



# The West Centre

Drumchapel's Child and Family Centre



# The West Centre

◀ Fencing to the front of the building, between the garden and street. Designed by Tassy Thompson.  
(image credit Keith Hunter Photography)

## Overview

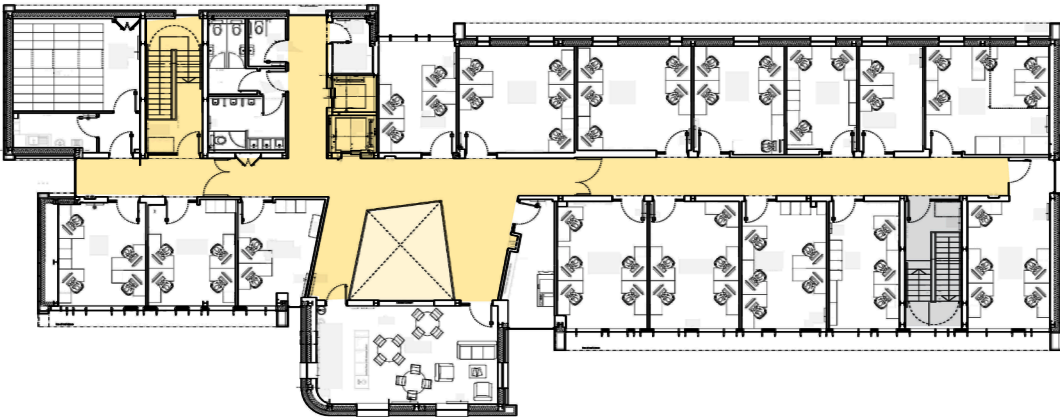
The West Centre is an award winning child and family centre in Drumchapel, Glasgow. The centre was built to form a "one stop shop" for medical and social support services for families and children with ongoing medical issues in west Glasgow and the wider area. Originally at its start in 2003 the centre was Local Authority led and conceived as a centre for children's support services, including childcare, and health, with various public sector and charity partners. That project stalled due to financial constraints with the partner groups. The project restarted in 2007 when NHS Glasgow and Clyde decided to relocate their existing child services in the area into a single centre in connection with related social services. A new more central site was selected, at that time occupied by a Glasgow City Council nursery, which was being relocated. The new site, placed in the heart of Drumchapel, was seen to be more appropriate for the building and had much better transport links and placement within the community. The site is directly adjacent to the Drumchapel Health Centre, so there were easy and evident links with the wider health provision in the area. The project architects, Anderson Bell and Christie, who had been appointed to the original project due to their design experience working on buildings for children and the community, were retained despite at this time having limited healthcare design experience.

The building is a three storey block running parallel to the main road through Drumchapel. Between it and the road is a garden area, and parking is provided at the back. The ground floor contains admin, varied multiuse rooms, and some consulting areas, with the majority of the consulting rooms on the first floor. The second floor is used by admin teams and outreach staff. The building works well as it has a very simple, clear plan, which enables easy movement throughout and all rooms to have views to the surroundings.

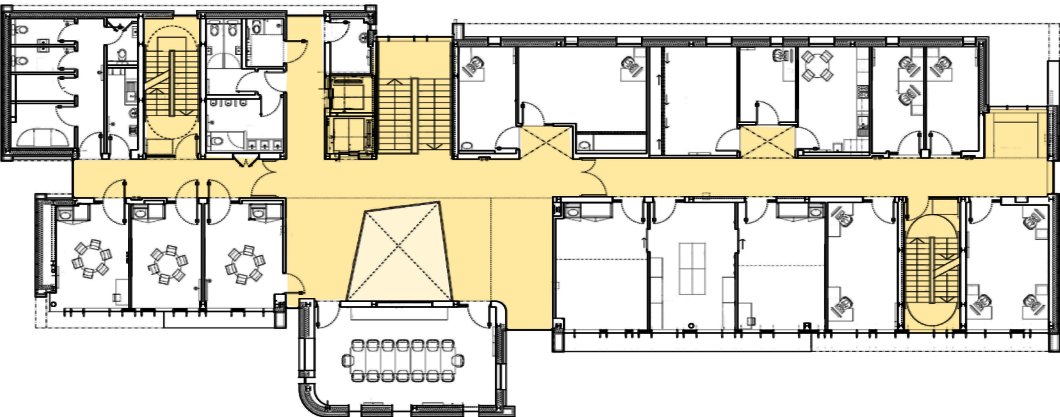
√ Front of the building, onto the main road through Drumchapel  
(image credit, Keith Hunter Photography)



