

LINN DARA GIVES WARM WELCOME

HAILED for providing a welcoming and reassuring domestic ambience, the Linn Dara Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit won the Best Universal Design at **RIA** Annual Awards.

The unit for children and adolescents with acute mental health illness opened recently on the Cherry Orchard Campus. It provides mental health services for children and adolescents up to 17 years in Dublin and Mid-Leinster. This is an in-patient building for acutely ill patients who reside here for up to six weeks. It includes a school, a gym hall and an apartment for family use.

For many of the children and adolescents, this is the first time spent away from family. The building plan stems from the brief and wraps around secure courtyards. The courtyards share a curvy wall faced with ceramics designed by artist Diane Jameson of birds and leaves and

trees. The courtyards are not enormous, but large enough for play, or to sun yourself on the grass, or site under the covered 'shed' area.

There are two wards, Hazel and Rowan, and the artwork picks up these themes in the wardrobe doors and the glass screens. The bedrooms are grouped around a small planted courtyard, with the coloured staff bases always in view. The staff base is round and blue (or green). The top glows gently, so at night you can keep it in view if you wish. All residents have a single room and ensuite bathroom.

There is a small wardrobe and a worktop for a dressing table or to work. One wall is painted with white 'blackboard' paint – you can draw on it, and then wipe it down. There is a large cushioned chill out area nearby, and a worktop with computer access for games or for homework if you need company, or you can move away and sit in a recess beside the planted courtyard, or go into your room.

There are a variety of living rooms, large and small, well-furnished and homely, with coloured carpets or flooring. The living rooms all get sunshine at some time during the day and several have direct access to the courtyard. It all allows for a variety of activities and gives the staff plenty of options for therapy.

The essential supervision of activities is achieved within a complex plan in a subtle manner. It avoids an over stimulated environment and allows the residents privacy as well.

At the front entrance there is a waiting area and office – it is bright and light, a bit quirky, you can see in and out. It leads to a coffee/meeting area with a view to planting outside and to the artworks on the wall. It is calm and spacious.

Beyond the entrance is the school. The residents leave their unit and make a short journey across the hall, past the outdoor ball area and into school. Going to school is normal and can even be a pleasurable distraction. There are several classrooms, an art room with access to the garden and a view of the mature trees on the campus, a small home economics room and the occupational therapy room. There is also a large, bright gym/activities/playroom which the staff find useful for all kinds of activities.

The staff offices and meeting rooms are upstairs. There is a small apartment for family stayovers where required.

Externally, the building elevation is broken into a number of smaller blocks with large coloured blocks at the corners. Double volume spaces at these nodes ensure both wards (two different orientations) receive sunlight, cross ventilation and the spaces provide variety in a building of small domestic sized rooms. Contrasting shapes and colour reduces scale and adds interest. Colours were selected to visually compliment Linn Dara's outpatient building nearby.

The gardens are landscaped and it is in harmony with the remainder of the grounds of Cherry Orchard which is characterised by large mature trees, brick walls and more recent low level planting.

"Dealing with mental health issues is tough when you are very young. The intention is that this building is welcoming and reassuring and homely and allows the staff to treat and care for the residents in a safe and robust environment," said one of the staff members.

The project team consisted for: HSE Estates Dorota Nieznanska, Pat Fogarty; Linn Dara CAMHS – Brendan Doody and his team.

The design team was: Wejchert Architects; Warming Consulting Engineers; Civil & Structural Engineers - O'Connor Sutton Cronin; Quantity Surveyors - Mulcahy McDonagh and Partners.

The coffee/meeting room at Linn Dara.

