



Flexible Working Strategy

**Wycombe High School:
Leading the way in flexible working**





Our vision for flexible working

Wycombe High School is led by our ethos and our values. We are an organisation that 'looks beyond' with limitless ambition, insatiable curiosity, infectious joy and a generosity of spirit. Our key strategic principle to embed best practice in mental and physical well-being for staff and students is closely aligned with our ambition to successfully retain, develop and recruit staff. This objective is set within the context of a challenging national recruitment crisis within the education profession impacting on both teaching and support/non-teaching roles. In 2023-24, postgraduate teacher recruitment was 50% below target for secondary teachers and national teacher recruitment targets have only been achieved once since 2015-16 (1). In Buckinghamshire in 2020, 9.4% of secondary teachers left the state-funded sector compared to the national average 8.2% (2). Although there is no national data available, our experience suggests that retaining and recruiting support/non-teaching staff is equally challenging in an increasingly competitive job market.

Our ambition is to be the first-choice employer, recognised by employees for our investment in our staff wellbeing, their professional development, and their job satisfaction. Many prospective employees, at any stage of their life and career, are used to having space for development, innovation and reflection on their own work and performance. Some have families; others caring responsibilities and others still want to ring-fence time to pursue other interests. If we want to get better at attracting and retaining these professionals and other talented individuals, we need to be better at offering the flexible working opportunities that other employers increasingly provide and be pioneering in leading the way for flexible working in the Secondary Education sector (3).

We believe that by taking a strategic approach to flexible working we can more successfully retain and recruit high quality staff and offer development opportunities which lead to greater productivity and engagement. In addition, our unique context, as a girl's school, fuels our desire to lead the way in making a positive contribution to challenging the inequality that derives from the link between flexible working and those with caring responsibilities. Research suggests that women are adversely impacted in terms of career progression and the gender pay gap but that "flexible working for all lies at the heart of addressing [this]" (4). Informed by data, our strategy seeks to address this inequality.

1. [Teacher recruitment and retention in England - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#) accessed online

2. [Teacher recruitment and retention in England data dashboard - NFER](#)

3. Timewise Foundation (2019) Building Flexibility into Secondary Schools [online] Available at: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/building-flexibility-secondary-schools/>

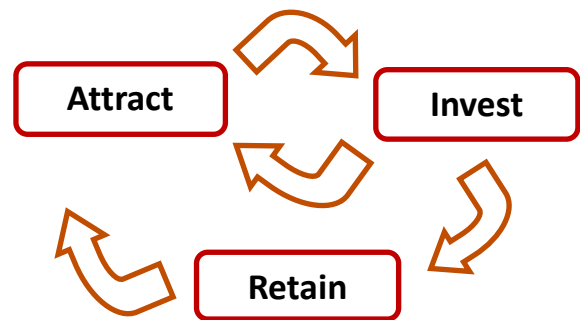
4. House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2016) 'Gender Pay Gap Second Report of Session 2015-16'. [Online] Accessed at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/584/584.pdf>

Our aim



The aims of our Flexible Working Strategy

1. To retain staff within a rewarding, collaborative and healthy working environment
2. To attract high calibre, expert staff and promote a more diverse range of skills and experience
3. To invest in our employees' wellbeing and their personal and professional development



What does success look like?

Our success criteria include but are not limited to the following:

- Increased opportunities for flexible working
 - More applicants/diversity of applicants/successful recruitment in response to job adverts leading to reduced staff turnover
 - Reduced staff absence and increased productivity
 - Improved succession planning
 - Improved staff capacity and expertise leading to improved progression opportunities
 - Improved perception of wellbeing, work-life balance and job satisfaction
 - Increased loyalty and motivation leading to improved intention to remain in the school/teaching profession
 - Closing of gender pay gap
- **Our students are taught and supported by expert, happy and motivated staff**

What is flexible working?

What is flexible working?