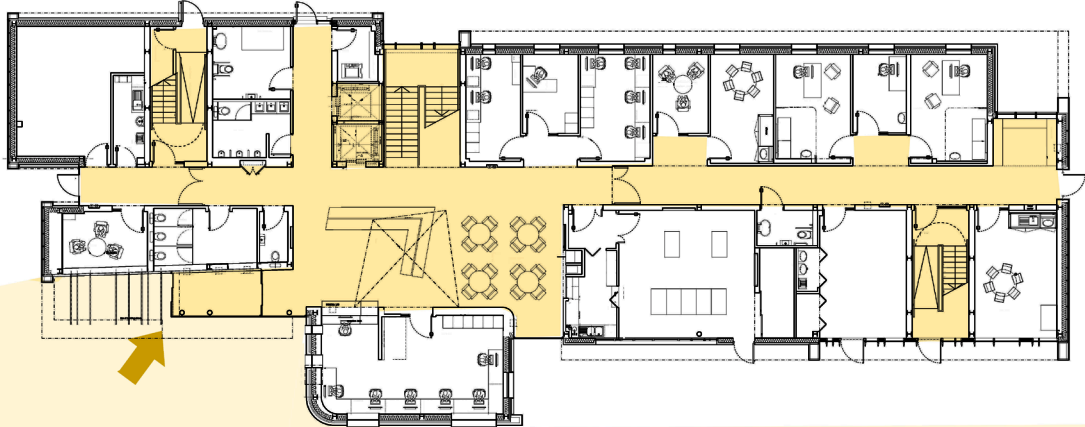
# The West Centre



Second floor plan  
(staff and outreach  
teams only)



First floor plan



Ground floor plan





# The West Centre

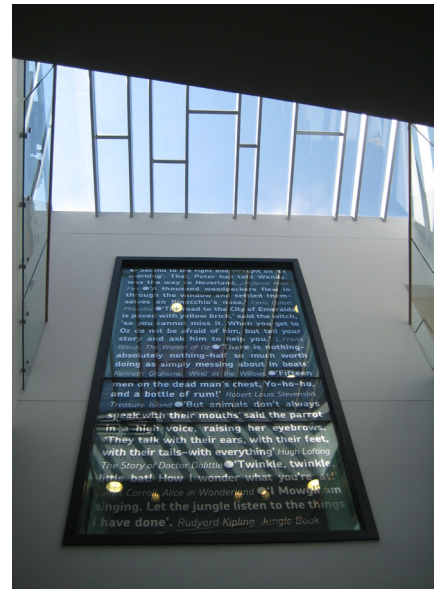
One of the key strengths of the project is the dedicated art strategy. The initial budget of £30,000 for the art was extended through a generous contribution of £250,000 from the Yorkhill Foundation. The brief for the art was not initially fixed, and it consequently developed throughout the wider design process. The art was discussed throughout the building's design, and was seen by the client and design team as extremely important and integral to the overall building. The client groups felt very strongly that the art should be integrated not only into the form of the building, but also that the users should be able to directly interact with it. This meant that part way through the production of the initial art works, the difficult step was taken to change artists;

*“it was obvious from what they were coming back with, they just hadn't understood, or we hadn't conveyed our requirements properly. The proposals really weren't connecting with people, and it became clear we weren't on the same wavelength as the artists. Quite unusually I think, people faced up to that and, decided to stop the commission, pay for what had been done and have a more informed thought about what the group really wanted from the arts programme. That's quite difficult to do, it's always a lot easier to just keep rumbling on with something, rather than confront the problem.”*

