

Key Point: Round Pillar

The round wooden pillar of the central spiral staircase was originally part of Zenkyūin Temple, the Buddhist temple that occupied the grounds prior to the construction of the Kaichi School's pseudo-Western style building. Spiral staircases are quite rare in traditional Japanese architecture, and the school's builders were unfamiliar with them. As a result, the width of each step is so narrow that the teachers and other adults could only use the outermost edge of the staircase, which has been worn down from decades of use.

Zenkyūin was the family temple of the Toda family, who had governed Matsumoto since 1726. Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the government issued several edicts calling for the separation of Shinto and Buddhist institutions, which had been merged for centuries. In some regions, this sentiment was taken to violent extremes: temple lands were confiscated, bells and statues were melted down, and monks were forced to find other professions. Toda Mitsuhsa (1828–1892), the last lord of Matsumoto Castle, abolished Zenkyūin himself and had the temple grounds repurposed to host the elementary school.