. This allows for a longer period of shared thinking about what could work. In secondary schools, staffing requirements are confirmed after pupils have chosen their options, and flexible working requests can then be approved if possible before the end of the summer term.

Timewise [18] offers a framework for thinking about flexible job design which looks at where and when work needs to be done, and whether the curriculum, pastoral care and non-classroom tasks can be split differently within teams of teachers or between teachers and support staff.

[18] https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Timewise-Now-Teach-Report_2019.pdf

Flexible job design options for teachers and schools



9-day fortnight - Dixons Academies Trust is currently trialling a 9-day fortnight [19] approach across its schools. According to this Schools Week article, this is in addition to PPA time and is effectively a day off (although some teachers use it to catch up with work). Students still have the same number of lessons. The Trust has enabled its schools to try different ways of managing the 9-day fortnight and is evaluating the trial. Schools in the Trust follow a 2-week timetable, which makes planning easier, and some lessons are taught in large (60 pupil) classes. This approach is being evaluated by EEF [20].

4.3 Evaluate - how is it working?

Schools which implement flexible working approaches well are those which have thought carefully about what success means in their context.

Measuring impact - on staff: it is important to find ways to measure the impact of flexible working practices on those who are working flexibly and those who are not, and those who lead and manage staff, as well as the impacts on pupils and parents. This may be through the same staff surveys and working groups that you used in exploring. It's also helpful to gather data on the pattern of requests, to ensure there is no perceived or actual bias - are there particular groups of staff who are more likely to make a request, or more likely to have a request granted? This may be around protected characteristics, or there could be disparities between teachers and support staff, staff in particular departments or year groups, or different career stages, for example early career or senior leadership.

Measuring impact - on pupils: it may be helpful to consider what is important to measure in your school context. If you are concerned about the impact of a job-share on pupils, identify what in particular the issues might be - is it about outcomes or behaviour for example, or are you concerned

[19] <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/nine-day-fortnight-proves-a-big-hit-with-dixons-staff/>

[20] <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/teacher-choices-ndwf>

about groups (those with SEND perhaps). By being clear at the beginning, you can work collaboratively to identify ways to measure impact and who to talk to, as well as being open to regular conversations about support that may be needed. These measures can also inform decisions about whether to stop, continue or expand practices, and what support or conversations are needed in future. Organisations such as Flexible Teacher Talent [21] work with schools to evaluate offers too.

Flexible working staff focus group - as flexible working becomes embedded, unanticipated practical issues emerge. These include issues with systems, strategies and processes, as well as staff attitudes and perceptions. A staff focus group, made up of staff with different (and no) flexible working arrangements, can help to identify and anticipate problems and offer solutions.

Using a self-assessment tool - the FWAMS Flexible Working Self-Assessment Tool [22] takes leaders through ten strategic areas, including developing a policy and dealing with requests, job design, workload and timetabling. It gives ideas and resources for different stages of a school's journey, from beginning and developing practices to embedding flexible working in the school culture.

05 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER SUPPORT

5.1 Policy development

- Camden to develop a model policy on flexible working aimed specifically at schools and considering the varying contracts, terms and conditions of different staff.
- Clear guidance to be made available setting out the HR policies available to schools, for example bereavement leave, and the flexibilities already available to school staff.
- Support from HR and from the LDBS (for Church Schools) to develop policies that integrate flexibility and wellbeing for all staff.

5.2 Support and training

- Developing opportunities for leaders to discuss flexible working with others, both to share practice and to be challenged. This could include invitations to other organisations, or leaders from outside Camden, to share expertise.
- Opportunities to be offered for those responsible for school timetabling to share understanding, effective practices and information about useful software.
- Leaders to be supported to manage and mitigate the pressures on themselves and their leadership teams of managing flexible working.
- HR and LDBS to provide support and training for leaders in varying contracts and in building supportive school cultures focused on flexibility and wellbeing. Support to be offered for reviewing decisions made, and evaluating flexible working and its impacts.

5.3 Support and training

- Camden Learning to give clear guidance on the legal requirements for flexible working, particularly any changes.
- School leaders to be signposted to guidance from flexible working organisations - some of which are identified in this report.
- Information and guidance to be made available for governors/Trustees on the legal requirements and their role in supporting and challenging flexible working in their schools.

