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architecture+
urban design

alfred felton hall

location balaclava road caulfield melbourne australia

status completed april 2005

client melbourne grammar school

photography john gollings

Founded in 1858, Melbourne Grammar School is one of the oldest denominational schools in Victoria. The School is located on two campuses, the Junior School at Grimwade House in Caulfield, and the Middle and Senior Schools in Domain Road South Yarra.

Grimwade House opened as a junior boys school in 1918 in the former grounds of 'Harleston'. Built by the Grimwade family in 1875, the original house and grounds still form the core of the current school some 80 years later. Grimwade House became co-educational in 1979 and today has 650 girls and boys attending from prep to year 6. The campus is located within an established residential area and is covered by heritage overlay controls.

A Master Plan was undertaken in 1999 that provided the framework for the future development of the Campus. Whilst the School has a stable population, there was a need to upgrade facilities to meet new educational demands. This Plan provided for a range of projects to be staged over several years, including pedestrianising the campus, new administration and classroom buildings, the refurbishment of numerous specialised spaces for art and music and a major new assembly hall.

The campus possesses an intimate, "village-like" atmosphere that owes much to the nineteenth and early twentieth century foundation buildings. There is a diverse range of architectural styles and materials from many eras, which in general coexist happily mostly due to the quality of the landscape setting. The Master Plan consolidates all academic buildings into a single precinct leaving the balance of the campus for recreational and landscape purposes. Buildings are loosely linked around a network of

courtyards, pathways and gardens with easy access to generous and leafy play spaces.

Alfred Felton Hall has been designed as a flexible school assembly and performance space with a seating capacity of 750. The Hall is located in the heart of the campus and is accessed via a glazed foyer, which is linked to the adjoining 1920's Hall & Chapel building. The auditorium has been arranged in a "courtyard" format with a flat floor open-end stage and wings, facing raked seating and side galleries. The flat floor zone provides for stackable seating and roll out rugs for the smaller children to sit on. The interior space is day lit to create a welcoming and child friendly place. This is not a black-box theatre, rather it is a day lit Hall which can adapt into numerous formats.

Back of house facilities including change rooms, toilets, stores and a workshop are located under the Hall and accessed via 2 main circulation systems one serving the public foyers and the other serving the back stage. The back of house level can also be directly accessed from the main sports ovals, which the Hall foyers overlook. The building has been conceived as an inner rectangular Hall form wrapped on the perimeter by transparent glazed foyers of a lower scale. For the most part views of the Hall are limited glimpses from the nearby courtyards and pathways between buildings, although there is one prominent distant view from the ovals to the south.

"The centrepiece of the School's Master Plan is the Alfred Felton Hall which forms the new heart for Grimwade, a focal point for performance and learning activities, concerts, assemblies, plays, presentations and functions." Paul Sheahan, Headmaster, MGS 2006

