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CUTTING-EDGE UPGRADE TO HISTORIC FARM SCHOOL BOOSTS RURAL EDUCATION IN THE WINELANDS

South Africa, Worcester, Friday, 20 September 2019; **A STATE-OF-THE-ART** school for farm community children has opened its doors on the outskirts of Worcester. The new Botha's Halte Primary School is the result of a private-public partnership that harnessed top level educational, commercial and design skills and experience, to make the much-needed rural facility a reality.

Minister of Education, Western Cape, Debbie Schäfer, who officially inaugurated the new school building at Botha's Halte Primary School on Friday 20 September, says that Botha's Halte is one of the greatest examples of what we can achieve in education and as a society if we work together.

"Our values as the Western Cape Government are Caring, Competence, Accountability, Integrity, Innovation and Responsiveness. And our motto for some time has been "Better together". This school embodies every one of those. Not only does it embody our values as a Government, but it also greatly assists us in ensuring that the learners of this rural farming community are prepared for the 21st Century."

The original school was founded during the 1920's and was known as "Anna Zaal". Comprising a single hall, it served as the first school building on the property and has been restored as the new focus and reception area for the school. The new Botha's

Halte Primary School design was undertaken by architectural firm Meyer & Associates, a practice with an extensive range of national education sector projects under its belt.

Central to the school's design focus was to showcase educational best practice from around the world by making digital technology available throughout the teaching spaces. All classrooms are equipped with the latest technology such as e-beams which are connected to the internet.

According to Minister Schäfer, one of the Western Cape Government's strategic priorities is to ensure that learners are 'digitally literate'.

"Every day we are witnessing a revolution in how our learners acquire knowledge and skills in a digital world. So, in order to ensure that our children are being equipped adequately to be economically active when they leave school, we place a very high emphasis on e-Learning. Digital technologies are changing the way that learners learn, the way teachers teach, and where and when learning takes place."

"Botha's Halte is already demonstrating how 21st century technologies can be used to reach and contribute to quality education in rural and outlying areas of South Africa," says Minister Schäfer.

The fully fitted and furnished buildings can accommodate 240 learners, roughly about double its former capacity. The learners are accommodated in a single stream from Grade R to Grade 7.

The buildings are all tucked into the landscape with the curved roofscape imitating the rolling foothills of the Witzenberg Mountain range, which also acts as the majestic backdrop to the school. The external colours of the buildings are recessively dark, to blend into the landscape, with only minimal bright accents. However, the historical components remain in their original white. To the one side, the Anna Zaal reflects the link with the lime washed building traditions of the past, and on the other, the tower represents a symbol of a green and increasingly ecologically sustainable future.

Inside, the interiors are light and bright, with an abundance of colours to stimulate the creativity of learners. Furniture and equipment have purposely been selected with this design intent in mind.

Included as part of the school is an auditorium-type multipurpose hall, two specialist classrooms with sewing machines, handwork and woodwork equipment, as well as a science laboratory.

A Discovery Centre, where learners can gather in small groups under the “tree-of-knowledge columns”, forms the heart. Here, they make use of the multi-media equipment, computers, a screened-off audio-visual area, and good old-fashioned library books. The area also serves as break-out space from the adjacent classrooms, for group work or individual teaching.

Operationally, the teachers involved with the school are provided continuous training for the use of the high-tech learning aids. They are also supported by the WCEDs and SUNCEP (University of Stellenbosch Centre for Pedagogy in the faculty of Education).

Mark Saint Pôl, Director of Square One Landscape Architects, who spearheaded the careful design and integration of the external elements of the school, explains that best practice landscape architecture principles have been used which allows the landscape to harvest, filter and store all excess waste and storm water run-off in a bio-filtration retention basin which also serves as an attractive forecourt for the school. This water is then reused for irrigation and creates a natural habitat for indigenous wetland species. Dry river beds have been designed to not only prevent seasonal flooding, but create nature-play environments and interactive learning opportunities.

The building and surrounding spaces are sensitively integrated into the landscape through planted roofs that act as natural insulation to the harsh external climatic conditions.

A substantial play space at the back of the school, featuring two Astro turf play areas (one for older learners for formal and competitive play with stepped spectator seating, and the other a secure exploratory play area for younger learners) takes full advantage of the sunken building profile to create an environment that is sheltered from the prevailing summer winds. The play elements embrace the site's unique topography to incorporate embankments for running, clambering, rope climbing and sliding.

Food production is an important part of the school and the addition of a citrus courtyard and a large food garden mean that the learners have the chance to grow and eat their own produce. The food garden supplies nutritional food to the feeding kitchen which is designed as part of the school building complex and forms a critical part of the WCED school feeding scheme for learners from disadvantaged communities. In addition, a partnership with the adjacent farm will allow them to use the surplus produce in their estate restaurant, Bosjes Kombuis.

From an environmental perspective, new solar and wind generator capacity now allow the buildings to function largely independent of the electrical Eskom grid. The benefits of these aspects are clearly demonstrated to learners via interactive displays throughout the school.

Rain and storm water is harvested for irrigation and stored in a large reservoir under the school buildings. The reservoir is topped up by a borehole as well as with the clean, treated effluent from a sewerage package plant.

A large rugby field/soccer pitch is also planned for the lower parts of the site, which would be able to be shared with the broader community after hours and over weekends.

“Efficient and equitable access to education in South Africa is one of our greatest challenges, and I have a particular concern for rural communities,” says Minister

Schäfer. *"Many people do not pay attention to the rural communities, and so I am very pleased that this school has been built in a rural community so that our rural learners can also access the best education possible, with modern facilities."*

"Schools such as Botha's Halte change lives. I have witnessed first-hand how they can change communities' attitudes towards education and decrease learner drop out and apathy. They are giving the learners and their communities hope."

The new primary school complex is located off the R43 in the Breede River Valley, between the Witzenberg and Slanghoek mountain ranges. In operation since April, the school's official inauguration took place today at the close of term.

For press assistance contact Ian Manley of Manley Communications on 0861 MANLEY (626 539), email premierbrands@manley-communications.com or visit the Press Room of Manley Communications at www.manley-communications.com.

#bothashalte #bosjes #breedevalley

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Note to editors:

BOSJES Trust is the charitable arm of Bosjes, a tourist destination, committed to socio and economic upliftment of the area by supporting and employing locally.

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