[21] <https://flexibleteachertalent.co.uk/>

[22] <https://flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/resource-library>

Appendix 1: Flexible Working Project, Case Study: Heath School, 14 in 15 Alex Wilson (Headteacher)

Heath School is a secondary Pupil Referral Unit, serving young people with the most complex needs. The staff student ratio is higher than mainstream and the work is very challenging for staff. It has historically been difficult to recruit to the school, and retention has also been a challenge. This impacts on student outcomes. Alex wanted to find the best approach to flexible working in his context that would enhance recruitment and retention and improve student outcomes through that.

What is the flexible working model?

The model in Heath School is known as 14 in 15. Every three weeks, full time staff have a Friday to work flexibly/remotely. Staff have been placed in three different groups, and the timetable set out so that one group takes a remote Friday each week. This means that two thirds of permanent staff are on site on Fridays.

The offer applies to all staff (teaching and support), including leadership. Agency staff are eligible after 12 weeks; part-time staff have an offer relative to their hours worked (eg those who work 0.5 will have a Friday every 6 weeks). Staff can opt in or out.

Fridays were chosen as the school finishes early that day. The student offer is scheduled so that there is no drop in the quality of provision: work-experience, pre-existing (and extended) mentoring from a charity, and places on a construction course happen on Fridays.

The timetable, reflecting any changes to staffing on Fridays, is shared with all staff each Wednesday during the daily all-staff briefing. Teaching staff are excused from attending the daily all-staff debrief meeting on Wednesdays to liaise with the usual class teachers and plan their Friday lessons, to ensure no drop in continuity from the Thursday to Friday lessons.

The operational running of the school is prioritised on Fridays, so there are no meetings - staff know there is an expectation that everyone is available to support as required. Staff are also aware if there were a serious incident on a Friday that could have been resolved or had fewer consequences had more staff been on site then the practice will have to stop.

Other flexibilities, including formal part-time working and ad hoc opportunities are available, with the latter - e.g. for attending children's school events - granted at the head's discretion and reflective of the needs of the school.

How was 14 in 15 developed?

Alex developed the initial idea from looking at flexible working in other sectors and in education and reflecting on what could work for Heath School. He worked on several ideas, before deciding on a model that could fit with the way the school is structured. He explored this with his SLT and then presented a model to his then Executive Head that he thought would be possible. After working through this process, he developed a paper to share with governors for review and sign off on a consultation. Alex was very clear that he needed a model that had every chance of being implemented before sharing with staff, knowing that if he presented something that then didn't happen it could have a detrimental effect on staff wellbeing and morale.



Appendix 1: Flexible Working Project, Case Study: Heath School, 14 in 15

Alex Wilson (Headteacher)

The school already has a commitment to the DfE wellbeing charter, including termly reviews, so the model was presented as an initiative within that process. Alex held a consultation with staff and also created time for them to meet with him to ask questions. The consultation identified a number of issues that hadn't been considered and led to a move from the original proposal of '9 in 10' to a more conservative '14 in 15'.

Alex then developed a final version including modelling a three-week timetable. He decided to invite staff to opt in/out, so that no one felt forced into a new way of working.

The timeline - Alex started thinking about this in summer term 2024, working on the proposal for half a term before bringing it to governors. Staff consultation took half a term. He developed the model before beginning implementation in the second half of autumn term.



How is it monitored and evaluated?

For the first year of implementation, 14 in 15 was a standing item on weekly SLT meetings. As they happen on Mondays, it was an opportunity to review the previous week, analyse whether any problems were down to the new model and agree any actions that needed to be taken. Alex had set up a weekly implementation plan, identifying what needed to be done or considered each week, and had agreed beforehand with SLT timelines and how to communicate with staff. This meant that problems didn't build up over time. Staff knew it was regularly reviewed and were able to feed back.

In the first half of the spring term 2025, he reviewed the first half term's implementation, inviting a governor with a professional background in supporting organisations with flexible working to discuss the model. She fed back on this meeting to the Governing Board. Following the first year, review is carried out termly rather than weekly, though Alex is still clear that this is a trial. Every term he issues a staff survey to gather feedback on whether the model is achieving against the success criteria initially set out, including staff attendance and wellbeing, and outcomes for students, and to identify what could be improved. He also gathers SLT feedback. This information is used to inform whether the trial will be extended for a further term. Alex presents on pupil progress, outcomes and behaviour to governors, and both they and the Executive Head would ask questions if these were stagnating, which would lead to scrutiny of the model. Surveys have been positive against the criteria; there has been no drop in student outcomes, and in many areas there have been improvements.

