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One of Melbourne's biggest private schools is about to get bigger



Bridie Smith

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Private school giant Caulfield Grammar will add a second junior campus to its portfolio after a high-profile merger with struggling all-girls school Shelford Girls' Grammar.

The Anglican schools [merged last year](#) under a deal in which co-educational Caulfield Grammar took on Shelford's multimillion-dollar liabilities and assets – including the heritage-listed Helenslea, a former mansion built in 1863.



Caulfield Grammar principal Ashleigh Martin on the grounds of the new Shelford campus. JASON SOUTH

On Tuesday, Caulfield Grammar will announce that its newly acquired Shelford campus will open to grades 4 to 6 students in 2027 and later expand to include students down to prep.

There are about 3800 students across Caulfield Grammar's three campuses – Caulfield with students in years 7 to 12, Wheelers Hill with prep through to year 12, and a junior campus at Malvern for students up to year 6. The Shelford campus would accommodate an additional 200 students by 2028.

Principal Ashleigh Martin said acquiring Shelford, which is located less than a kilometre from the Caulfield campus, was not about generating revenue but providing a primary campus near its secondary campus to ease students' transition to year 7 and for the school to be accessible to families in the nearby suburbs.

Martin said the arrival of Shelford as a second "feeder campus" would not change the size of the year 7 cohort starting at Caulfield each year, which would remain about 270.



Shelford's class of 2024 was the last to graduate from the 126-year-old all-girls school before it merged with Caulfield Grammar.

Caulfield Grammar has undertaken to retain Shelford's house names and colours and keep portraits of past principals at Helenslea, which will also host alumni events. The memorabilia collection will join Caulfield Grammar's collection.

Like Shelford, Caulfield Grammar will rent a sports oval and tennis courts from nearby Oaktree Anglican Church, St Mary's.

The Shelford campus will offer an innovation and learning hub for students in out-of-hours programs that include robotics and AI, technology in sport and cooking classes.

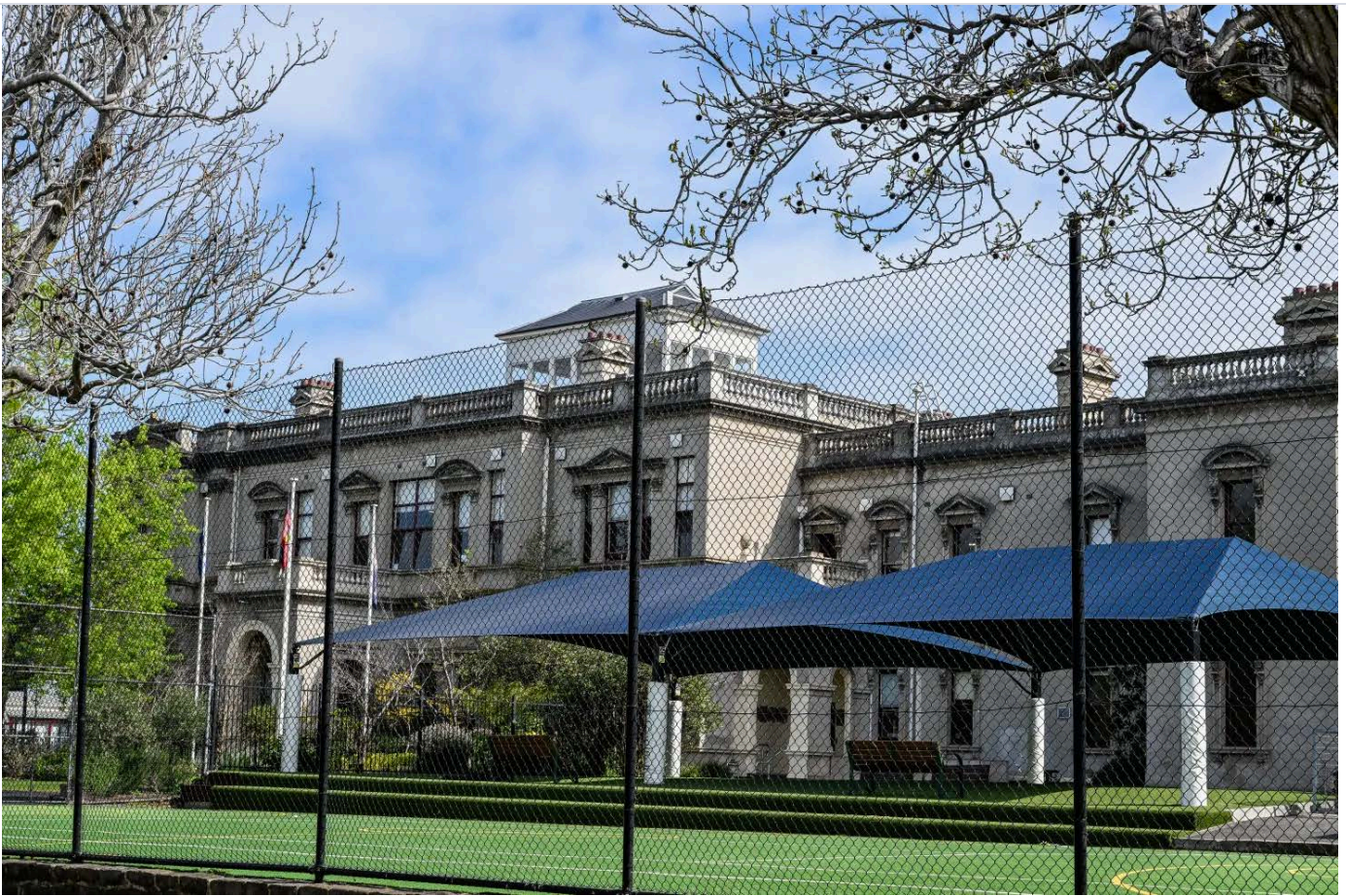
"It's where the independent school sector is moving," Martin said. "It's a 7am-7pm proposition, and we need to be utilising our assets and opportunities because parents are thinking carefully about where they send their children."

