

Two new community schools

Dowland Contracting building schools in Inuvik and Fort Good Hope

by Jeanne Gagnon
Northern News Services
Inuvik/Fort Good Hope

Inuvik's elementary and high school students will learn under one roof once the new combined school opens about three years from now.

Several hundred steel pilings are already in the ground and the structural steel has been erected. The workers are now focused on the wall systems, which poses the biggest challenge, said Patrick McGuinness, chief financial officer for Dowland Contracting. He said the building's envelope must be "air tight" and structurally sound, so a high level of quality control testing will be done to achieve that.

"There is quite a substantial amount of work to be done," he said.

The building's size adds to the challenges, he added.

Construction of the approximately 129,000-square-foot building started in 2007 and is expected to last until the end of 2012 or early 2013. The project is estimated to cost \$92.3 million and is fully funded through the GNWT's infrastructure acquisition plan, said Mike Burns, the assistant deputy minister for Public Works and Services.

The Inuvik-based general contractor has set up an arrangement with local aboriginal groups for on-the-job training and hiring, said McGuinness.

"We have a process here to maximize as best we can the local employment and local hires together with use of local business in the construction of the school," he said.

About 380 students attend the existing Grade 7 to 12 Samuel Hearne Secondary School, built in the 1960s. Principal Roman Mahnic said he's following construction very closely as a section of the new school is about eight metres from the old one.

"Right now, we've got an inefficient heating system. Because of the age of our building, structurally it's not that sound. Definitely being into a new building, I think we're going to have that fresh air and clean air," he said.

He added the new school will enable them to enter into the 21st century and enhance programming in areas such as drama, music, arts, computers and video editing.

The combined school will replace both Sir Alexander Mackenzie and the Samuel Hearne Secondary schools,

which is a good idea, said Mahnic.

"We do so much together, so much in partnership and there is a lot of family ties between the two schools and a lot of friendships. So to bring the two schools under one roof, I think is a really good idea for Inuvik because we are a close community anyway," he said.

Once students and staff have moved in the new school, the old school will be declared surplus by the government, normally starting the process for demolition, said Burns.

Dowland is also working on another school project in the NWT.

Construction of the new Chief T'Selehye School in Fort Good Hope is expected to be complete this November.

"The building is enclosed and the windows are going in," said McGuinness. "The construction of that building is quite well on. We're now getting into the final touch-ups – carpentry, painting, flooring, that type of thing – and finish off electrical and mechanical."

The approximately 30,000-square-foot steel structure is estimated at \$20 million. It's fully funded through the GNWT infrastructure acquisition plan, said Burns.

Obtaining materials, bringing workers to Fort Good Hope and finding accommodations presented some challenges to the Inuvik-based general contractor, as the community is only accessible by plane except when the winter road is operational.

"We have to plan our logistics pretty well to make sure that we take advantage of the barge or the ice roads," McGuinness said. "We barged a lot of material and equipment in there before the last of the year and since then – obviously with the ice road – we've been trucking in quite rapidly. The road will be breaking up shortly so we're in a big push to get most of the material and everything else we need in there. That will last us until the end of June, otherwise we'll have to fly the stuff in."

McGuinness said they hired local labourers and camp workers and use local businesses as much as possible.

"For the community, it's going to be a fantastic building. It will serve not just the school needs, but the community needs over the next 50 years or so," said McGuinness.

About 130 students from

"There is a lot of family ties between the two schools."



photos courtesy of Dowland Contracting

Construction of the new combined elementary and high school in Inuvik progresses last November. The school is expected to open in late 2012 or early 2013.

Kindergarten to 12 attend the existing Chief T'Selehye School, built in the early 1970s with an addition built about a decade later.

Principal Gordon Sutton said he's closely following the construction.


"Right now, it's just watching it take shape and being able to go in now and starting to picture where the classrooms are, where the different things are in it," he said. "This school is really old. With age, you get that run down feeling and students don't treat it with the respect that they should treat it."

He added he's excited about the new school, saying: "It's going to be beautiful."



Construction of the new Chief T'Selehye School in Fort Good Hope as seen in the fall of 2009. The school is set to open late this year.


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