There are three main elements that can be modified to make a role flexible:

- **Where** an individual works
 - *Working from home*: it might be possible to do some or all of the work from home or anywhere else other than the normal place of work
- **When** an individual works
 - *Compressed hours*: working full-time hours over fewer days
 - *Flexitime*: the individual chooses when to start and end work (within agreed limits) but works certain 'core hours', for example 9.00 to 3.00 every day
 - *Annualised hours*: the individual has to work a certain number of hours over the year, but they have some flexibility about when they work. As with flexitime, there can be 'core hours' which are worked each week and the rest of the hours flexibly or when there's extra demand at work
 - *Staggered hours*: the individual has different start, finish and break times from others
- **How much** an individual works
 - *Job share*: two people do one job and split the hours
 - *Part time*: working fewer than full-time hours (usually by working fewer days)

Timewise Foundation (2019) Building Flexibility into Secondary Schools [online]
Available at: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/building-flexibility-secondary-schools/>



What does flexible working look like at WHS?

We are committed to increasing flexibility in the following areas:

- 1. Leadership** – flexible working is seen as a positive organisational tool
- 2. Working arrangements** – there is a good balance of creative working arrangements to meet school and individual need
- 3. Progression** – flexible working is possible at every level
- 4. Hiring** – All job adverts specify which types of flexible working are available and all roles advertised as open for discussion
- 5. Advocacy** – advocate for flexible working and embedding flexible working practices

A range of arrangements are in place at WHS to flex where, when and how an individual works. These arrangements do or have included: job shares, part-time, staggered hours, annualised hours, compressed hours, working from home and phased retirement.

This is managed strategically and adopts a whole-staff approach rather than reacting to single requests.

1. Flexible Leadership

A number of leadership roles are flexed at WHS, including two part time Assistant Headteachers. Other approaches include clarity on core hours and ad hoc arrangements for staff who are parents.

2. Flexible working arrangements

The current volume of flexible working arrangements at WHS includes: part time hours; compressed hours; job shares; 38 weeks (following the student calendar).



3. Flexible progression

Flexible working arrangements are also in place for middle and senior leaders exemplifying our commitment to flexible progression.

4. Flexible hiring

All job adverts at WHS are advertised as 'happy to talk flexible working'.

5. Flexible advocacy

This strategy centres on the implementation of a flexible job design process that adopts a 'done with' approach.

It has been designed to address real or perceived structural challenges (e.g. timetabling, budget, workload) and cultural and attitudinal challenges ('opening flood gates', fairness).

Our flexible job design process sits alongside but is separate from employees' statutory entitlement to make a flexible working request at any time. As well as accepting formal applications in line with statutory and ACAS guidance, the process for flexible job design begins in the autumn term of an academic year with an invitation to colleagues interested in working flexibly for the following year to complete the application form following a one-to-one conversation with their line manager or the HR Manager.

Staffing requirements are confirmed following student options choices by April, the timetable is completed and flexible working request outcomes granted, where possible, in July.

Case Studies

Cover Manager Role:

This role was originally held by a full-time support staff member. When she was promoted into another support staff position, two long-standing members of the Cover Team requested a trial job-share. This has been very successful, with one employee holding this responsibility on Monday-Wednesday, and her colleague holding this responsibility on Thursday and Friday.

Both employees are former teachers at Wycombe High School, they are valued skilled members of staff, and the job-share suggestion has now been made permanent.



Team Leader, Student Support

This role is held by a support staff employee who is contracted to work the equivalent hours of four days, but these are physically worked over three days per week.

This compressed work pattern is one which is new to the school, but our flexible working strategy is underpinned by five pillars (page 9), one of which is *'the presumption that a flexible working arrangement can work unless there is a genuine business or operational reason why it cannot'*.



Subject Leader, Economics

This is one of six Subject Leader positions which is held by a part time member of teaching staff. The TLR for all part time Subject Leaders is paid in full, rather than part time. We believe, as they still have overall responsibility for their department irrespective of the hours or days they are onsite, that they should receive the total TLR in full.

We have also been able to accommodate this member of staff's request for flexibility over his working days by enabling him to take his PPA's offsite if they are at the beginning or end of the working day.

Unlocking the barriers to flexible working

The following should be read in conjunction with Timewise's Building Flexibility into Secondary Schools.



There are several barriers or perceived barriers to flexible working. Wycombe High School is unable to grant every flexible working request. Our structure for flexible job design will ensure that parameters are shared transparently and openly, individuals are able to have frank and open discussions about their particular circumstances, and the implications for individuals, teams and the school/ organisation are considered collectively. This is a two-way process, and all flexible working requests will be considered individually and as part of the 'bigger picture', on an annual basis and over the longer term.