Appendix 1: Flexible Working Project, Case Study: Heath School, 14 in 15 Alex Wilson (Headteacher)

How has it changed over time?

After the initial change from 9 in 10 to 14 in 15, the biggest change has been in the deployment of in-class support staff, which has developed over time in response to questions about what they would do in their flexible working time. They are beginning to be assigned specific responsibilities - checking behaviour logs, making parent phone calls. This is work in progress but will add to the school's capacity (particularly the behaviour and attendance team) and has provided an opportunity to make beneficial changes to staff roles.

What benefits have you seen?

- Staff say that having blocks of time away from the classroom has been significant in terms of their wellbeing and managing workload. Retention has been strong, and staff reference 14 in 15 as something they really value.
- The school has also recruited well in this period, and the staff team is very strong. While this is not just down to flexible working, 14 in 15 is at the top of job adverts. Alex believes that improved student outcomes come from staff outcomes.
- It has made distributed leadership more effective across the school, because staff have time where they can be asked to lead on projects, when they would otherwise be solely student facing. If staff say that they don't have time, leaders can ask how they are using their third Friday to manage their time.

- Teachers know that opting in to the model means that the school could deploy them outside their allocated timetabled lessons as needs arise. This doesn't happen routinely but having the opt in makes it easier.
- It has been helpful for leaders to have space and time to do bigger pieces of work, when the busy environment of a PRU means that they can be pulled away from the office.
- It has also become a USP for Heath School, changing the perception of what a PRU is and the benefits of the work it does, and raising the profile of the school in Camden.



Appendix 1: Flexible Working Project, Case Study: Heath School, 14 in 15

Alex Wilson (Headteacher)

And the disadvantages?

- It has slightly restricted the timetabling. The school has proactively secured additional places in a construction course on a Friday for a group of students, so that staff can better manage the pupils on site.
- There have been a handful of Fridays when there has been staff absence which has made staffing feel tight, but it has been manageable.
- It has taken time to set up, including time on SLT agendas for initial weekly review. It has also taken time to think about what staff will do on their flexible working day which can benefit the school as well as the individual, and to design quality assurance. It took time to work out how to calculate the time fairly for part-time staff. Although took time to set up, and to address issues during implementation, Alex feels it no longer takes up his time on a regular basis.
- It was hard to get right for all staff so that there isn't a feeling that it works well for some but not others, which risks staff feeling disgruntled by perceived inequities - for example staff questioned what support staff would do on their flexible working days.

What would you have done differently?

- Start more conservatively. When it was decided to go from 9 in 10 to 14 in 15, some staff were disappointed by what they saw as a worse offer.
- Think about staff roles in advance, to build an idea of what each group of staff would do on their flexible working days.

What advice would you give to a head thinking about implementing a similar idea?

- Really think carefully about the details, about everything that could go wrong before introducing the idea. The worst thing would be to suggest and then not follow through, which could unsettle staff and undermine confidence in leadership.
- Consultation is key.
- Make it a standing item at SLT, and review regularly.
- Make clear that this is a temporary or trial arrangement. Build in a safety clause, so that the arrangement can be stopped with a certain amount of notice.
- Allow staff to opt in or out.



Appendix 2: Flexible Working Project, Case Study: Hampstead School, Building a culture of flexible working

Matt Sadler (Headteacher) and Michael Haddon (Director of Business Operations)

Hampstead School is a large comprehensive school with a sixth form in West Hampstead, with around 1,300 students between the ages of 11 and 18.

Senior leaders recognise that a better work-life balance can improve staff motivation, performance and productivity. Flexible working can help to boost employee wellbeing and reduce stress. Matt is keen to make it a bigger part of the school culture and is looking to be more proactive, believing that this could help create a culture of trust and improve overall student educational outcomes. Proactively offering flexible working, rather than waiting for requests, could position Hampstead School as an employer of choice.

What does a more proactive approach mean?