John Donnelly NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

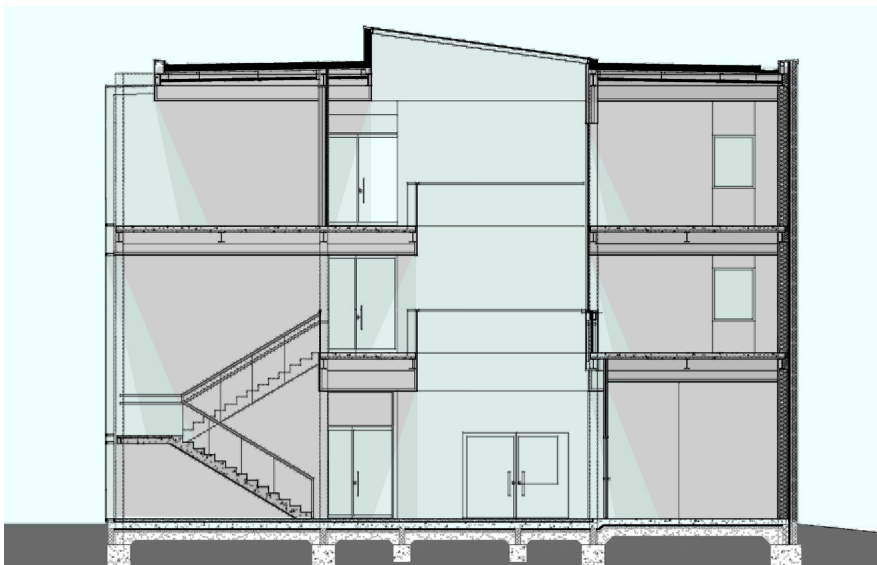
The art is scattered throughout the circulation and waiting spaces of the building, and impacts all elements of the building form and experience, adding value in many ways through the clever design of elements that would have had to be bought and provided anyway, such as the bench seating in the waiting area and external garden walling.

The building has been thoroughly future-proofed, with a planned extension to the rear (forming an L shaped plan), considered from the beginning of the project, and the services and location of amenities within and outside the building located accordingly. The extension should be able to be built with the minimum possible disruption to the existing building or grounds. The room dimensions are not standardised, but are not specially designed for one function, so can be changed to another use if needed in the future.



View up into the atrium from the waiting area showing the window covered in lines from famous children's books. Designed by Graven Images. ^

Sub waiting room overlooking the flight path to the airport, with aeroplane art by Tim Taylor.



Cross section through the atrium <



# The West Centre

## Experience

The building is entered directly from the main road, accepting its place as an important marker on the road into Drumchapel, and aiming to create a sense of arrival and centre of the community. As you approach the building the artist designed wall to the street gives flashes of the garden behind, giving the building privacy without disconnecting it from the street.

Once inside the building, you enter the main waiting room in the base of the atrium. Light streams in from the glass roof, and you can see up through into the upper levels of the building. The waiting area has been designed in informal zones, where parents and children of different ages can congregate and relax before their appointments. Despite the multiple services provided in the building, there is only one reception desk, clarifying the patient journey, making the arrival more informal and friendly and avoiding any stigma attached to attending any of the clinics, such as mental health or social work. This area shows the breadth of approach in the art, with the seating designs for different users, interactive wall art for children to play with, art built into the reception desk to entertain children while their parents make appointments and a relaxation area built in under the stairs with moving water displays. A large glass window above the waiting area is inscribed with phrases from children books, which are then found in waiting areas around the building. This, in common with the overall art strategy, relates to the fact that most of the children who visit the centre will do so repeatedly, and things can be discovered over time and then revisited on later visits.

*"it had to be quite secure and, in a way, defensive, but, not appear so, so, really, the building had to be open and light, friendly, non-institutional, and child friendly"*  
Bruce Brebner, Anderson, Bell and Christie

All the floors of the building use a simple double loaded corridor to move away from the atrium area, with visibility right through the building, afforded by full height windows at each end showing the trees beyond and through glazed doors along its length. Areas such as those used by mental health are linked visually through glazed doors, allowing them to be secure, without feeling shut off or confined. Sub-waiting areas are found along the corridor, surrounded by full height glazing and views to the outdoors; both natural views of trees close by and also views to the community reinforcing connection. One of the areas, which overlooks the flight path down to the airport, has this referred to in its art, with a tiny plane flying in a high alcove. The main stairwell opens directly off the atrium,



The waiting room, looking towards the entrance and reception  
(image credit, Keith Hunter Photography)



Looking up through the atrium  
(image credit, Keith Hunter Photography)



The waiting room



# The West Centre



^ Looking down the first floor corridor to the light and trees beyond.

and is open and bright with full glazing. Set into the handrail is a working harp, which can be played by running your fingers across as you climb. At no point in the building's circulation do you lose visual sight of the atrium, or the environment outside, you can always tell where you are.

