

LEIGHTON PARK - MUSIC AND MEDIA CENTRE BUSINESS CASE

Current School

Leighton Park is an independent co-educational school for students aged from 11 – 18. It has both boarding and day students.

The current role of the school is 470 students made up as 148 boarders and 322 day students. The capacity of the school is 510 students of which 120 can be boarders. The school has been near to capacity in the past and this produces the optimum business model. However, in the last few years numbers have fluctuated with the trend being slightly downwards as potential students, who are serious about music and the arts, are lost to other schools with better facilities. The building of the music and media centre at Leighton Park is an important element of its business strategy which will assist in retaining students into the 6th Form as well as attracting sufficient students in general so as to provide the most appropriate educational and economic model. It is not intended to increase the total number of students above the capacity of 510.

Day students are referred to as day boarders as they are provided all meals and often stay into the evening so as to finish academic work and to enjoy the many activities that are provided by the school.

Background to Project

Foremost amongst those activities are the performing arts for which the school enjoys an excellent reputation in music, drama and, more recently, film. Alongside the regular school concerts, of which there are at least three per term, the school has always been ambitious in their selection of drama and musical productions with excellent performances of *Evita*, *Miss Saigon*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Crucible*, and *Our Country's Good*. These productions have never only been about showcasing the performing talents of the school but about providing opportunities for all our students, be that in performing, stage design, technical support or orchestral. This is reflected in the volume of students involved in each production, usually in the region of a third of the student population.

Leighton Park believes in making drama and music available to all members of the school community. In support of this approach last year the school was delighted to become a pioneering member of Yamaha's Music in Education Partner Programme. The Music in Education Partner Programme was created by Yamaha to help engage more people in music making and to support those who help others learn music - in whatever settings - to make it a life-enhancing experience for all concerned.

Music and drama have consistently been an academic strength of the school and also form, alongside film and animation, (as might be expected in the *alma mater* of Sir David Lean) a significant extra-curricular activity for all our students. We have now reached a stage where we have simply outgrown the current facilities and the limited facilities within form a constraint on both the academic and extra-curricular ambitions for our students.

The school wants to improve the provision for its performing arts and to combine the teaching of music and media into one centre for use by the school's students. This will allow the school to dispense with the current temporary building. The intention is to continue to further grow the performing arts in the school combined with the provision of modern facilities – it is not the intention to grow the school beyond its current student capacity nor to increase its commercial use for non-school events.

The Existing Theatre

The current theatre / main hall was built in the 1970s. It is used as a main hall for the school, provides facilities for some teaching of the performing arts, includes practice rooms for peripatetic instrument teaching, and also acts as a theatre for school productions. Unfortunately the building is lacking adequate foyer facilities (including toilets) which are substantially below the area-requirements for a modern facility, and this has a negative effect on both school and external productions. The project must therefore include enlarged and enhanced foyer facilities suitable for 250 people.

Disabled access to the theatre is also poor and does not meet current standards. The brief therefore requires that disabled access is provided to the new facility and to the main entrance to the theatre. The preference is that this is provided internally rather than through extensive external ramps.

New Building and its Setting

The school takes great pride in the appearance of the estate and its cultural and heritage setting. It is our view however that the existing theatre was poorly located (immediately in front of Old School) and that its style is unsympathetic of the adjacent buildings. Consideration was given to the demolition and re-provision of the hall, but this would be prohibitively expensive.

The synergy between the different performing arts disciplines can only be provided if they can be based in one centre. There is no existing building on the site, which would combine co-location with modern appropriate spaces in which to accommodate changing teaching standards for music and film production. The school therefore seeks to build a new music and media centre which will enlarge the existing foyer and provide a single entrance to a combined facility. It is therefore expected that the new building will be joined to the front or side of the existing theatre building.

Landscaping

In addition to providing new and improved facilities, the school are keen to respect and enhance the parkland style landscaping on the site, and improve the setting of Old School (the listed building) and the attached buildings which form the teaching and administrative centrepiece of the school. These areas have become dominated by cars, parking, access and deliveries to the detriment of the creation of pleasant pedestrian-focussed areas. The design brief therefore included a requirement to 'screen' the existing theatre through the provision of a new foyer and to improve the hard landscaping between the theatre and Old School. It is recognised that this would be closer to the historic buildings, but that the

benefits would be significant. It also set out to respect the open nature of Grove Field and the woodland outlook – particularly the tree belt along the western boundary with Shinfield Road.