Taking a proactive approach to flexible working means actively sharing what works well and what doesn't across the organisation, spreading best practice and making sure everyone is on the same page. This includes clearly communicating the main frameworks, like our current capacity issues that mean more staff can't work from home or not on a Friday. It also means making sure these policies are discussed at every stage of the recruitment process, from the job advert and interview conversations to onboarding of new employees, so that everyone understands and follows them. This can create a fairer and clearer approach to flexible working that supports both staff and the school's goals.

What kinds of flexible working are currently on offer?

The school accommodates a range of flexible working, with part-time working the most common. The headteacher works 0.95 to manage childcare. They are starting to trial a 9-day fortnight for a small number of staff. There is also the opportunity to work partly from home, but mainly for non-classroom-based support staff.

How is flexible working managed?

The school takes an 'experimental learning' approach to flexible working, with changes set up and evaluated as trials. Requests must be made with as much notice as possible. All requests are treated as conversations. While the requirement is for a response to be given within 10 days of a request, staff are invited to delay the final decision until after a conversation. Where a specific request can't be met, the leadership team will discuss alternatives that could meet the needs. Line managers are involved in these conversations too, as they may have concerns that need to be addressed, or ideas for alternatives.

Staffing changes are sometimes made to meet requests: when a Head of Faculty went to four days a week, the school appointed an Associate Head of Faculty to cover the fifth day. They were appointed internally, offering career progression, and an idea of whether the Head of Faculty role was one they would like to pursue in the future. They were eventually appointed as the substantive Head of Faculty when their job share partner resigned.

Appendix 2: Flexible Working Project, Case Study: Hampstead School, Building a culture of flexible working

Matt Sadler (Headteacher) and Michael Haddon (Director of Business Operations)

How do you evaluate flexible working trials?

To evaluate trials effectively, feedback is gathered from multiple perspectives.

- For individuals, this mainly involves meetings to understand how the trial has impacted their work-life balance, productivity, and overall wellbeing.
- Line managers and colleagues are consulted through surveys and meetings to gain insights into how the flexible arrangements are affecting team dynamics, communication, and workload management.
- The Head collates feedback from senior leaders to assess whether the trials align with the school's strategic goals and organisational culture.

Combining these different sources of feedback allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the trial's benefits, challenges, and overall effectiveness, guiding future decisions about flexible working arrangements.



What are the benefits of flexible working and your current processes?

The trial process used for almost all flexible working practices means that leadership can identify clear benefits for staff. Those engaged in trials have expressed how it means better work-life balance, allowing them to manage their time more effectively and reduce stress, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and productivity.

For students, the evidence base is less clear, but leaders believe that flexible working has resulted in more engaged and motivated teachers, as staff feel more supported and less overwhelmed, which has a beneficial impact on students.

What barriers or risks have you found to flexible working?

There is a balance to be struck between offering flexibility and having enough teachers on site particularly to manage pupil behaviour and safeguarding. This is a particular issue when considering PPA from home requests. There is also sometimes opposition from staff who feel that a colleague's flexible working might impact on their own work and workload.

There can be personal barriers too. Senior leaders often feel they must be on site even when their work could be done elsewhere. They are being encouraged to work from home occasionally, to understand that they can step away for a time.

There are also barriers to building a culture of flexible working, which are often around communication.

Appendix 2: Flexible Working Project, Case Study: Hampstead School, Building a culture of flexible working

Matt Sadler (Headteacher) and Michael Haddon (Director of Business Operations)

Moving towards a more intentional approach

Senior leaders are concerned about the equity issues that may develop unless they move away from responding reactively to individual flexible working requests. For instance, staff who see colleagues taking up flexible working opportunities may be more inclined to request it themselves, but this can become limited to departments or roles, leading to unequal access to information on the possibility of flexible working requests. The SLT knows that Matt (the Head) has a flexible working arrangement, and it has encouraged some senior leaders to request their own, but it is not clear how many other staff know, even though that could build a belief that 'if the head can do it, anyone can'. Limited visibility could limit flexible working, or different types of flexible working, to certain pockets of the organisation or, even more worryingly, certain demographics of staff.

The school is at the beginning of this journey towards a more intentional approach: leaders want to develop plans for flexible working that can support the school's goals, staff wellbeing, and student needs, and are attempting to build it proactively into strategic conversations at SLT level about staffing, the curriculum and the timetable.

