

Implementing job shares successfully

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Phase: primary

Number of pupils: 424

Tell us about the job shares in your school

When I first came to the school, I had one very experienced teacher working in key stage 2. When she decided to have children, we talked about her and her husband doing a job share together in year 6. They have now been doing this very successfully for 15 years! This has allowed me to retain a full time teacher and has meant they are able to keep their teaching skills current whilst both having the opportunity to parent their sons. They also share an assistant head teacher role, which has been great.

The culture around flexible working

I have never declined a flexible working request. With the governors, I tell them why I'm committed to it, and they completely agree and support this. They know that to get the best out of our staff, we need to be prepared to be flexible. The teachers in my school are very committed to looking after other people's children in their role as teachers so we need to support them when they want to prioritise looking after their own little ones for a while.

Planning for flexible working

Requests for flexible working may well come out of informal conversations about a member of staff's future, for example, if they become pregnant. Or, it could be part of their performance management conversation where they might discuss what they want to aspire to in the next few years. For example, one of our teachers is an aspiring artist and he wanted to work part time so that he had more time to paint. We have an open and honest dialogue about any flexible working requests, looking at impact, feasibility and how we might plan ahead. We consider both their needs and how it can work practically in the school. I think about staffing for the following academic year around May to June.

What are the benefits for the staff and the school?

Strong teachers are attracted to our school because we are prepared to be flexible. We have explicitly advertised for new partners to join an existing job share, and we have gained a number of teachers who were attracted by our reputation for flexibility. We had a lot of interest in our teacher vacancies this year, and being flexible also means we have very good staff retention as

we are able to accommodate changes in family circumstances, which means teachers can look after their children and work part time.

The parents are used to the children having more than one teacher. They know that it works well because their children are happy and the results are consistently good. The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in 2016 to 2018 was above the national average compared to both local authority and England state-funded schools. In relation to the job share at year 6, one parent said to me: "Having the 2 teachers at year 6 is great preparation for the children as they get ready to move to secondary where they will have numerous teachers." I definitely agree.

For the children in year 6, they have a male and a female teacher, so they get different role models, and 2 teachers with different areas of expertise. It is a win-win situation. I really value having more than one teacher with the same class, because it means I always get 2 different perspectives on the children. The teachers can also focus on the subjects that they are most confident in, which works really well for them and for the children. They can manage their time flexibly, which means they can switch working days between themselves if they need to. Working part-time means that they can much better balance being involved in their family life as well as progressing in their careers.

What are the challenges for the school?

Timetabling can be a challenge, but it helps me enormously when the staff think creatively about the solutions. For example, 2 young mums came to me and asked if they could job share together with a crossover day in the middle, as they were going to look after each other's babies on the other days. This meant they could avoid costly child care as well as knowing their child was in very safe hands! With a job share, I have to make sure that they can have a face-to-face handover, so I always have an 'overlap day' on a Wednesday. I schedule staff meetings on the handover day because then it means that everyone can attend. Then, on that day the 'extra teacher' can help cover PPA or support intervention groups when they aren't needed in the classroom – another win-win situation.

Advice for leaders considering flexible working requests, including job share requests

You have to think beyond initial concerns about the timetable. It is challenging, but it can be worked out with a bit of effort, and the gains are really worth it for everyone. It's important to have an open and honest dialogue, and everybody needs to be prepared to be flexible. There are challenges, but there is a lot to be gained from the school's perspective. Staff who do not feel like they are trying to juggle too much in their lives, are less stressed, happier and work better. I am very fortunate to have a very happy, productive staff, with many people working flexibly, and am fully committed to continuing with this ethos, knowing that ultimately there are great benefits for everyone.