

# MADE<sup>•</sup>

## Hadley learning community

**location: Shropshire**

The Hadley Learning Community (HLC) is the UK's first 'all-through' school, a unique fusion of several schools in one, also extending into family and adult education for the wider community. The scheme was delivered as a £70 million PFI project built by Interserve for the Borough of Telford & Wrekin and completed in 2006.

It is an exciting and innovative development and offers a template for future schools, offering a solution both to the problems of depressed inner cities and the troubles of rural areas faced with families' complex needs. It has been built on a 39 acre site in Hadley, Shropshire.

HLC is one of the first purpose-built facilities in the UK that offers a full extended service to its community. Gathered within its 'wheel-hub' design is a 1,200-place secondary school, a 420-place primary and the 150-place Bridge Special School for children with severe and profound learning difficulties. In addition, the site in the north Telford area, will include a crèche, nursery and childcare support, health provision for families and young people, a 150-seat theatre, a learning resource centre, a swimming pool and a fitness gym as well as numerous out-door sports pitches.

### Design process

The site chosen for Hadley Learning Community was previously occupied by an infant school and a junior school. There was extensive public consultation and development of the concept of a brand new state-of-the-art building to provide a centre of learning for this area of North Telford. It was constructed by the Borough of Telford and Wrekin in partnership with Interserve.



The borough's initial application for private finance initiative (PFI) credits was made in December 2001, the outline business case was approved in May 2003 and full planning permission was granted in September 2004. In 2005 the heads of the secondary and primary schools, as well as the overall principal, were appointed by the local authority to work full-time on liaising with the PFI partner on the refinement of the design and the construction phase. During this time, the principal found that the PFI partners were very receptive to discussion about design details, saying that 'nothing was non-negotiable'.

As part of this phase, senior staff along with a local authority landscape architect, visited other new-build schools and were struck by how the green

landscape had been minimised. A decision was made to prioritise aesthetics, including the landscape, to raise aspirations and inspire users of the school. The architects were also keen to prioritise the landscape, and a landscape architect from the team was present at all planning meetings.

The resultant building is essentially a large ring-shaped formation, with wings of classroom accommodation radiating out in a spoked wheel configuration. At the centre of the ring is an open landscaped courtyard called the Forum which can be used as a teaching or performance space. The building is constructed using a range of modular and off-site construction techniques, and it incorporates a number of advanced sustainability features to ensure efficiency and low-energy consumption.

Sections of the primary and secondary school accommodation ringed around the Forum have double storey glazing, flooding the building with light and creating a visual connection between primary and secondary pupils.

Along the library, primary and secondary school sections the sedum-covered roof of the building overhangs to provide a broad belt of shelter around the edge of the Forum. Picnic benches have been placed outside the secondary dining hall with direct access through several doors.

The Forum steps down from the secondary school in block paved terraces to a large grass circle in the centre. Raised beds around the terraces have retaining walls with wide coping to double as informal seating. Trees and other planting soften the area. The accessibility ramp, which zig-zags down to the central space, has become a gathering point for older pupils.

Between each wing are wedge-shaped segments that provide garden spaces or separate entrances into the school for each user group. The different entrances have block paving and tarmac surfacing, with formal beds planted with amenity shrubs and benches. Each entrance also has specific features to meet the needs of its users.

The community entrance welcomes visitors with poetry engraved in the paving, a result of a community arts project during the school's development. The wing to the left as you arrive houses the swimming pool, highlighted by a translucent wall which lets in daylight and provides a glowing trail along the community entrance into the school at night. Popular community facilities include a café with views into the Forum.

The secondary pupils' entrance is approached via a footpath across a public park that accommodates the school's playing fields. Just inside the school boundary is a covered cycle storage monitored by CCTV. The secondary student's fenced outdoor area is the broadest of the segments, with a wide straight brick path leading to the building. Half way down, the path bisects a small circular bed planted with shrubs, which is in turn within a larger brick circle. The circle motif is repeated across the school, including on its uniform and logo, reflecting not only the physical shape of the building but also symbolising the school's values of partnership, collaboration and community.

The fenced segment also doubles as a social area for secondary pupils during break time, an alternative games area during PE classes and provides quick access to the outer hard surfaced sports court and a multi-use games area.

The external gardens for specific use by the secondary school include a science garden and wildlife area located adjacent to, and with direct access from, the secondary school's science wing. Amenities provided are picnic-bench-style seating suitable for gathering a small class, a green house and two gazebos.

The primary school entrance, in contrast, has a more sinuous path and larger areas of planting providing a more enclosed, sheltered feel. Sculptures decorate this entrance, and there are benches for waiting parents and a small play area for younger children. From this entrance you can see through a green railing fence into the primary playground which has seating, gazebos and playground markings in the shape of a compass.

The Bridge is a school for children aged 2 to 19 who have a profound learning disability. It has a separate entrance providing easy and sheltered access for minibuses straight to the door. The outdoor spaces include: a set of playgrounds for each age group, some of which are completely enclosed in courtyards, specialist playground equipment for children with a physical disability, sensory play equipment such as play panels, musical instruments and curved mirrors, a horticulture area with raised beds, a greenhouse and shed.

## **Evaluation**

Hadley Learning Community is a striking and innovative building which successfully embodies the educational philosophy of the school and local authority. The carriage-wheel design creates a variety of interesting and usable spaces around the outer edge of the school and prevents the size of the school overwhelming pupils and visitors. The double storey glazing creates sight lines into the forum, as well as creating light and spacious interiors.