Ideas include:

- Inviting requests at certain points in the year - so that timetabling and staffing can be adjusted as needed, and so that all requests can be considered equally rather than being (partially) rejected because too many other staff are already working flexibly
- Trialling to understand the limits to flexible working, for example could it work for admin staff to work 3 days a week at home rather than 2; are there limits to the numbers of staff who can work flexibly at any one time?
- Supporting the HR manager to develop and share case studies of where flexible working is going well in the school, to make opportunities more obvious, to show that it can work across different departments and roles, and that it can be for a variety of reasons.
- Providing training and guidance for managers on how to support flexible working arrangements consistently and fairly to help shift the mindset from reactive to strategic.
- Thinking about how to manage requests for off-site PPA time.
- Continued highlighting of the headteacher's flexible working arrangements as part of the cycle of highlighting the flexible working policy.

What are the benefits and risks of a more intentional approach?

An intentional approach could result in more flexible working requests. However, it would mean the school receives them at more suitable times in the year that makes their assessment easier. An intentional approach could also reduce the number of requests that the school has already determined are not usually viable, such as a postholder wanting to maintain an entire TLR payment but only work part-time. This could help to reduce stress and friction between different parties throughout the application and trial processes.

Appendix 3: A summary of DfE guidance on flexible working

DfE guidance [23] on flexible working from November 2024 looks at both non-statutory and statutory requests. For both routes, it is recommended that school leaders hold a discussion with the individual thinking of making a request, to consider:

- The benefits - for the individual and the school;
- Options - with a request that the individual is flexible with the request;
- A trial period - DfE suggests requests should be trialled before any permanent changes are made to contracts.

Statutory route

The Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended) and regulations made under it sets out the formal right of employees to request flexible working from the first day of employment. Employees can make two statutory requests within a 12-month period, but only one can be 'live' at a time. Requests must be submitted in writing, ideally at least 3 months in advance of the proposed change starting, and must state:

- the date of their request.
- their desired working pattern and the intended start date.
- when previous requests for flexible working have been made to the employer.
- whether the request is in relation the Equality Act, eg as a reasonable adjustment for a disability.

Employers must respond within 2 months, including the conclusion to any appeal. Successful requests will lead to a permanent change in contract (unless both parties agree something different).

Flexible working is a 'day one right', meaning that staff have the right to request flexible working from the first day of employment. A request can only be rejected for the following business reasons:

- it will cost your business too much
- you cannot reorganise the work among other staff
- you cannot recruit more staff
- there will be a negative effect on quality of work
- there will be a negative effect on the business's ability to meet customer demand
- there will be a negative effect on performance
- there's not enough work for your employee to do when they've requested to work
- there are planned changes to the business, for example, you intend to reorganise or change the business and think the request will not fit with these plans.

The employer must consult with the employee before rejecting a request, so that both parties can explore whether there are any alternative workable options.

Employees should follow their school's flexible working policy to make sure they are following the correct procedures or discuss procedures with their line manager if there is no policy.

[23]<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2#the-process-for-requesting-flexible-working>

Appendix 3: A summary of DfE guidance on flexible working

Non-statutory route

The non-statutory route is often made for requests that will not permanently change an employee's contract (e.g. altering start or finish times but without changing the number of hours contracted), or for one-off and temporary flexibilities. DfE guidance says that employees should 'follow the process set out in the school or trust's HR or flexible working policy'.

What should employers consider?

- The DfE guidance is clear that employers must consider requests fairly, in a timely way and according to due process based on business need'. They must also not discriminate against employees based on:
 - gender
 - age
 - race
 - disability
 - any other protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010

Flexible working should not be implemented to address excessive workload. Headteachers should use the DfE workload and wellbeing tools to address the workload issues.

Schools and MATs should consult with the education trade unions to develop a flexible working policy, to clarify the process and ensure transparency.

Appendix 4: Parent perceptions of flexible working

While there is growing evidence of the benefits of flexible working for teacher wellbeing, work-life balance and retention, there is much less research on the impacts on pupils. It is hard to find research that compares the impacts of different flexible working practices or different part-time or job-share models.

