

ArchitecturePLB was appointed to design Midhurst Rother Academy, the fourth school to be developed as part of the West Sussex Academies programme, and the second to be sponsored by the United Learning Trust. Catering for 1500 pupils with a 300-place post-16 centre, it has been designed to meet the educational vision and brief of West Sussex County Council, the existing College and the Sponsor.

The site is located within the South Downs National Park on the outskirts of Midhurst, a fairly small rural community in West Sussex. Midhurst is a market town that has retained much of its mediaeval layout: its character formed by the varying architectural styles and historic building materials, and open spaces punctuated by lanes and passages. The site has required a sensitive and sympathetic response, whilst simultaneously offering the opportunity to design a unique and exciting building.

The boundary consists of an amalgamation of sites within and on the edge of Midhurst; the existing upper school buildings and playing fields, the Old Grammar School, plus additional sites to the south and southwest. Given the exceptional setting that affords beautiful views in almost every direction, it was intended from the

outset that the design should endeavour to incorporate as much connectivity with the outside as space, security and building envelope could permit.

The new building gathers all visitors and users at a generous entrance, covered by a canopy, with the entrance itself further recessed into the building. Beyond this double height entrance, key spaces such as dining, LRC and the theatre, all of which are publicly accessible for out of hours use, open directly onto the triple height circulation and exhibition space at ground level.

'The Drum', located at the centre of the atrium space and acting as the main circulation core, provides a focus for building users, articulating a pivotal form from which the main 'house' wings radiate. This three storey oval structure, which projects through the roof, has been clad with russet textured light cream terracotta blocks with white bucket handle mortar joints, giving a warmth and texture to the central atrium space. A feature accommodation stair wraps two thirds of its circumference providing links between the ground, first and second floors. The stair contrasts with the drum cladding and complements the smooth flowing curves of the surrounding atrium balustrades.

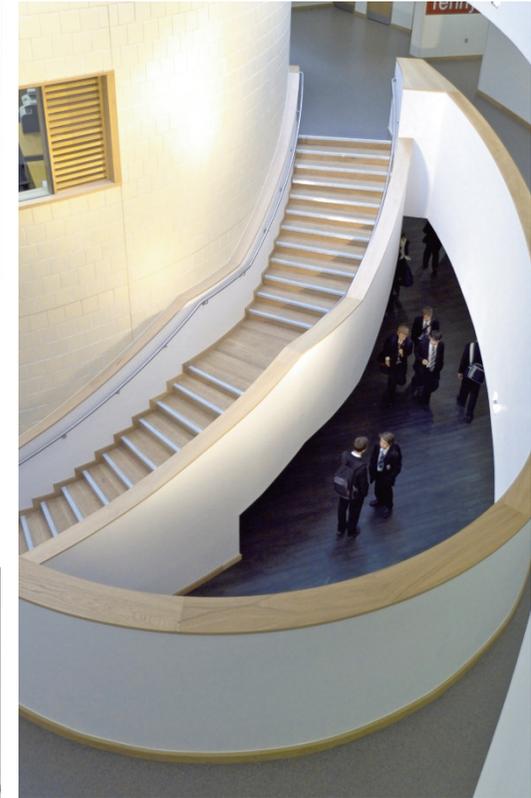


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- 01 Aerial view CGI
- 02 Main dining area
- 03 The 'Drum' acts as the main circulation core area



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