The forum creates a genuine heart to the school and its visibility from both the primary and secondary schools helps to tie the two schools together. The school reported that female Muslim pupils particularly liked the sense of privacy and security this space provides. Currently the forum is only used by the secondary-school pupils, and as a performance area, although this may change in the future as the area clearly offers potential for more outdoor lessons.



The design of The Bridge provides privacy to its pupils. Where the primary and secondary schools have large windows providing a view into the forum, The Bridge faces away from the forum, and the building design creates enclosed courtyards for outdoor play that makes the school feel separate from other parts of the school.

The Bridge school playgrounds are well-equipped with play facilities for different ages, but the mainstream primary playgrounds are less developed, although this has the benefit of allowing the school to shape their environment to meet their changing needs over time. The social areas for both primary and secondary schools are very open, catering to large groups of pupils rather than for smaller socializing groups, who might prefer more intimate scales of space. In the primary playground this may be alleviated as the planting grows.

The spaces around the outer perimeter are more varied in their success. The science garden is well-provided with facilities to make it a practical space for teaching and the school is making active use of this area by developing the plantings.

The entrance to the secondary school is the least characterful with its broad expanse of tarmac, and the circle of planting in the middle looks vulnerable to being trampled. Railway sleepers which have been used to terrace areas of grass at the edge of this area provide spaces which are popular for socializing but the grass wears away easily. Wear and tear is also a problem immediately outside the secondary pupil exit, where the shortest route leading to the basketball court has not been paved.

The location of the car parks, which circle about half the school's perimeter, creates a risk that the first view of the school is of cars. This has been mitigated, however, by using changes of level to make the car parks less conspicuous. Signposting to the various pupil/teacher entrances is discreet.

Hadley Learning Community deserves its recognition as an innovative, exciting learning space, not just inside the buildings but also outside. Students are justly proud of their new school, which is helping to raise aspirations and confidence in the local community.

### **Key design features to look out for**

- The use of a fairly restricted palette of materials to create a generally calm and unifying theme between the individual elements of the building.
- The placing of an emphasis on expressing structural elements of the building in natural timber, bringing a simplicity and honesty to reading the way the building is constructed.

The buildings sustainability credentials are a key aspect to the overall project goals, and the design of the building incorporates some advanced

sustainability features to ensure efficiency and low energy consumption. These include:

- Biomass boiler – which produces most of the energy needs for the campus.
- Rain water harvesting systems – water is collected off all of the roofs and is recycled as grey water in the toilets
- Sedum roofs – these have been laid on all flat roofs and are attractive and have good insulation properties.
- Natural ventilation systems – there are carbon dioxide and temperature sensors in all teaching rooms and these control the opening and closing of the windows (Window Master system).
- Night time cooling – all internal doors are opened at night to allow the building to cool naturally by allowing the air to circulate.
- Photovoltaic system – there are solar panels on the roof, and the electricity created is fed into the HLC grid. There is a display panel in a science laboratory showing the KJ of energy being generated and the amount of carbon dioxide as a result that has NOT been emitted into the atmosphere.
- Under floor heating – the entire campus has under floor heating and therefore reduces the loss of space from radiators and/or heating units.
- Light motion detectors – every teaching space, office, changing room has motion detectors so that the lights go out if no motion is detected in the room and the lights also dim near windows if light levels are sufficient.
- All of these systems are available on the Building management systems and the data can be accessed for use in the curriculum.

The building also incorporates state of art ICT provision which is viewed as a critical element to the successful delivery of HLC's programme. Some specific inclusions are:

- The entire campus has a high speed CAT 6 network and is also wireless.
- All teaching rooms from nursery, primary, secondary and special are equipped with promethean interactive whiteboards.
- There are four ICT suites in the secondary phase as well as two fully equipped CAD/CAM rooms in the Engineering Faculty.
- There are two Life Long Learning suites above the Public Library with approximately 90 PC's for students and the community to use. In addition there are visualisers, active slates, active panels and voting systems for staff to use.
- The campus runs an integrated management information system (CMIS) which contains all pupil information, assessment data, timetable, conduct and reward logs.
- The campus has an Online Learning Environment (OLE) which gives parents and students access to the curriculum and will allow students to work independently from home or within the campus.

## **Link and downloads**

Hadley Learning Community website - <http://www.hadleylearningcommunity.org.uk/>

BBC Shropshire. Tour video of centre -  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/shropshire/content/articles/2007/04/04/hadley\\_school\\_tour\\_video\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/shropshire/content/articles/2007/04/04/hadley_school_tour_video_feature.shtml)

Faber Maunsell Engineers website -  
<http://www.fabermaunsell.com/NewsMedia/47/58/>

Training & Development Agency for Schools. Case Study.  
[http://www.tda.gov.uk/case\\_studies/remodelling/hadley.aspx?keywords=able+to+teach](http://www.tda.gov.uk/case_studies/remodelling/hadley.aspx?keywords=able+to+teach)

CABE case study  
<http://www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentitemid=2933&aspectid=23>

Interserve case study  
<http://www.sectors.interserve.com/education/case+studies/hadley+learning+community+telford.htm>

Aedas Architects website  
<http://www.aedas.com>

Telford & Wrekin Council website  
<http://search.telford.gov.uk>

## **Contact for further information**

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