NOTE: Our flexible job design process sits separate from but alongside employees' statutory entitlement to make a flexible working request at any time. We continue to accept formal applications in line with statutory and ACAS guidance.

Any individual involved in making decisions about flexible working or enacting any flexible working requirements (e.g. timetabler) will have training that unpicks the barriers or perceived barriers to flexible working.

Structural barriers

One structural barrier is **timetabling, staff-student ratios and cover**. Through the flexible job design process, we will ensure that consideration has been given to all posts to provide transparency around where flexibility can be provided and where it cannot (e.g. attendance at staff training and CPD). We will also ensure that all timetablers have been trained and supported as required. In terms of **budget**, we will recognise that where there may be an additional budgetary expense, this is often offset by the cost of recruiting and training up replacement staff. The other barrier that we will address relates to **workload and the intensity of the school day**. We will ensure that the workload of a part-time member of staff reflects their part-time status (e.g. 0.8 teacher has 0.8 timetable). We have a special arrangement in place to drive equality where part-time middle leaders fulfil the part-time role of the teacher and full-time of the middle leader. Where this is the case, the teacher salary will be adjusted and the full TLR Allowance paid. This is an option available to middle leaders. We will also ensure that there is a full complement of senior leader hours if a senior leader is part-time and ensure that there is clarity around directed time for all part-time colleagues.

Cultural and attitudinal barriers

Research suggests that some school leaders worry about '**opening the flood gates**' and that they are worried about allocating flexible working **fairly**. To combat these attitudinal barriers, we will ensure that all executive and senior leaders have been trained thoroughly on the principles and processes of our flexible working strategy and be transparent throughout the flexible job design process communicating clearly with all colleagues at each stage of the process. We will ensure that all colleagues are clear that this is a two-way process and that any flexible working requests will be considered on an annual basis and over the longer term, recognising that not all flexible working requests can be approved each year but that the best efforts will be made to do so.

Studies have also shown that some leaders see childcare as the only **valid reason** for granting flexible working. At Wycombe High School, we will consider all reasons for an individual wanting flexible working, including supporting their mental health, personal development or pursuing hobbies and interests.

Another attitudinal barrier to flexible working, expressed by both leaders and teachers, is the **perceived impact on students**. Union guidance on job shares indicates: 'There is no evidence that splitting responsibility for classes in any way affects pupils' education. Ofsted concluded in a 1994 research report that the quality of work of part time teachers, including job sharers, was "significantly above the national average". In its reports on individual schools Ofsted has commented favourably on the benefits of job share arrangements, including the quality of educational provision and the good progress made by pupils taught by job sharers. In addition, employment tribunals have rejected any assumption that job sharing has an adverse effect on education.' In responding to a flexible working request, this process will ensure that the following is considered:

- Practical implications for the role;
- Practical implications for managing the post;
- Practical implications for the team;
- Benefits;
- Financial implications.

In addition, training materials and support will be provided to support flexible working.

Benefits and practicalities

Flexible working has many benefits. For flexible working to be successful, clarity, quality communication and high levels of organisation are essential. It requires all concerned to adopt a solutions-focused mind-set and to be equally committed to this as a reciprocal process. The following prompts will be used to ensure that flexible working works successfully for the individual, team, school and organisation.

Benefits:

- What are the benefits of any proposed flexible working arrangement for:
 - the individual;
 - the team;
 - the line manager;
 - the school.
- Are there advantages that offset any disadvantages the proposed flexible working arrangement may create?

Practical implications for the role:

- Is the workload achievable within the new arrangement?
- Can the work be done in the pattern of work requested?
- If a teacher, what can be done to make the timetabling work?

- What is the impact on wider workload, e.g. duties?
- What flexibility can be built in to respond if work commitments change, sometimes at short notice, or for meetings?
- Are there any considerations for home working?

Practical implications for managing the post:

- How will performance and output be managed?
- What agreement is needed as to contact and responses, e.g. when homeworking?

Practical implications for the team:

- What will be the impact on the workload of other colleagues and the team?
- What is the current working patterns of other team members?

Financial implications:

- What are the financial implications for the individual and the school / organisation?
- Are there any additional costs that might be generated?

The 5 Pillars Underpinning The Flexible Working Strategy

1. **Presumption it can work...**

unless there is a genuine operational or business reason why it cannot.

2. **Maintain a balance...**

we need to balance staff requests with the needs of the school.

