St Margaret's is creating a flexible workplace, not just flexible working arrangements.

Flexibility to support diverse roles.

School

St Margaret's Anglican Girls School

Type

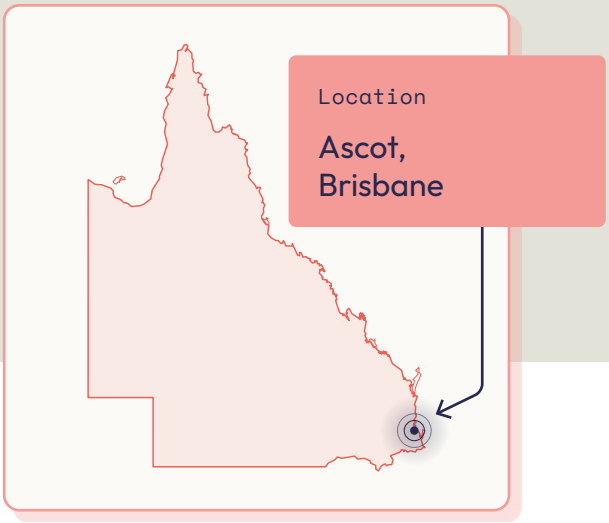
Pre-Prep–Year 12, Girls

Size

1,454

students





01. Context

What features of the school shaped the opportunity and constraints?

St Margaret's is an established Pre-Prep to Year 12 girls school of around 1,450 students, including boarders. Its size means it features a substantial teaching workforce (whose work is organised by timetables and tied to a classroom presence), and also a substantial workforce of other professional (e.g. Finance), operational (e.g. Facilities & Maintenance) and administrative roles.

Some business functions are shared with their sister school (St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School), adding a coordination consideration most single-site schools don't face. The teaching workforce also skews younger than many peer schools, creating higher-than-usual demand for parental leave.

02. Challenge or opportunity

Why did flexibility become relevant at this point?



Flexibility is not a new conversation at St Margaret's; the first formal Flexible Working Arrangements policy was written in 2013, making the school an early mover relative to many peers. The policy emerged because informal practices (e.g. part-time arrangements, job-share requests from staff returning from parental leave) already existed and needed more structure around them.

More recently, competitive pressure and expectation for flexibility in the employment market among some non-teaching roles (e.g. IT and Finance) have grown, creating a risk that these roles will be increasingly difficult to fill without access to more flexible work.

In this shifting landscape, leaders at St Margaret's identified that while there was a need for flexibility across the school, this need looked different by role, inside the school and in the market.

03. Design response

What flexible work arrangement or set of practices was considered or introduced?

Rather than one flexible-work policy, St Margaret's has layered several mechanisms for different roles.

For teaching staff, flexibility centres on **load and time** structure rather than location. Part-time teaching is long-standing and well supported, with teaching loads set by semester or year based on school need and individual preferences. The school also builds flexibility directly into full-time teaching loads, ensuring expectations of teaching responsibilities are kept below the industrial maximum for all teachers, and graduate teachers are granted three extra non-teaching periods a week in their first year, tapering to one extra period in year two. While this 'underloading' approach was established to provide junior teachers more time to prepare as they build capability, flexibility in how they spend a considerable portion of their week is a result.

Out-of-classroom obligations are also managed deliberately as part of the school's 'respecting time' framework which acknowledges the importance of sustainable workload to staff wellbeing. Assembly attendance for teachers is rostered and flexible: staff may attend once a term rather than every week. Similarly, exam supervision is outsourced to external invigilators so teachers retain more time for marking assessments. Leave is used flexibly too, through occasional sabbaticals, single long-service-leave days, or leave without pay for personal circumstances or pursuits.

For non-teaching staff, flexibility is built more around location and hours. Working from home was introduced post-COVID but remains limited to these functions, with no true 50/50 hybrid model in place anywhere. Compressed hours are common, allowing earlier starts to enable school pickups or similar personal commitments. Ad hoc, informal flexibility (e.g. swapping hours, adjusting a day on short notice) is also more readily available to this group than to teaching staff, since it isn't constrained by timetabled, student-facing obligations.



04. Implementation

How was it designed, communicated, governed and adapted?

The roll-out of change at St Margaret's has been iterative, rather than transformative. The 2013 policy was initially not widely published to account for the unknown factors involved in administering new arrangements (e.g. enabling leaders to test strategies to ensure workability).

To clarify this uncertainty and support consistent implementation, the school has created a set of resources to support leader decision-making, including an approval matrix which sets out what a leader can and can't approve in terms of working from home arrangements by role type, and which leaders hold sign-off authority for different kinds of requests.

"We've all got flexibility; it just doesn't look the same"

– Director of People & Culture

05. Impact

What changed, for whom, and what remains uncertain?

From the leader's perspective, the most notable shift to result from St Margaret's individualised approach to flexibility has been cultural rather than structural: leadership increasingly frames flexibility as something already present in many forms, rather than an entitlement some staff have and others don't. Consequently, St Margaret's is creating a *flexible workplace*, rather than *flexible work* in a traditional sense.

As in any large school, operational factors (e.g. tracking when shared-services staff are on or off campus) remain an ongoing consideration. Similarly, the distinction between which scenarios warrant a formal versus an ad hoc approach to flexibility is expected to require ongoing assessment.





06. Learnings

What should another school take from this case?

The St Margaret's approach is an example of the adage 'never let the perfect be the enemy of the good.' School leaders began to explore flexibility well before COVID brought a global spotlight to remote work, and since then practice has consistently preceded definition. If leaders had waited for the perfect definition of flexibility or the perfect circumstance to enact it, the school may not have achieved the progress it's made to date.

Second, this case demonstrates that *equitable access* to flexibility does not necessarily mean *identical access* to flexibility, and that thoughtful consideration of individual staff circumstances while always prioritising student needs can create positive outcomes.