



# Greater Shepparton Secondary College



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**Many schools, particularly those in regional areas, suffer from not providing the standard of facilities and amenities found in the city. So, to address this concern, the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) has started the process of amalgamating smaller schools, often lacking in these amenities, creating larger and more sophisticated school campuses.**

This approach is certainly born out with the new Greater Shepparton Secondary College. With a strong Koorie community of approximately 12 per cent (as opposed to the Australia-wide 3 per cent), the focus from the outset was to build a community, not simply for secondary school students for years 7 to 12, but also for their families and the wider community.

Amalgamating four schools in the Shepparton region, with one being across the Goulburn River at Mooroopna, this new larger school, designed by Gray Puksand working with landscape architects, Tract Consultants, established an important model of the type of schooling that will be delivered by the VSBA, going forward. With extensive briefing, workshops with the various stakeholders and leaders of the Koorie community, the Greater Shepparton Secondary School is now home to 2,300 students. For architects Stephen Turner, Gray Puksand's National Managing Partner, Mark Freeman, the practice's Education Sector Leader and their team, it was a great opportunity to masterplan an entire campus rather than simply adding to a series of former buildings, in this instance from the 1960s and '70s, that

were well-past their use-by date. Apart from the red brick schoolhouse important to the heritage and history of Shepparton built in the early 20th century, every other building is new, purpose built to an exacting brief. "It's the largest school of this type in Victoria," says Turner, who was also at the helm of creating a vertical school model for Prahran High School rather than, as traditionally conceived, low-rise detached buildings that literally 'swallow up' an entire land holding.

With many students at the Greater Shepparton Secondary College coming from smaller schools, with anywhere between 150 and 300 students, the idea of attending such a large school would be daunting, particularly for some of the Koorie students. "My role was to provide a cultural lens across this project, from the teaching programs to creating spaces that felt safe both inside and outside of the classrooms," says Larissa Falla, Senior Koorie Education Advisor for Shepparton Education Plan in the Goulburn/North East Victoria Region for the Department of Education and Training. Falla worked closely with the 250 or so Koorie students, as well Koorie educators and the broader Koorie community.



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To create a level of intimacy in what's a large school, Gray Puksand designed what it refers to as a 'neighbourhood' of buildings on the triangular-shape site, mitigating the residential areas on one side and light industrial areas on the other side of the railway line.

Each of the three 'houses' combining three classroom and studio wings that intersect the 'knuckle', a STEM hub, are separated from the other two houses by generous courtyards, vegetable gardens and play areas for the children. However, rather than having to traverse the entire campus to study the STEM subjects on offer (from food technology and science) or drama and the arts, each student is allocated to one house.

And as with a traditional detached house, with a pitched roof and a clearly visible front door, the houses on this school campus feature distinctive pitched steel roofs, generous cantilevered awnings for sun and weather protection, along with large extruded openings that clearly reference a front door.

Oversized louvred glass windows ensure continuous cross ventilation and the irregular shape and positioning of windows loosely references some of the old heritage industrial buildings that still remain in Shepparton and the surrounding region. Gray Puksand also took its concrete and steel design cue from the regions many industrial buildings.



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While previously students, teachers and families moved past the gatehouse and period-style gates, a remnant of a colonial past (the gatehouse is now used for a number of uses, including administration), the main entry point to the campus has been shifted to Hawdon Street.

And unlike the past, the cluster arrangement is more akin to a village atmosphere, with roads, paths and garden areas for students to explore. The neighbourhood buildings are named in local Indigenous language after native trees, significant elements of ‘Country’.

“The neighbourhoods are seen as trees, the houses its branches, and the students, like the leaves, signifying growth,” says Falla, also pointing out the names of each house, after the local rivers in the region.

Other Koorie features include indigenous images on some of the glazing, along with the school’s ‘Yarning Circle’, a circle of rocks that double as seating where students, like their forefathers, can gather. And within each house are dedicated spaces for Koorie students and educators to gather.





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Neighbourhood Names





Cafes, libraries, classrooms, laboratories, IT, workshops and a broad offering of teaching areas allow for teaching practices that will enable students to move forward, whether they plan to go to TAFE, university, or seek a position in the region or further afield. "It was about developing a community, a sense of place, as much as providing the entire gamut of subjects offered at year 12, something that isn't offered anywhere else in the state," says Freeman who with his team, worked with Dr Ben Cleveland, an education specialist. Gray Puksand's design also includes amphitheatre-style teaching areas that can double as presentations areas, learning spaces or simply for students to gather and catch up.

Turner sees this design as being like a 'fractal', mimicking the growth of a cell that allows students to develop at their own pace, but with guidance at every step (including bringing in specialists from industry that create a link to their future). And unlike the traditional school arrangement with long and endless corridors, here there are unimpeded sight lines across the neighbourhoods, allowing for passive surveillance as much as a well-connected school community that fully responds to the changing needs of students.

For further information on Gray Puksand projects please visit our website: [www.graypuksand.com.au](http://www.graypuksand.com.au)



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