

## **Renovation of Trafalgar Castle School's Grace Chapel**

The idea to renovate Grace Chapel came out of the **Master Site Planning Process** that the School undertook in the Spring of 2018. An invitation to participate in the planning went out to all members of the Trafalgar Castle community, and a series of 5 meetings were held from April to June. At these meetings, referred to as *charrettes*, architect Tye Farrow worked with a volunteer committee made up of students, alumnae, parents, board members, staff and faculty to identify current and future needs, and create a forward-looking vision for the School.

The Master Site Plan was presented to the Trafalgar Castle School community on October 3, 2018. It is an aspirational plan that creates a direction for the future development of facilities and provides a strategic direction for many years to come.

In addition to envisioning new facilities for the school, such as a performing arts space and a fitness facility, the plan also identifies ways to cost-effectively maximize and repurpose existing spaces in order to meet current needs.

During the charrette process, the committee identified the pressing need for a multi-purpose space for larger groups to meet. In reviewing the existing spaces in the Castle, a question was posed: Can we make better use of the Chapel? The Chapel is in need of renovation, so the prospect of breathing new life into this underutilized space offered promise.

### **How do Trafalgar students come together in 2018?**

Student assemblies take place in the Chapel every Monday (for 15 minutes) and Thursday (for 30 minutes).

On Tuesdays, the whole school participates in Power Hour. This 60-minute block provides time for students to hear guest speakers, attend workshops that focus on study skills, mental wellness or other relevant topics, hold House meetings, or participate in special activities. During this same time, teachers spend 60 minutes on professional development, alternating between instructional training, workshops and shared or individual planning time. On the second Tuesday of each month, an Active Power Hour takes place, and the entire school (students and faculty) participates in physical activity (e.g., Zumba, yoga, Tai Chi, swimming, CrossFit, etc.).

On Wednesdays and Fridays, instead of a whole-school assembly, students meet in Advisor groups. In grades 7 and 8, the Advisor is the Home Room teacher. In grades 9 to 12, the Advisor is a teacher assigned to a mixed-grade group of students (grades 9 through 12), and the same Advisor follows the girls through their years at the Castle. Advisor is an important part of ensuring that no girl falls through the cracks, and that every girl feels known.

## **How is the Chapel currently used?**

Student assemblies takes place in the Chapel on Monday and Thursday mornings. Faculty are asked to attend assembly with students and are seated in the section of rows closest to the interior doors. With 227 students and an average of 20 faculty in attendance for assemblies, the space is currently at maximum capacity. (When the student population was 240, a very small handful of teachers attended chapel).

Guest speakers and student meetings also take place in the Chapel, but the space is not conducive to group discussion or collaboration. When parent events are held in the Chapel (e.g., speaker evenings, university information night), the space is often less than half full and does not convey that sense of warmth and community that we value at the Castle. With fixed pews, the space cannot be configured to improve the experience of participants.

## **Why was the Resource Centre renovated? Wasn't that space needed?**

In September of 2018, the School introduced Grade 4. This coincided with the introduction of a new Collaborative Classroom<sup>1</sup> program for grades 4, 5 and 6 that mandated a new learning space, one that was more suitable to the instructional and social-emotional needs of younger students. By renovating the Resource Centre, the School was able to create a self-contained Lower School space that includes three classrooms, a grade 4 reading area, an office for the Lower School Program and Instructional Coach, and a central area for multi-grade collaborative teaching. Direct access to downstairs washrooms and a new locker area (located beside the pool) further improve safety for our youngest ones.

In order to accommodate the creation of the Grade 4/5/6 locker area, the fitness equipment was relocated to a temporary portable situated on the field to the east of the gym. The fitness equipment needed to be relocated regardless of the new locker room space as the moisture and humidity from the pool was causing the machinery to rust. In addition, having students undertake strenuous and sustained cardio exercise so close to the chemical fumes from the pool was determined to be unhealthy.

The new Lower School spaces are beautiful, functional and enhance the girls' learning. Feedback from the parent community has been exceptionally positive, and admissions reports that, as we showcase the new space, interest in our lower grades is growing.