A DfE study [23] from 2022/23 provides some insight into perceptions of job-share arrangements from parents and (secondary school) pupils. In 2021/22, parents of primary school pupils were more likely than those of secondary school pupils to say their child had been taught by job-sharing teachers. Most parents (62%) reported that job-sharing had a positive impact or no impact on their child. 21% of primary school parents said it had a negative impact. Positive impacts included:

- experiencing a range of teaching styles (46%),
- building relationships with different personalities (45%),
- being able to go to more than one teacher for help and support with learning (33%), or with wellbeing (19%).

Positive impacts were more likely to be reported at primary level than at secondary level, e.g. 56% of primary parents identified building relationships with different personalities as a positive impact. Over primary and secondary, parents of pupils eligible for free school meals, those with SEND or those with Child in Need (CiN) status were less likely to report a positive impact from some practices - experiencing a range of teaching styles, going to more than one teacher for help and support for learning or wellbeing, and building relationships with different personalities.

A third of parents said there were no negative impacts of being taught by two job-sharing teachers. The negative impacts reported included inconsistency of teaching (28%), teachers not sharing information with each other (24%), or class disruption due to inconsistent behaviour approaches (22%). Around one in six (16%) reported being unsure who to speak to about concerns, 12% reported lack of support for their child, and 6% said concern that their child was building relationships with more than one teacher. Primary parents reported lower concerns about negative impacts than secondary parents, except for being unsure who to speak to about concerns (primary 18%, secondary 14%). Parents of children with SEND were more likely to report class disruption due to inconsistent behaviour approaches, lack of support for their child, and concerns about their child building relationships with more than one teacher.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the perceptions of those whose child had not been taught by job-share teachers were less positive than those who had. For example, 57% of parents whose child had not been taught by job-sharing teachers expected that teachers not sharing information with each other would have a negative impact, compared with just 24% of those whose child had experienced a job-share. These findings would suggest that communication with parents is paramount, to anticipate concerns and to provide ongoing reassurance that impacts are being managed. They also suggest that strong evaluation of flexible working practices should be undertaken, to ensure that groups of children are not being disadvantaged.

[23]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63f4d3ea8fa8f56130bbccd7/Parent_Pupil_and_Learner_Panel_2022_to_2023_November_wave.pdf
p50

Appendix 5: The Survey

A survey was sent to all school leaders in Camden via the regular mailing. Reminders were issued through the same mailings.

1. What kinds of flexible working happens in your school? Please choose all that apply.

	Teachers	Support staff	Senior leaders
Regular working off-site (eg PPA/leadership time)			
Occasional working off-site			
Working part-time			
Job-sharing			
Different contracted hours (eg 9-day fortnight, annualised hours)			
Different start/finish times			
Occasional days off (eg wellbeing days)			
Occasionally vary hours for personal or family needs			

2. Do you offer any other kinds of flexible working? Please specify what and for what staff.

3. Who requests flexible working opportunities in your school?

- Mothers returning from maternity leave
- Mothers with small children
- Fathers with small children
- Women with other caring responsibilities
- Men with other caring responsibilities
- Staff with disabilities
- Staff moving towards retirement
- Others - say who

4. Do you have a flexible working policy?

- Yes, we have a stand-alone policy
- Yes, it's part of another policy (eg wellbeing)
- Yes, we use the LA HR policy
- We're currently developing one
- No

5. Do you believe that flexible working is compatible with working in education?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Appendix 5: The Survey

6. Do you believe that flexible working is compatible with promotion into leadership positions?
- Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes

7. Please explain briefly your response to questions 5 and 6

8. How do you promote flexible working opportunities?

	For teachers	For support staff	For senior leaders
We are proactive in seeking flexible working requests			
We have a different process for managing statutory and non-statutory flexible working requests			
We advertise flexible working as a benefit in job adverts			
We regularly remind staff of the opportunity to request flexible working			
We occasionally remind staff of the opportunity to request flexible working			
We have crafted roles particularly so that they can be worked flexibly			

9. If you have crafted roles particularly so that they can be worked flexibly, please explain briefly.

10. Are you actively looking to increase flexible working opportunities in your school?

- Yes
- No
- Not at the moment

11. What makes flexible working difficult to offer in your school?

- Cost
- Parent perceptions
- Staff perceptions
- Continuity for pupils
- Governor/trustee perceptions
- Timetabling
- Concerns about pupil safety or safeguarding
- Not enough staff
- Negative impact on managers of managing more staff
- Something else

