

Minister helps mark new school milestone



A Welsh Government Minister has taken part in an ancient ceremony to mark the development of the new Welsh-medium school for three to 16-year-olds currently under construction in Haverfordwest.

Eluned Morgan AM, the Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, performed a ‘topping-out’ event on the site of the £28 million development at Withybush.

The school – which is yet to be formally named – represents the first ever investment in Welsh language secondary education in that particular part of Pembrokeshire.

The only other Welsh medium secondary provision in Pembrokeshire is based in Crymych, with travel times from the mid and south of the county in excess of 45 minutes.

It is one of several schools which have been built, or are being built, under the 21st Century Schools and Education programme – a £120 million initiative between Pembrokeshire County Council and the Welsh Government to build state-of-the-art schools.

The development will provide a:

- 45-place nursery
- 315-place primary provision
- 600-place secondary school
- 24-place playgroup (Cylch Meithrin)

Also included is an all-weather sports pitch and associated facilities.

The ‘topping-out’ event marked the structural completion of the highest point of the building by contractors Willmott Dixon.

The ceremony is said to ward off evil spirits and bestow good fortune on a property. It involved pouring wine, oil, corn and salt on a small yew tree.

In ancient times a yew tree branch was placed in the uppermost part of a new construction as a symbol of completion.

Wine symbolised fertility and wisdom and oil promised liberty and prosperity. Corn would ripen and grow prosperity into abundance and the salt equated to purity and hospitality.

A pupil from each of the four feeder primary schools – Gelli Aur; Hafan y Mor, Narberth and Glan Cleddau – took part in the ceremony.

Welcoming guests, Willmott Dixon's Operations Director, Ian Jones, said the company were delighted to continue its relationship with the County Council in building the school.

He added: "Our prime focus has been to engage with the local supply chain and to continue our involvement in support of the local community and schools, so as to ensure we provide a lasting legacy within the region"

The Minister said: "It is a pleasure to mark such an important occasion in the construction of this new school, the first investment in Welsh medium secondary education in this part of Pembrokeshire.

"I am delighted the Welsh Government has been able to support the development with funding of nearly £12.5 million from the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme.

"It is an excellent example of what the Welsh Government is achieving by working in partnership with local government and schools.

"It is testament to the hard work of many who have been fighting for Welsh medium education in the area and this school in particular for some time that this topping out ceremony is taking place today. Schools like this are crucial to our aim of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. "

The County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, David Lloyd, told guests it was an important moment in the historic campaign to promote the Welsh Language.

Councillor Lloyd went on: "This campaign was inspired by such visionary figures as Saunders Lewis, Gwynfor Evans, the poet Waldo Williams - born nearby at Prendergast school house - and Dilys Parry who lived and taught here at Haverfordwest and fought all her life for Welsh medium education.

"Were they with us today, I am certain that their delight in the establishment of a new Welsh-medium three to 16 years school would only be matched by their astonishment that it should happen in 'Little England beyond Wales'.

"That is the scale of this achievement."

Under the scheme, the County Council has already opened four new schools and are in the process of building five others around Pembrokeshire.

Caption

Minister Eluned Morgan AM with Councillor Lloyd (second from right), Council Chairman, Councillor Harries and Ian Jones with pupils who took part in the ceremony with the yew tree. From the left they are: Emyr Jones (Gelli Aur); Evan Mackeen (Hafan y Mor); Tallulah