The building is extremely bright and airy, with raised ceiling heights and high doorways making the rooms feel spacious and non-institutional. The glass doors and balustrades in the circulation areas let light stream through the building. Scattered throughout the circulation areas is art that can be touched and engaged with by adults and children, though much of it is deliberately hard to spot. One of the installations is a series of peepholes set into the walls at child height, which look onto minute scenes where tiny figures inhabit the walls, skiing down pipes and climbing electrical wires. The building is designed to be explored, not merely used. The key driver from the start was that the building must feel welcoming and non-clinical, so that the children can feel as happy as possible about coming here, even though they might be undergoing unpleasant treatments or have spent large amounts of their lives in healthcare facilities. Everywhere in the building is light and friendly, but shielded and safe; with something to find or notice, and to remember and revisit.

*"It's fantastic, exactly what we wanted, even now children come in and they've been in time and time again and, then, they suddenly see, you know, something in the wall, or something like that"*

Alison Morrison, a clinical lead involved in the project.

The consulting rooms and meeting areas are varied in size, access to ground floor garden areas and built in facilities, to suit the many different functions that happen in the building. They are all however very flexible, and the building has already accommodated changes of use caused when the social work programmes were relocated to another building, and were replaced with mental health services.



^ Working harp set into the main stairwell, by Tim Taylor.

The interior finishes and art installations are all approached in a similar, if unconventional way, with impact and design being the key drivers, so that different finishes are used to those in more conventional healthcare settings, using different furniture, and different materials, led by a team of interior designers, Graven Images. None of these are more expensive, or less durable than usual, but they give a different, less clinical feel. The exterior finishes are quite urban, to give the building a civic feel and importance.

## Reaction

The building holds true to its fundamental aim, to not feel like a health building. It is a building that seems to not take itself very seriously, it is playful and irreverent in places, but it is extremely serious about its role in people's lives and the community, both as a safe place for children and families, and as a civic building. It stands proudly in the gateway to Drumchapel, confidently relating to its neighbouring buildings, whilst setting the precedent and tone of the future regeneration and improvements to the area. The public has welcomed it wholeheartedly, being invited in at open days, even those who will never use it, so that it can be valued and something they are proud of. Despite the problems in the area, there has been no graffiti, no vandalism. It is unashamedly ambitious but not intimidating and is unafraid to suggest that Drumchapel deserves a high quality building and service.





The atrium at first floor level



The client groups have been extremely pleased with the building. They took the initial step of requesting a non-institutional building, and the architects were keen to explore what that meant to each of the groups, how they wanted the building to feel, and also how they did not want it to feel. Through visits to other buildings, including types other than healthcare, such as schools, they were able to clarify the brief and needs in ways which the architects could translate into architectural decisions such as ceiling heights to give a civic feel or sense of enclosure through shielding walls. In many respects there was never any intention or likelihood that the West Centre would look or feel like more conventional healthcare buildings. The multipurpose rooms are well used, and are also rented by neighbouring healthcare groups as needed, which is very successful. One of the few regrets is that as the room used by the crèche has such a great relationship with the garden, that it seems unfortunate now that some of the other rooms, such as the main multi-function room, were not also given this opportunity.

The design and client team all freely admit that the secret to the building's success was an unusually fortunate combination of motivated, ambitious and open minded individuals and groups. The client groups were courageous enough to accept new ideas and make decisions based on design quality and aspiration, and the design team were keen to make a people centred building that used bold simple ideas to create the atmosphere the clients wanted, rather than what might usually be provided. The health board NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde have a substantial track record of demanding and delivering high quality environments, and this building is undoubtedly an excellent example of what can be achieved. The art strategy is also the result of the drive from the board, with the art coordinator Jackie Sands working closely with the client groups, design team and

The fence along the front of the building, separating the garden from the main road. Designed by Tassy Thompson. (image credit, Keith Hunter Photography)



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^ Art by Tim Taylor

artists to develop the highly individual and unconventional approach and form. A great deal of input was taken from the client groups early on, to finalise the relationships between the different user groups and functions, but whilst this proved complicated, particularly the potential conflict between the need for openness and access for the health teams and the need for security and privacy from the social work side, the compromises reached are acceptable to all and have allowed the building to be very flexible. The only regret held about these dynamics is that the rear elevation of the building was not clad with timber as originally imagined, as the client groups were not convinced that difficulties with maintenance and conflicts between preventive coatings would not prove difficult in the future, with the result that the Trespa panels were used instead.