3. **A separate initiative...**

flexible working is separate from initiatives to reduce workload.

4. **Open to all...**

there is no need to give a reason for applying for flexible working.

5. **Based on trust...**

the process is transparent, fair, robust and is based on mutual trust.

Principles underpinning our strategy

This strategy is founded on the following principles:

1. There is a **presumption that flexible working can work unless there is a genuine operational or business reason why it could not**. We will look for creative solutions to achieve the best possible approach for both the colleague and the school.

2. We aim to **provide transparency on the process and decision-making** and will ensure that systems are in place to ensure that the process is **fair, robust and balanced**. Alongside supporting individuals to work flexibly, a **balance needs to be maintained** to ensure that the needs of students, the team and the school can still be met and high standards preserved.

3. Our **aim to provide greater flexibility is separate from other initiatives which aim to remove unnecessary workload**. No colleague should be deciding to work flexibly because of unnecessary workload demands. We will support colleagues to work full-time or part-time and achieve work-life balance.

4. Our strategy supports **flexible progress for all** and is built on the principle that **all reasons for requesting flexible working are equitable** including to pursue hobbies or interests. Therefore, no reason needs to be given by the individual member of staff requesting flexible working.

5. The implementation of this strategy is a 'two-way street' and is **built on the principle of trust** from the leaders in employees and trust from employees to the leaders. Through this work, we aim to provide a range of flexible working opportunities that colleagues can choose from to best meet their individual needs – whilst colleagues may make requests, not all will be able to be fulfilled and, therefore, this strategy needs to be predicated on mutual trust.

How to apply

Our flexible job design process sits alongside but is separate from employees' statutory entitlement to make a flexible working request at any time. They are two separate processes, and the following should be read and understood by any employee considering flexible working to identify which approach is most applicable to their individual circumstances and need.

Statutory requests for flexible working	WHS Flexible Job Design process
<p>At Wycombe High School, all employees have a day-one right to make one formal flexible working request twice in any 12-month period. We, your employer, must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • look at your request fairly following the ACAS Code of Practice on flexible working; • decide within two months. <p>If your request is approved, this will change the terms of your employment contract.</p> <p>We will put into writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the agreed change; • when the change will start; • how long the change will last, if for a fixed period; • a review date, if the change will be looked at to see how it's going. <p>If the change affects anything that must legally be in your employment contract, we must put it in writing. We must do this within a month of the change taking effect.</p> <p>This includes changes to your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working hours • pay • job location • holiday entitlement <p>Any permanent change to your employment contract is legally binding on yourself and us, your employer.</p> <p>We would encourage a two-way dialogue before any formal request is made so that an open discussion can be had between the employee and manager as to what will work in practice. This will encourage compromise and negotiation which is much easier to achieve in a face-to-face conversation rather than through form filling.</p> <p>We recognise that the absence of these conversations can limit honesty, an open dialogue and negotiation that can lead to rejected requests and a perception that the school is not supportive.</p> <p><i>Typically (though not in all cases), a statutory request would be made in terms of <u>'how much'</u> an individual works (part-time, job share, phased retirement).</i></p>	<p>In seeking to provide flexibility for all staff, Wycombe High School offers a flexible job design process. Any colleague is entitled to make an informal flexible request via this process.</p> <p>If your request is approved, this will entail a <u>temporary</u> variation on the terms of your contract for the academic year as stated in your application. This would be binding on you and us, with both parties adhering to the agreed conditions for that year.</p> <p>We will put into writing: the agreed change; when the change will start and end.</p> <p><i>Typically, a flexible job design request would be made in relation to <u>'where'</u> and <u>'when'</u> an individual works.</i></p> <p><u>Timeline for the Flexible Job Design process:</u> The process for flexible job design begins in the autumn term of an academic year. Staffing requirements for the school are confirmed following the student options choices by April. The timetable is then completed and flexible working request outcomes granted, where possible, in July at the latest.</p> <p>A flexible job design request can be completed and submitted at any point between September 1 and the end of the February half term break.</p>

In addition, Wycombe High School recognises that there may be situations in which an employee may request a temporary flexible working arrangement, for example, to care for a sick loved one. In these circumstances, the HR Manager and/or Headteacher will meet with the individual to determine whether this will be treated as a statutory request or as part of the flexible job design process. The same principles apply as above. These requests will be taken very seriously, and every effort made to grant any such request.

