

Kirsty Williams visits north Wales to open two 21 Century Schools

Ysgol Nant y Groes and Ysgol Swyn y Don have been refurbished and extended to provide state-of-the-art teaching environments, with all the facilities expected in a 21st Century School, including the latest in IT equipment.

The overall cost of these two projects was £4.2 million, funded by Welsh Government 21st Century Schools and Education Programme (50%) and Conwy County Borough Council Education Capital Programme (50%).

During her visits, the Education Secretary toured both sites to see their newly improved facilities and enjoyed performances by pupils, before unveiling plaques in front of the gathered guests.

Kirsty Williams said:

“It is a pleasure to be in Conwy today to officially open the newly refurbished Ysgol Nant y Groes and Ysgol Swyn y Don, and see first-hand how the Welsh Government’s investment is having a positive impact on education and learning in the area.

“Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence. Our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme plays a key part in this and is the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.”

The new Ysgol Nant y Groes is the amalgamation of infants school Ysgol Glan y Môr and junior school Ysgol Pendorlan, which were housed in separate buildings on the same site in Colwyn Bay.

This £2.25 million investment project focussed on improving the school environment through refurbishment of the existing site in addition to developing a physical link connecting the two existing buildings.

In addition to the single storey glazed link area, internal improvements have included room remodelling and construction of a new platform lift and lift shaft, providing access for all pupils to the second storey KS2 area.

Alterations and extensions have also been made to all internal and external services including much needed boiler replacement and improved IT facilities.

Externally, investment has improved playground areas and school frontage, providing playground equipment, and a new 3G MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) facility.

The Ysgol Swyn y Don project involved the amalgamation of the existing infants

and junior schools, Ysgol Babanod Penmaenrhos and Ysgol Iau Tan y Marian, with a new Primary School established on the Ysgol Tan y Marian site.

As part of this £1.97million refurbishment, the building has been extensively renovated, with a new school entrance and reception, extension of two new classrooms (nursery and reception), a redecoration throughout, renovation of the school kitchen, and new electronic whiteboards for each classroom and the hall.

A soft play area for Nursery and Reception Classes has also been established, and a new boiler and heating system installed. The school has also benefited from an extended tarmac play area, nature trail, benches, garden sheds and flower beds.

Leader, Conwy County Borough Council, Councillor Gareth Jones added:

“It’s very important to the Council that we are able to invest in our schools, to allow the governors and staff to provide high quality education and support in buildings that are fit for purpose. I wish the staff and pupils of Ysgol Nant y Groes and Ysgol Swyn y Don all the very best, and I thank the Cabinet Secretary for taking the time to visit both schools today.”

Finance Secretary discusses regional investment in South Wales after Brexit

The ‘Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit’ event follows the publication of the Welsh Government paper of the same name published in December.

The paper proposes a new, simplified and less bureaucratic way of supporting Welsh communities and driving economic development. It calls for every penny of the £370m that Wales currently receives from the EU each year in structural funds to be replaced by the UK government and added to the Welsh Government’s annual budget.

The paper rejects the idea of a Westminster-controlled UK Prosperity Fund and calls for regional investment decisions to continue to be made in Wales. The proposals include:

- simplifying the rules, administration and systems for regional investment funds
- developing plans for the regions of Wales led by partnerships involving local authorities, businesses and communities in those areas
- regional investment focussed on places where it is needed

The event will be an opportunity to discuss the proposals about the future approach to regional investment once our current European Structural and Investment programmes come to an end.

Mark Drakeford said:

“The publication of the ‘Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit’ paper was very much the beginning of a process where we want to work with as many people, organisations and businesses as possible in this process to help inform a new approach to regional investment policy that will maximise the potential of every part of Wales.”

This event is the second of 2 public engagement events on regional investment after Brexit. The first event took place in Bangor University last week (18 January) where Lesley Griffiths AM, the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, addressed a forum of business and council leaders based in North Wales.

Mark Drakeford added,

“Our intention is not simply to replace existing EU programmes by other means. This is an opportunity to think differently and work differently in ways which link policies together across portfolios and organisations.

“This will mean even closer alignment to approaches for local government reform, the regionalisation of economic development policy, and other Welsh Government priorities identified in ‘Prosperity for All’.”

EU funding boost for £2.5m scheme to help people in South Wales into work

Led by Newport Council and supported by £1.3m of EU funding, the Journey2Work initiative will provide specialist support to long-term unemployed people over 25 in Newport, Monmouthshire and Cardiff.

