

## Hospital check-ups

### Two children's hospitals are put under the stethoscope to find out how well adapted they are to young people.

*Two children's facilities put under scrutiny*

#### Great Ormond Street Hospital

Often feted as a pioneer of good practice, Great Ormond Street Hospital struggles against the natural concerns, possible trauma and inherent boredom of hospital visits to create the happiest possible environment for their young patients.

A popular assessment of the building is that "it isn't like a hospital at all." Young people who go there, either as patients or visitors, see it more as a hybrid of hotel and play centre.

"They've got all the utilities you could want here," said 13-year-old Ben Wheaten, who was halfway through a six-month stay. "They've got a radio station, and they've got the play centre, and Scouts - there's quite a lot for teenagers to do."

In the play centre, nicknamed The Den, books and board games, the traditional mainstay of hospital waiting rooms, are complemented by a huge television screen and a video games console. Boredom is not on the menu.

"I don't think the hospital really needs that much improving," said Sarah Burgess, 15. "All the doors are open in the corridors, there's no stairs and there are slopes for wheelchairs. I'd maybe put more lifts in, because you have to wait ages for them, and also the dinners could be a bit better. But that's about it, really."

Walls and doors all over the hospital are decorated with vivid paintings and drawings, but it's the friendly staff who really add colour to the day.

"The nurses and the play people are kind and they pay attention to you," said Sarah. "The doctors get down to your level and talk to you. They help you to understand what they're doing. The atmosphere is nice and relaxed."

Unfortunately, the carefully cultivated environment is still at the mercy of the two classic hospital complaints - the noise and the smell. "You can hear planes going over, and cars," said Sarah. "You can see out of the windows, so that's good, but at night it's noisy, so I can't really sleep. You can also hear what's going on outside the ward. You can hear the dinner trolleys coming, but at least then I know that dinner's coming."

"When I was in intensive care," explained 13-year-old Marcus Holden, "I didn't feel well anyway, and all the beeping and crying kept me awake. I'd change that to add a bit for older people, because I was with babies all the time."

Ben was more concerned with his nose than his ears: "If I could change the hospital I'd make sure there was no smell of anaesthetics. When I go for my operations I'm fine until I get past reception, but as soon as I get near the anaesthetic rooms, I start retching."

Sounds and smells apart, the overall response to the hospital is positive. However, no matter how colourful the walls are, what lies outside them still proves more attractive. "You can't really get outside," moaned Sarah. "There's a garden across the street but we're not allowed out of the hospital. If there was a garden in the middle or something, that we could get out into when it was sunny, that'd be nice. It'd be good to see some sunlight."

#### Sweetening the pill

*The new Derbyshire Children's Hospital provides medical facilities with a soft touch*

It is hard to believe that only one entirely new children's hospital has been built this century. It opened in September in Derby. The 72-bed, £15 million Derbyshire Children's Hospital took two-and-a-half years to complete, following extensive consultation workshops with staff, parents, children, artists and community groups.

As well as pyjamas and toothbrushes, children bring to hospital an unhealthy collection of worries. The Derbyshire Children's Hospital, designed by Trent Architecture and Design, with interior design by Potter and Holmes, aims to create an environment to take the young patients' minds off what they are going through. This starts before you even reach the door.

"When you approach the main entrance," said 13-year-old Martin, "it looks like you're coming to some really good science museum. It's got kites and different coloured flags on the canopy, and seagulls and a puffin. The entrance gives the impression that it's going to be a fun time. Well, maybe not fun, but it's certainly not going to be a horrible experience."

The reception area does its best to support this initial impression. Visitors are greeted with colourful carpets, lush green plants, a fountain with ever-changing water sprays, frogs, dolphins and, above all, a sense of calm. "It's not what you expect a hospital to look like," said Martin. "You feel comfy. The seats are all in circles, not in rows, so you can look anywhere, and there's a lot to look at."

"They've got steps built into the reception desks, so that little kids don't have to stand and stare at a piece of wood," added 10-year-old Toby. "They can climb up and see what's going on. They've definitely thought a lot about what kids want."

Each separate area of the hospital has its own 'theme'. The emergency area, or seagull ward, features a pirate ship play area. The outpatients' clinic is home to the Loch Ness monster. "Each room has its own theme and its own colours," said Toby. "There are things for kids to do everywhere."

The hospital is awash with board games, televisions, books, jigsaws, video games - everything bored children could want when their mobility is restricted. For those who can venture further afield, there are a number of brightly decorated courtyards on the ground floor and two larger outdoor play areas on the first floor, fully equipped with the trappings of the traditional playground.

Martin was impressed. "There's more outdoor play space than I expected there to be," he said. "Usually you just get the hospital and that's it. All the outdoor space will make kids feel happier and probably help them to get better more quickly, because they've got somewhere to play and get fresh air as well. Nobody likes being cooped up inside all day."

Older children have also been taken into consideration. "The sitting room is for the adolescents," said Martin. "There's a snooker table, a kitchen with a microwave, a TV, video, lots of posters, table football. You can't hear the noise from the ward. I wouldn't mind coming here. All in all I think it's a good hospital. It's not just a boring old place to come and stay if you're ill. It's quite exciting, really. There's plenty of things to do."

Toby agreed: "It's very good. I didn't expect it to be like this. It didn't really seem a place for sick people at all."

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## About the team

Great Ormond Street interviews conducted by reporters Gillian Antwi-Bosiako, 9, and Eugene Asare, 11. Edited by Natasha Asare, 14, Rachel Bulford, 15 and Tara Glynn, 17. Derbyshire review by Martin Webb, 12, and Toby Webb, 10. This article was published in the [Architects' Journal](#), in a special youth edition guest-edited by Children's Express.

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