

More than a birthday



The vocal ensemble performing the school song at the gala dinner

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IT'S something of a given for 10th anniversaries to be celebrated with aplomb. Not limited to marriages, endeavours in various fields – including education – require a great deal of commitment, and a decade can seem like an eternity in some cases.

Lately, my aside, it is also a telling hallmark of stability and 10 years of growth in the business speaks volumes of the confidence given to you by the community.

In short, there is plenty of motivation to have a blast, and that is precisely what the Australian International School Malaysia (AISM) did during its 10th Anniversary Foundation Gala Dinner recently.

Held at the Prince Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, the dinner brought together the who's who of the school community from former school captains to stakeholders.

There were also a number of sponsors around – but this was by no means a sign of an institution struggling with financial woes. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

AISM, which is part of the Taylor's Education Group, decided that their 10th anniversary would be the best time to unveil the Matilda project, an initiative aimed at supporting 28 Sabahan children from Kampung Liposu and Kampung Kelobang.

Due to the hilly terrain and occasional bad weather, pupils from these villages spend up to two-and-a-half hours every day to get to SK Pukak – the only primary school in the area.

The unfavourable conditions prevented many from going to school consistently, but the problem was resolved – at least for a while – with the construction of Azarua Desi Pukak, a hostel near the school managed by the Good Shepherd Welfare Centre.

However, maintaining the hostel does not come cheap.

Lager to overcome these challenges, AISM ensured that their night was dedicated to fundraising activities.

And thanks to impressive performances by the school's students and a carpet audience, the party mood was not lacking throughout the night.

Kicking things off, guests were treated to the debut of the school's song by the AISM vocal ensemble. Written and composed by the students, the first recording of the song was auctioned and the

winning bid of RM2,300 was sufficient to sponsor a child's education for the Matilda project.

The carpet auction took a total of RM14,000 and proceeds from the sale of a special anniversary yearbook, the new school song CD and a raffle organised by the school's parent association contributed to Matilda as well.

Coupled with contributions from the sponsors, the gala dinner raised more than RM85,000 and the project will continue throughout the year until the final goal of RM1.13 million is reached.

AISM principal Anne-Marie Armstrong, who championed the project, said that 16 of the 28 children had been sponsored and expressed confidence that the remaining 12 child sponsorships would be secured by the end of the year.

"The Matilda project is an ongoing commitment by AISM to support another community in need," she said. "I believe that the entire school community, especially the children, will benefit from this long-term commitment."

Although it was officially unveiled this year, the Matilda initiative complements the various corporate social responsibility (CSR)

driven Taylor's is involved in. In his speech, Taylor's CEO Datuk Loy Teik Ngan recollects the education group's legacy outreach efforts and the first initiative began in 2005 when the group re-examined the reasons which underpinned their presence in the education business.

"We wanted to educate the world," he said. "Going to school is more than just getting the grades or having a good time – it's far more than that."

"It's also about impact and we want to inspire students with the knowledge that they can make a positive change in the lives of others."

But that is easier said than done as this was demonstrated when Loy shared a personal testimony which set his heart on social change.

It began when Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Mazlan Ngahli contacted Loy and asked whether he could donate RM50,000 to construct a hostel in his constituency to enhance access to education.

"These students must not be seen as deprived but life in rural areas can prevent them from accessing various opportunities," explained Loy.

he paid a visit.

Seeing how impactful it was, Loy decided that this would be the area that Taylor's would focus on and the education group has bankrolled such projects since 2006.

Loy added that this year, the education group will venture to Bario, Sarawak.

"We want to do things differently this time and Taylor's will not merely pump in the cash," he said. "In fact, we want to get involved in the physical construction of the hostel so all able-bodied men are encouraged to sign up."

Also present at the event was the new Australian High Commissioner, Miles Kapa who praised the Matilda initiative as it provided much-needed assistance for less fortunate students.

"It shows that school can be much more than a place for knowledge and Matilda must be commended as it invokes a sense of responsibility amongst AISM students," he said.

He added that apart from the Australian expatriate community here, the school also served Malaysia well as it offered good continuity to strong bilateral ties between the two nations.

The first – and only – international school in Malaysia with a full Australian Middle School and Senior School curriculum, AISM is registered with the New South Wales Board of Studies and caters to students from Preparation (age 3) to Year 12 (age 18).