The project will provide mentoring, training and financial support for travel costs and work clothes as well as volunteering opportunities to people who face significant barriers to securing work.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“Supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable people to gain new skills will help them to take the next steps into employment. I am pleased EU funds are being invested to increase learning, tackle poverty and support a more inclusive society in Wales.”

Councillor Gail Giles, Newport Council’s cabinet member for education and skills added:

“Providing the right support to people to help them into work is so important – not just for individuals but for our wider communities. I am delighted money is being invested in this project and that Newport is able to lead on this initiative.”

The project is being delivered in partnership with Monmouthshire Housing Association and Cardiff Council and will work with people living in social housing.

Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill gains Royal Assent

To mark this significant milestone, First Minister Carwyn Jones and Education Secretary Kirsty Williams visited Ysgol Penmaes in Brecon on Monday.

This forward-looking school provides high quality specialist education for pupils aged 3-19 with a wide range of learning difficulties.

During the visit the First Minister and Education Secretary were given a tour of the school by Head Teacher, Julie Kay and they also spoke with staff and pupils to hear their views on how they feel this Bill will help them.

The wide-ranging legislation contains eleven main aims and will be backed up by an ambitious wider programme of reforms, measures, subordinate legislation and an Additional Learning Needs Code, which will sit alongside the Bill.

Speaking ahead of the Bill gaining Royal Assent and highlighting why this legislation is so important, the First Minister said:

“Nearly a quarter of learners in Wales will experience some form of additional learning need (ALN) during their early years or education and this Bill places them at the very heart of our new system.

“Ysgol Penmaes is a great example of a school that puts children and young people’s needs first and it is only right that the legislative system which underpins the school’s approach continues to be fit for purpose.

“This new Bill will pave the way for a radical new approach, driving improvements in standards to ensure all learners are supported to meet their full potential. Essentially it brings the entire legislative framework into a 21st Century enabling us to effectively support learners with ALN through their education journey.”

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams added:

“It was brilliant to meet with staff and pupils at Ysgol Penmaes on Monday and see how this school is supporting young people with additional learning needs to get the very best from their education.

“We have engaged heavily with a wide range of people and groups on the development of this legislation to make sure we got it right and today is an historic day for education in Wales.

“This Bill includes a range of aims to strengthen the ALN system and focusses on identifying those with ALN needs as early as possible and working with them and their families to plan the right support.”

Outlining how the legislation will help to support Ysgol Penmaes and its pupils, Head Teacher, Julie Kay said:

“I welcome the fact this new system supports 0-25 year olds and places children and young people at the very heart of that support.

“For learners to have their own individual plan that they have been involved in producing and that is based around what is important to them is very positive; it will especially help our learners in ensuring the process is more seamless and supportive of their needs when they reach the point of transition and move to their post-school provision.”

The Welsh Government has already outlined a challenging but realistic

timeframe for implementing the new system, which is due to commence in September 2020, should last three years, with completion expected by the end of 2023. It has also committed £20m of funding to the transformation programme over the course of this Assembly.

Abolition of the Right to Buy legislation receives Royal Assent

At an official Sealing Ceremony held today (January 24) in Cardiff, the Abolition of the Right to Buy and Associated Rights (Wales) Bill became an Act of the Assembly.

The Bill aims to protect the stock of social housing in Wales from further reduction, ensuring it is available to provide safe, secure and affordable housing for people who are unable to buy or rent a home of their own. It complements other actions being taken by the Welsh Government to increase the supply of housing.

Minister for Housing and Regeneration Rebecca Evans AM said:

“Between 1981 and 2016, over 139,000 local authority and housing association homes were sold off under the Right to Buy.

“We know this has led to many people, including many vulnerable people, waiting longer to access a home that they can afford. This legislation will give social landlords more confidence to invest in new housing, by removing the risk of these homes being sold after only a few years.

“We are committed to creating 20,000 more affordable homes by 2021, and we are supporting social landlords to help us to achieve this.

“We will shortly be publishing more information for tenants which will be circulated by their landlords, to better explain what this Act means for them.

“By protecting the stock of social housing in Wales, we are ensuring it is available for the long term to provide safe, secure and affordable homes for the people of Wales.”

This Bill was introduced last March, following a White Paper consultation in 2015, and now passed, abolishes all variations of the Right to Buy, including the Preserved Right to Buy and the Right to Acquire.

Right to Buy will finally be abolished on the 26 January 2019 for existing

properties, one year after Royal Assent. But to encourage investment in new homes, the rights will end for homes that are new to the social housing stock, and therefore have no existing tenants, two months after Royal Assent, on the 24th of March 2018.