

Weydon Multi Academy Trust (WMAT)

WMAT is a local Multi Academy Trust operating in the Farnham area. It consists of 3300 students at 3 secondary schools (Weydon, Farnham Heath End, Woolmer Hill) and 3 Special Schools (The Ridgeway, Abbey School, the Park School)

The case study involves predominantly Weydon School but some of the principles established will be used at our other schools as they progressively develop their facilities.

Development of community sports and arts facilities at Weydon School ,Farnham, Surrey

Background

Weydon School is an outstanding non- selective state comprehensive school in Farnham. The current roll is 1600 and this has increased from 1200 in 2013. In 2019 it achieved the status as the top school in England in the 11 to16 age group.

In 2013 Surrey CC provided capital as part of a basic need requirement to increase the size of the school from 1200 to 1600 students.

As part of this development the school led by Head John Winter, convinced Surrey CC that in addition to additional classrooms it needed to invest in sports, arts and drama facilities and that this should also be available for both the school and the community.

The case regarding additional sports facilities was especially strong since some of the classroom development was to be built on existing school sports field and tennis courts so Sport England guidelines were relevant.

In addition, drama and the arts were also fundamental parts of the school curriculum.

The school was grateful that Surrey CC took a wider view on the role of sport and the arts in the education of the students at Weydon.

As such part of the development funding contained an allowance for additional facilities to which the school itself added a further £300k from its own funds.

The project

As the school was losing effective 'green' sports fields the school decided that it would build 2 full size enclosed all weather pitches, 6 netball / tennis courts, a fully equipped fitness suite, upgrade the cricket pitches and floodlight all the external facilities.

The provision of the all-weather pitches meant that the new space would have a much higher utilisation rate than the original grass pitches and met all space / student ratio requirements.

The end position was that the school would have sports facilities which were on par or even better than any school in the country, either state or private.

Visiting teams now cannot believe what are truly fantastic and high specification facilities in a state school.

The school also built a multi- purpose drama hall which can be converted into a 308-seat theatre in 5 minutes by movable seating plus an art and display studio.

School and Community use.

Over the years Weydon school to some extent bucked the current trend and always placed a big significance on sport and drama within the school. It saw it as a key element in the provision of widely based education for the students.

The completion of the all- weather facilities and fitness suite gave sport in the school a massive impetus since to a large extent the weather became an irrelevance since sport could be played at all times. In addition, the floodlights allowed matches to be played throughout the winter avoiding the usual shut down.

A wide spectrum of clubs opened in the school which utilised the sports centre...gym, fitness, archery, holiday camps and a whole range of often neglected sports. Staff were also keen on using the newly extended facilities to improve their own fitness.

Prior to completion the school developed the planned usage for the community. The opportunity was to both create a new high -quality resource for local clubs but also provide a revenue stream that would flow into the school. The commercial development required the school to develop new skills that were outside the normal concept of 'lettings.'

The Head set a target KPI of full use of the pitches during both summer and winter. Whereas it is easy to let a football pitch on Tuesdays to Thursdays for 20 weeks in the winter the elimination of 'fallow' periods still remains a challenge.

These new skills needed to encompass such aspects as cleaning, revenue control, planning of commercial use alongside the school use ensuring that the commercial activity was not at the expense of school usage.

Another key element was the whole question of public liability insurance and contract negotiation with a multiplicity of local sports clubs.

After a short period Weydon decided to set up a separate company (WESS) to manage the commercial activities of all the sports park and other school facilities.

This has two strands.... the pitch hire which is reasonably straight forward. For the use of the other facilities a different route was chosen. It was realised that the skills in dealing with a large range of local clubs from pilates to quidditch was complex. WESS decided that it would essentially contract out the gym, fitness suite etc to a company or individual and leave them to collect money, provide insurance, membership, marketing etc. This meant that although potential revenue was not maximised it is a more simple process for the school to manage. This model continues to work well.

WESS also has the ability to 'buy' time from the school and it is now entering the next phase of development which will encompass use of the total school and staff. This will allow for example a summer camp to provide sporting activities but combine these with art, language drama and many other subjects. This will allow even more community access to the school facilities.

WESS will be the vehicle that we will use at all our WMAT schools. The separation of the individual school and the commercial activities has worked well.

Summary

The Weydon project is an example of both school and community benefitting from something which was essentially a need to increase the student numbers at Weydon.

The vision of the Head, John Winter, was twofold- firstly a commitment to students which saw sport and arts as a fundamental part in providing an outstanding education and secondly that school facilities were also a fundamental resource available for the community.

It is fair to say that the evenings at Weydon are as busy with community use as it is during the day with the students. The school is now determined that the other school facilities are more widely used by the community.

There is a win-win here.... the taxpayers gain more benefit from the investment in schools and the revenue generated by these activities are ploughed back into the community.