[Click here for application form](#)

Frequently asked questions

happy to talk flexible working

Q: What impact will introducing Flexible Working have on teacher retention and recruitment?

A: Our vision for flexible working (page 2) outlines our motivations for introducing this strategy. In addition, a 2024 DfE survey of teaching staff has stated the following:

- 83% of teachers feel that flexible working supports with improving their work-life balance
- 72% believe flexible working promotes wellbeing
- 52% of teachers associate flexible working with supporting staff retention
- 56% of teachers are more likely to apply for roles at schools that are open to flexible working

We anticipate that this would also be true for support/non-teaching colleagues.

Q: Do I have to give a reason for my flexible working request?

A: No. The process of applying for flexible working is open to all, and no reason needs to be given for the request.

Q: What if everyone in my department asks for flexible working?

A: We need to maintain a balance between staff requests and the needs of the students, the department and the whole school. The process will be fair and transparent and, if we have been unable to accommodate your request, then we will consider it next year.

Q: Are you offering flexible working to staff to reduce their workload?

A: No, the flexible working strategy is separate from other initiatives which aim to reduce unnecessary workload.

Q: Won't flexible working have a detrimental impact on students' learning and outcomes?

A: On the contrary. We believe, and research has shown, that by investing in the personal and professional development of staff by allowing more flexibility in the workplace staff are happier and more professionally fulfilled.

As a first-choice employer, we also believe that the offer to work flexibly will support the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff and offer development opportunities which lead to greater productivity and engagement.

Q: Once my flexible working request has been approved, is it permanent?

A: No, all flexible job design requests will be reviewed on an annual basis, to make it a fair process to all.

Q: What if I already work part-time and want the same working days in the future?

A: We will work on the assumption that part-time working days will remain the same in future years unless a colleague submits a request to change their working days via the statutory flexible working process or the flexible job design process.

Where a continuation of the same working day pattern presents a timetabling challenge, we may approach colleagues to discuss their flexibility.

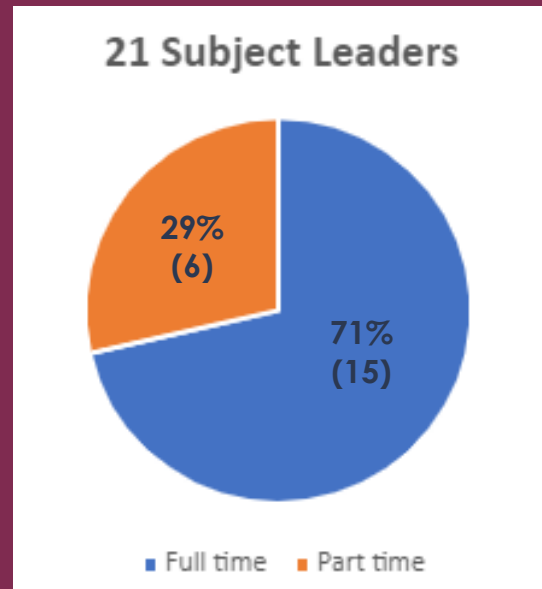
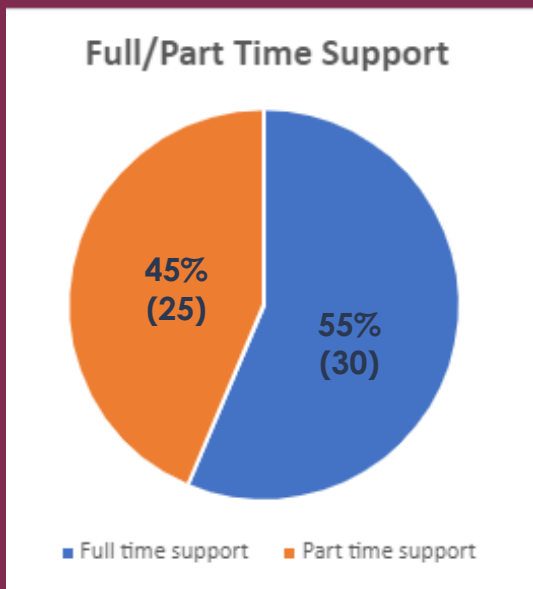
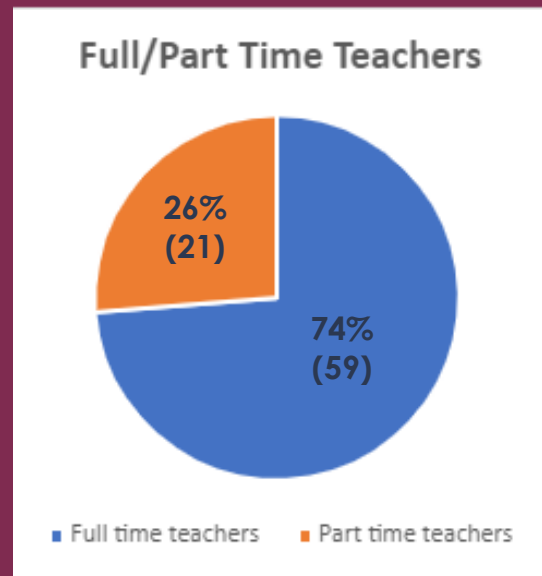
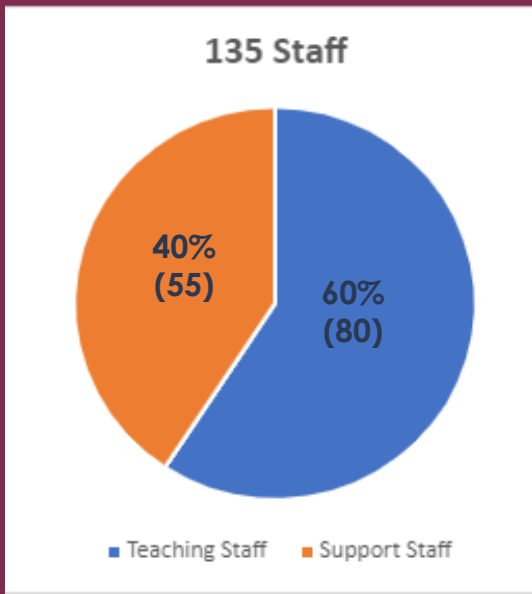
Q: What is the process to follow if I wish to submit a flexible working request?

