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Empowering Educators: Flexible Working at St Peters

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At St Peters, we are committed to fostering a supportive and sustainable environment for our dedicated staff. Recognising the unique demands of the educational landscape, we have proactively implemented flexible working initiatives to enhance well-being, improve retention, and optimise school operations. This case study explores two key initiatives: our 'Working from Home' (WFH) scheme and the 'Friends & Family' scheme.

Background: Embracing flexible working

The journey into flexible working at St Peters was driven by a clear understanding of the pressures faced by educators today. The traditional model of teaching, while rewarding, can be incredibly demanding, often leading to challenges in staff well-being, recruitment, and retention. We recognised the need to innovate and demonstrate our trust in our staff as professionals, offering tangible support that goes beyond conventional benefits. Our aim was to create an environment where staff feel valued, empowered, and able to achieve a healthier work-life balance, ultimately benefiting both our team and our students.

Challenges: Overcoming demands in education

The educational sector is dynamic and challenging, with increasing demands on staff time and energy. Before implementing our flexible working practices, St Peters, like many schools, faced the inherent difficulties associated with a demanding profession. These included:



Staff well-being: The intense nature of teaching often left staff feeling overwhelmed, impacting their mental and physical health.



Recruitment and retention: Attracting and keeping highly skilled educators in a competitive landscape was a constant challenge, exacerbated by the demanding work environment.



Cover lesson quality: Relying on external cover staff could sometimes lead to inconsistencies in lesson quality and classroom routines, impacting student behaviour and learning.



Financial efficiency: The cost associated with external cover could be substantial, diverting resources from other student-focused initiatives.

Our flexible working initiatives were specifically designed to address these critical areas, aiming to mitigate their impact and create a more sustainable working model.

Approach: Implementing tailored flexibility

St Peters adopted a dual approach to flexible working, introducing two distinct but complementary initiatives:

1. Working from Home (WFH) initiative

-  **Implementation:** For the past three years, our full-time teachers have been allocated two timetabled Work-from-Home (WFH) slots. These slots are strategically integrated into their existing PPA (Planning, Preparation, and Assessment) time.
-  **Philosophy:** This initiative is not merely about convenience; it is fundamentally about trust and empowerment. By providing dedicated time and space for remote work, we empower our staff to manage their workload more effectively and in a setting that supports focused work.

2. Friends & Family scheme

-  **Implementation:** Now in its third successful year, the 'Friends & Family' scheme is an opt-in program designed to offer significant personal flexibility. Staff who choose to participate complete 8 additional lesson covers outside of their directed time.
-  **Benefit:** In return for these additional covers, participating staff earn a full day of their choice as additional leave at any point during the academic year. This allows them to manage personal commitments, attend important family events, or simply take a crucial mental health day when needed.
-  **Rationale:** This scheme is a small yet significant demonstration of our commitment to staff well-being, acknowledging the demanding nature of their profession and providing a tangible benefit that supports their personal lives.

Outcomes: Tangible benefits for staff and school

The implementation of these flexible working practices has yielded significant and measurable positive outcomes for St Peters:

For staff well-being and retention:

-  **Improved well-being:** Both schemes have profoundly impacted staff well-being. The WFH initiative provides a “well-needed breather” and “distraction free time to get on top of work”, leaving staff feeling “refreshed.” The 'Friends & Family' scheme is universally praised, with 100% of staff in our latest voice survey believing it is beneficial, specifically highlighting its positive impact on well-being.
-  **Enhanced work-life balance:** Staff frequently report achieving “a better work-life balance.” A particularly poignant outcome of the WFH scheme is the ability for many staff to regularly pick up their children from school for the first time ever, a benefit consistently highlighted in their feedback.
-  **Lower turnover & higher attendance:** We have observed significantly lower staff turnover rates and only had a 5% staff turnover in the last 12 months here at St Peters (which includes retirements and promotions etc). The Education Policy Institute (EPI) estimates that the average classroom teacher turnover rate in secondary schools within large multi- academy trusts (MATs) is about 19.5 % annually.

For School operations and students:



Improved quality of cover lessons: The 'Friends & Family' scheme ensures that a large portion of cover lessons are delivered by our own experienced staff. This guarantees higher quality instruction and helps maintain consistent classroom routines, leading to better whole-school behaviour.



Significant financial efficiency: The 'Friends & Family' scheme has generated substantial financial savings by reducing the reliance on external cover agencies. We saved over £10,000 on cover agency costs last year and are projecting a £20,000 saving this academic year.



Positive learning environment: Ultimately, these initiatives contribute to a more positive and consistent daily experience for all our students, as they benefit from a well-supported and dedicated teaching team.

The Future: Continuing our commitment

St Peters is incredibly proud of how these schemes foster a supportive environment where staff feel valued and students consistently receive high-quality education. We are thrilled to confirm the continuation of our 'Friends & Family' scheme for the upcoming academic year, building on its proven success. The Work-from-Home initiative also remains a cornerstone of our flexible working approach. We are continuously exploring further strategies to support staff well-being and flexibility, always seeking innovative ways to ensure our educators thrive, which in turn ensures the best outcomes for our students.