The previous grade 5 and 6 classrooms (located under the Chapel) are now used as much needed additional classroom space, alleviating course conflicts, particularly for grade 11 and 12 students, as we now have greater room flexibility for scheduling courses.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.trafalgarcastle.ca/academics-program/lower-school-grade-4-to-8/the-collaborative-classroom/>

## **What space constraints does the School presently face?**

The School does not have a suitable space for Power Hour workshops and full-grade meetings, times when we often want to engage the students in active participation, group discussion, team building exercises and movement.

There is presently no large collaborative space suitable for teacher professional development workshops, monthly staff meetings, Parents' Guild meetings and board meetings.

## **Why change the space?**

The Chapel is no longer used as a place of worship but remains an important part of strengthening community and sisterhood. We want to retain the beauty and the history of the space while allowing for the types of multi-purpose use that will enhance the learning of today's students and meet the present needs of our community.

The removal of pews is something that many faith communities are electing to do out of both necessity (i.e., the cost of replacement is prohibitive) and a recognition that community building in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves active engagement, participation and a sense of inclusion. In our research on the renovation of worship spaces, it was found that the preservation of key historic elements can support a sense of tradition and history, while the reconfiguration of spaces meets the increasingly diverse needs of communities.

Below are a few examples of spaces that have evolved from traditional churches or chapels to become flexible worship and community spaces.



Opened for worship in May 1930, the building was erected as a typical Methodist Church of the day, but with the pews replaced in recent years with chairs and carpet laid, there is an open and welcoming atmosphere which lends itself to alternative styles of use.



### **What is the current condition of the Chapel?**

The pews and carpet are currently in need of replacement. The cost of this, however, is very significant. The School needs to replace the lights with energy efficient fixtures and motion sensors to provide better lighting and conserve electricity.

### **What is the proposal to renovate the Chapel?**

The proposed renovations include:

- Removal of the pews
- Removal of the carpet
- Opening up the space to accommodate larger groups
- Repairing and refinishing the hardwood floors
- Replacing or altering the balcony railing to bring it up to code
- Replacement of the overhead lighting
- Building of storage for tables and chairs that could be used as required
- Installing a new presentation screen and data projector

These renovations would allow the space to be configured and used in a variety of ways. Chairs can be used for assemblies, presentations, ceremonies, services, Parents' Guild

meetings and speaker events. As an open space, the Chapel can be used for student activities or community receptions. Setting up round tables and chairs allows for workshops, discussion groups, collaborative activities, and staff meetings. Setting up a conference table makes the space functional for board meetings. By temporarily bringing in desks and chairs, the space will provide a much-needed quiet area for math competitions and year-end exams.

The following rendering<sup>2</sup> shows a workshop configuration with tables and chairs:



### How would the space be used?

- Student assemblies
- Community gatherings (e.g., Carol Service, graduation ceremony, Prefect Installation)
- Speaker events
- Student workshops and gatherings
- Rehearsal space for dance, drama, vocal music
- Community receptions
- Open House presentations
- Board meetings
- Parent Guild meetings
- Staff and Faculty meetings
- Faculty professional development sessions

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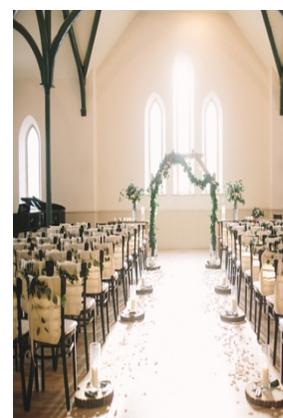
<sup>2</sup> Actual space would have hardwood flooring.

## What about weddings?

A renovated space could be beautifully arranged for weddings. Chairs offer greater seating flexibility, and can provide a more intimate feeling, particularly for smaller weddings.

The use of the Chapel and the dining hall for weddings and receptions would always be available to alumnae. The School, however, is undertaking a review of public use of the Chapel and dining hall as the revenues generated are modest in relation to the cost and added work these events place on staff, in addition to the general wear on facilities.

The following show how open spaces can be arranged to create intimate and personalized wedding settings.



### **What are the next steps?**

The School and Board of Directors are currently working on a new Strategic Plan for 2019-2024. Part of the strategic planning process involves a review of the master site plan, a current facilities audit and an assessment of space requirements and solutions. The Strategic Plan will identify priorities for the School, keeping in mind the resources available to support key future initiatives.

In all it does, Trafalgar Castle School strives to honour its glorious past while preparing today's students for the future.