A: The request form is at the bottom of page 11. There will be a window of opportunity each academic year, to request flexible working for the following academic year. The dates are detailed in the table on page 11.

WHS – Leading the way in flexible working

At Wycombe High School we understand the importance of a work/life balance and celebrate the diversity within our workforce. We are proud to be able to offer flexible working conditions to many of our employees, whether it be part time working, job share opportunities or co-leadership responsibilities.

In 2024/2025:



For statistical purposes, we have included all support staff who work full time hours over 39+ weeks per year as full time. 10 support staff (18%) are employed on full-time 52-week contracts.

Employee benefits at WHS



Working In Partnership With Mind

Working alongside Mind (the mental health charity), we are consecutive Gold Award Winners as an employer who has: 'successfully embedded mental health into their policies and practices.'



Disability Confident Committed Employer

A guaranteed interview for applicants who meet the minimum shortlisting criteria.



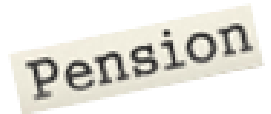
Employee Assistant Programme

This is a free, independent, confidential service for staff, their partners and dependents up to the age of 21, giving 24/7 access to counselling, legal, medical and financial advice and support.



Extremely Generous Employer Pension Contributions

All staff are auto-enrolled in the Teachers' Pension Scheme, or Local Government Pension Scheme, depending on the type of contract they hold.



MHFA England

Mental Health First Aiders

We currently have four trained members of staff who are available to offer support and guidance to employees who need it.



Domestic Abuse Champion

A fully trained member of staff is available onsite, signposting to specialist services or organisations.



Onsite Car Parking and Cycle Scheme

Car park facilities are onsite, available to all staff at no cost.

A tax-free benefit available to all staff to purchase a new cycle or e-bike via salary sacrifice.

AT WYCOMBE
HIGH SCHOOL

WE LOOK

BEYOND

We look beyond the
traditional grammar school.

We look beyond league tables
and examination results.

We look beyond stereotypes
and conventions.

We look beyond a world
where futures are fixed.



Wycombe High School, Marlow Road,
High Wycombe, Bucks HP11 1TB

01494 523961 • hr@whs.bucks.sch.uk • www.wycombehighschool.com