The building has been extremely well received architecturally. It has been awarded and shortlisted for several awards, in both healthcare and broader architecture categories. Overall, the building has been a great success, and had no major problems of any kind. When the social work team had to move to different building, they were very reluctant to leave. All its users and staff, and the client and design teams are extremely happy and proud of the building and proud of process that delivered it. The project and client team joke that someone involved must have sold their soul to the devil, as the project had come together so completely and well.

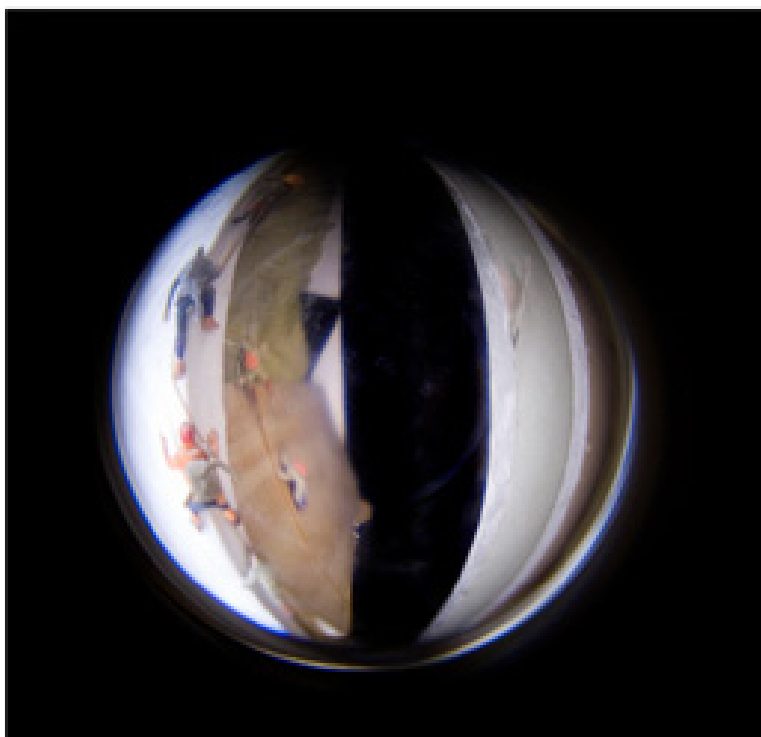
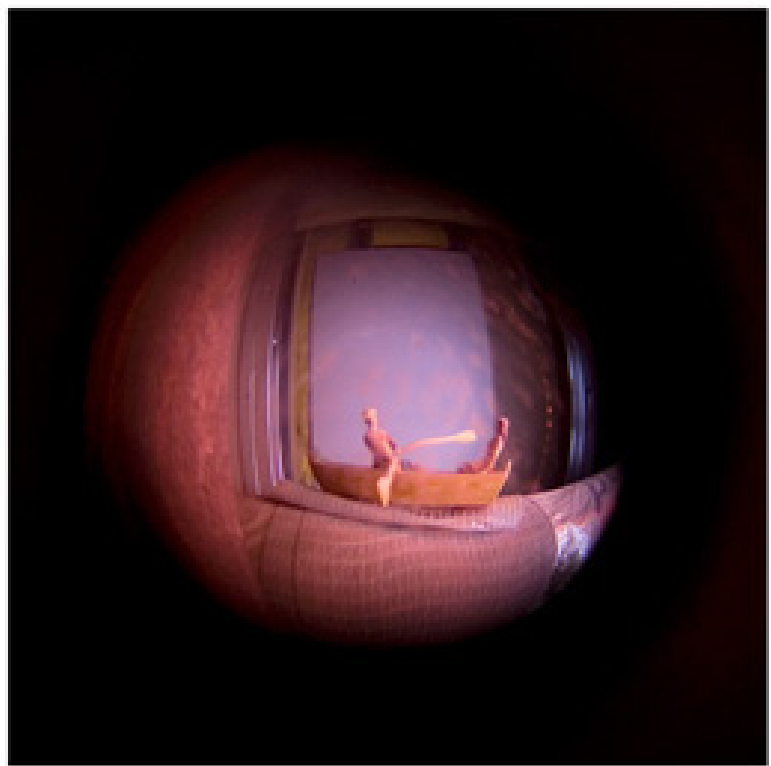
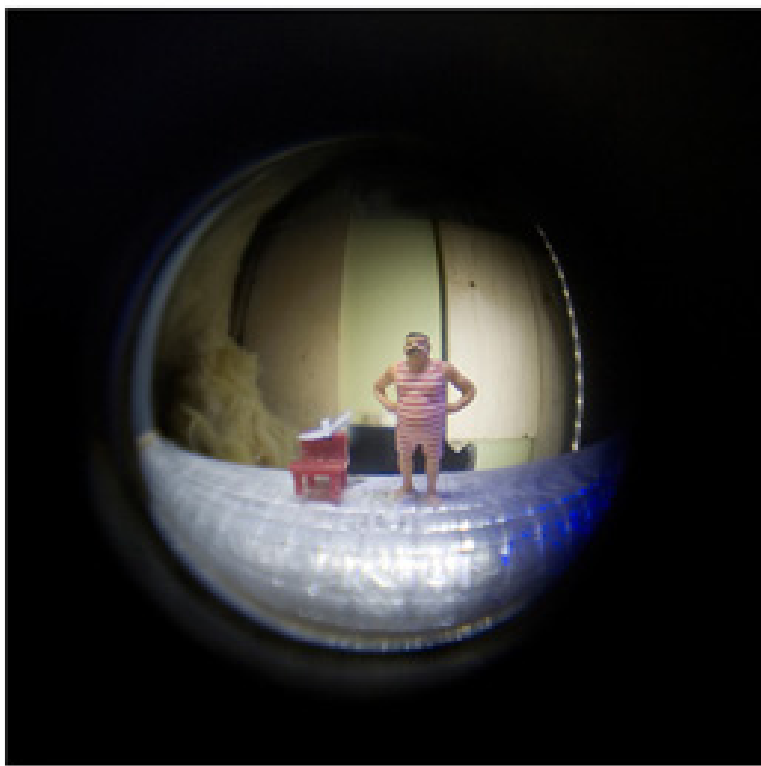
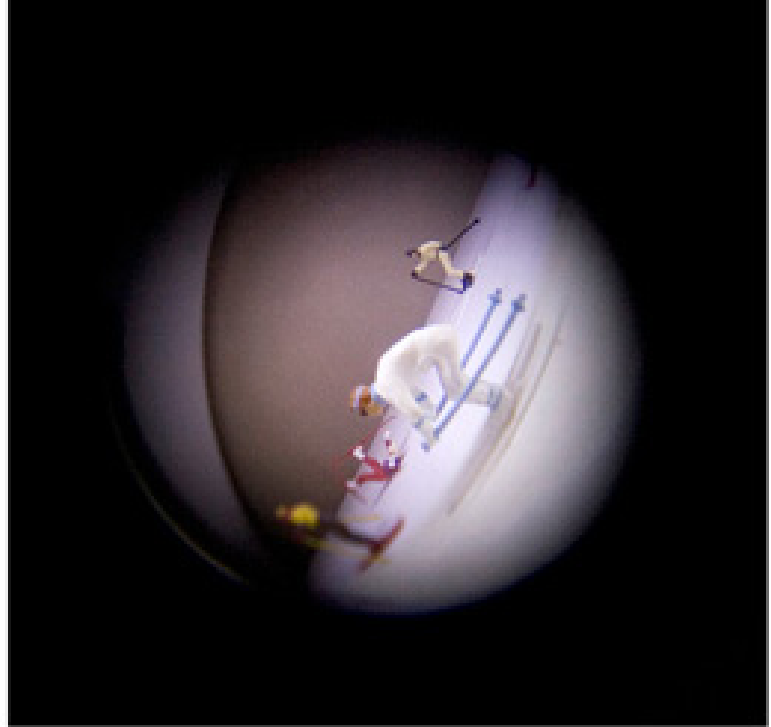
*"they feel this is a fantastic building and when they have parents coming in and saying, 'oh wow, this is a fabulous building, we went past it because we couldn't believe this would be an NHS building' and I think, that's when you know and, actually, looking at the reaction of the children, as well, they are happy to come here, even though difficult things might happen to them while they're here, they're still happy to come."*

Alison Morrison, a clinical lead involved in the project.

> Peephole art by Tim Taylor, each peephole is placed at child eye height in different places around the building.  
(image credit Jo Hanley)

∨ The staff room





## Project Information

Location: Drumchapel, Glasgow  
Architect: Anderson Bell Christie

Value: £3,990,000  
Area: 1,900m<sup>2</sup>

Opening Date: April 2010  
Procurement Type: Traditional  
Client body: NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

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