

SE News
HD **Chinese** developer to **buy** school
BY Chris Vedelago, Aisha Dow
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Wealthy **Chinese property** developer Wang Hua has been revealed as one of the overseas investors behind a last ditch bid to take over failing private school Macedon Grammar.

Mr Wang, who has a net worth of about \$400 million, is negotiating to acquire the licence and assets of the Christian school, which was declared insolvent last month.

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Fairfax Media understands the entrepreneur and his partners are hoping to expand Macedon Grammar into a boarding school that will cater for the children of **China**'s wealthy and politically connected.

But the "investment syndicate" and its local representatives have taken extraordinary steps to conceal their involvement in the mooted deal.

Mr Wang came to public attention last year amid claims from a former business partner that he employs ruthless business tactics and uses his private jet to transport suitcases of cash from **China** to Australia, where it is allegedly invested locally.

The school is the latest in a series of Australian assets sought by the **Chinese** national-turned-Australian resident, whose interests have included several **residential** developments, a winery, golf course and two Toorak homes.

Macedon Grammar School was put into external administration in late November in the wake of growing financial problems at the prep to year 12 campus. The school had been served with a "show cause" notice by state education authorities over concerns about its governance, educational leadership, declining enrolments and financial viability.

On the day the school was due to close its doors, a \$250,000 donation from a mysterious benefactor allowed the non-profit educational cooperative to remain open for the rest of the year. Parents were told the money came from Mountain Properties, a **company** funded by an unnamed **Chinese** investor interested in reviving the school.

An application has since been lodged with the state's education accreditation authority to continue the school's licence to operate.

Michael Landy, a partner at accountancy **firm** Eagle Financial Services, is the sole director and shareholder of Mountain Properties, which was registered on the day the donation was announced. Mr Wang's name does not appear on any documents lodged with the corporate regulator. It is also understood that the identities of those involved in the investment syndicate were not provided in the application to the state government.

But sources close to the deal have identified Mr Wang as key to the offer to acquire the school's licence and assets, which includes nearly 37 hectares in the Macedon Ranges. It is unlikely the **property** could be commercially developed because of planning and environment restrictions.

A central player in the planned revival of the school is its proposed new chairman and former Macedon Ranges mayor, Noel Harvey, who served on the school's **board** for 18 months before quitting in June over concerns about the school's incomplete financial records and whether it was trading while insolvent.

Mr Harvey said he believed Mr Wang wanted to take over the running of the school because there was prestige in being able to provide **Chinese** students with an Australian education through its International Baccalaureate program.

"If you have an Australian education it opens the door to the world. Victoria is seen as the best education you can get," Mr Harvey said.

Parents have been told should the state government approve the proposal the school's operation and curriculum would remain virtually unchanged next year. Mountain Properties, a for-profit **company** that would own the school's assets, is hoping to build boarding facilities and boost international enrolments in 2016.

Mr Landy initially denied Mr Wang has any relationship with Macedon Grammar, saying he was instead acting on behalf of an undisclosed overseas investment syndicate. He later admitted Mr Wang had been involved in meetings about the future of the school, but said he was only "one of the delegates" of the syndicate.

"We will reveal what we reveal when it's time to reveal it," he said.

Last year, Mr Wang became embroiled in a legal dispute over control of the exclusive Heritage Golf and Country Club in Chirnside **Park**, which he hoped to use to entertain associates from **China**.

His former partner in the venture, Guo Zhao "Sunny" Sun, made accusations in court documents about Mr Wang, including that he employed ruthless business practices and used his private jet to move large amounts of cash out of **China**.

The fight was settled out of court, but the club collapsed under massive debts. It was eventually bought by what appears to be a foreign **company** represented by a Melbourne "private wealth" consultant operating from the same address as Mountain Properties.

Sources close to Mr Wang said he is the ultimate owner of the Heritage Golf and Country Club.

In the wake of media coverage about the court case, Mr Wang resigned as a director of six of his investment companies on the same day, leaving his wife in control.

Mr Wang was also believed to be behind a bid to **buy** the lease to the Albert **Park** Golf Course in 2013, and was considering development plans that would add an indoor driving range, reception centre and a **hotel** to the public course.

The lease was later **sold** to a **company** owned by **China**-based entity Shenzhen City Zhuojia Converging Wisdom Invest Co Ltd, the ownership of which is unknown.

cvedelago@theage.com.au

aisha.dow@fairfaxmedia.com.au

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