Staff from all campuses will be able to do professional training at the hub, including working with industry partners.

Martin said competition between schools to attract and retain teachers was fierce, so enabling staff to extend their training away from the classroom might give the school an edge.

"The sector is in a little bit of crisis in terms of teaching, so I think we have to stay an employer of choice," he said.

Martin said while he was confident there was a demand for places, he was aware the 144-year-old school was not immune from the cost-of-living pressures felt by prospective families.



Caulfield Grammar is one of Melbourne's biggest private schools. JOE ARMAO

“We have to be very conscious of the headwinds that are coming our way ... and even just from the operating costs of schools because there's going to be a pretty public and aggressive [enterprise bargaining agreement],” Martin said.

In the years leading up to the merger, Shelford was in an increasingly perilous position. Its 2023 directors' report, lodged with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, revealed the high-fee girls' school recorded a deficit of more than \$792,800 in 2023 – its third consecutive year in the red. Total liabilities were listed at almost \$5 million. The 126-year-old school attributed the merger to declining enrolments and an “increasingly competitive landscape of girls' only schooling in Victoria”.

Enrolments were in freefall after reaching 526 in 2018. By the time the school closed last year, there were just 207 students.

Shelford went through a major restructure in 2020, in which 30 staff were made redundant, including 17 at the early learning centre. Ten resigned for personal reasons.

Caulfield Grammar was approached by Shelford's board in late 2023. [Persistent rumours of a merger](#) were confirmed in November, with the class of 2024 becoming the final cohort to graduate from the school.

Before it closed, Shelford's year 12 fees were about \$37,000. This year, Caulfield Grammar will charge \$42,822 for year 12. Few of the bursaries and fee discounts offered to Shelford students were retained.

Martin said about 140 Shelford students and 14 staff transferred to Caulfield Grammar.

Mark Wizel, of property advisory firm Advise Transact, said the 9350 square metre parcel of land, would, if subdivided, be worth about \$25 million in the current market.

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