Appendix 5: The Survey

12. What do you believe are the benefits of flexible working in your school?

- Positive impacts for staff (e.g. improved wellbeing, job satisfaction)
- Improved staff retention
- Improved pupil outcomes
- More staff bringing an increase in expertise
- Something else

13. Please tell us about information and support for flexible working - what you're aware of, what you use and what additional or better support you would like:

	We're aware of this	We use this	We would like (more of) this
Legal guidance			
HR support			
Guidance from DfE			
Guidance from flexible working organisations			
Conversations with other school leaders			
Support from governors or trustees			
Timetabling software			
Training			
Other			

14. Please use this box to expand on any of your answers in question 13

15. If you would be happy to talk in more detail about your approach to flexible working, or the support you would need, please add your email address below

Section 2 - Information about you and your school

What kind of school do you work in?

- Stand-alone Academy
- Academy in a MAT
- LA school
- Independent school
- Special School
- PRU

What phase do you work in?

- Nursery
- Primary
- Secondary
- All through

- Number of pupils
- Number of staff
- Number of staff with active and formalised flexible working arrangements

- How long have you been a headteacher?
- How long have you been a headteacher in this school?
- Do you have any contracted flexibility?

Appendix 5: The Survey

Survey Context

- Twelve leaders responded, meaning that responses cannot be taken as representative.
- 11 leaders were from maintained schools, and one from a special school.
- Nine were from primary schools, 3 from secondary schools and one from a nursery.
- Schools ranged in size from 40 to 1,250 pupils and from 25 to 175 staff.
- Two respondents said that they had no staff with active and formalised flexible working arrangements, four had 5 or fewer staff, three had between 6-10 staff, one had 15 staff, one had 20 staff and one had 25 staff with flexible working arrangements.
- Respondents ranged in experience from 9 months as a headteacher to 20 years.
- One headteacher said that they worked a 0.95% contract with some slightly shorter days, and one said that they occasionally worked from home. The remainder (10) said that they did not currently work flexibly in their role.



Appendix 6: Conversations

The survey invited respondents to provide an email address if they were interested in having a follow up conversation about flexible working. 7 respondents did so. Leaders were also invited via the newsletter to contact me directly for a conversation, and others expressed their interest to colleagues at Camden Learning.

I contacted each person by email, with a follow-up email to those who had not responded. Altogether, I had telephone/online conversations with people from 12 schools, 6 of whom were identified via the survey. Those conversations were relatively open-ended around a series of questions:

- What kinds of flexible working operates in your school?
- What is particularly interesting (either about the models or the way of operating)?
- What has the journey been like to get to where you are?
- Where are you planning to go next?
- Who supports you - and what support would be helpful?

I wrote a brief note of the conversation and shared it with the interviewee with a request for any clarifications or further thoughts. One person also shared a detailed note about their approach, prompted by our conversation.

I would like to thank the following for their time, and their openness in conversations:

Katy Forsdyke, Headteacher, Christ Church School NW3

Lorraine Goll, Headteacher, Holy Trinity & S.Silas Primary School

Michael Haddon, Director of Business Operations, Hampstead School

Nicholas John, Executive Headteacher, Acland Burghley School

Sophie Kennedy, Headteacher, Rosary Catholic Primary School

Clare McBride, Headteacher, Christopher Hatton Primary School

Lisa McManus, HR & Office Manager, The UCL Academy

Katie Metselaar, Head of School, Haverstock School

Kat Miller, Director of Operations, Acland Burghley School and La Sainte Union Catholic School

Gary Moore, Headteacher, Regent High School

Alex Wilson, Head of School, Heath School and Interim Executive Director of Resources, H3 Federation

David Wilson, Headteacher, Royal Free Hospital School

I invited two schools to provide further information for case studies. Thank you to Alex Wilson at Heath School and Matt Sadler and Michael Haddon at Hampstead School for their willingness to engage in more detailed conversations.

Camden Learning is a schools-led partnership between Camden schools and Camden Council, established in 2017 to drive improvement through collective expertise.

Guided by values of excellence and social equity, we support teachers, leaders and support staff in their work.

Our collaborative model helps schools take shared responsibility for outcomes, ensuring every child and young person in Camden benefits from high-quality, inclusive education.



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