

First drop of paint inaugurates new art room at Williams



By Brock Weir

It doesn't take much to make a newly redecorated room look lived in, but most people are loath to make the first move ? especially if the room in question is intended to be used for something messy.

This was a feeling recently experienced by the staff and students at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School as they moved back into their newly renovated and modernized art room after months of shuttling back and forth throughout the school in less than ideal conditions to allow their creativity to run wild.

?The first paint dripped on the floor was important,? says Williams art teacher Andy McClure with a laugh. ?The first clogged sink. All the firsts. One of the Grade 10s came in and tipped over a bucket of white paint. It hit the floor and went everywhere. One of our other art teachers was here, the student had paint all over themselves and all over the walls, and he said, ?Finally! Now we can all relax because somebody has spilt and it is now officially an art room.?

Upcoming graduates, and soon-to-be Grade 10s were on hand to help cut the ribbon on the new art space last week. While the older students were excited to be back in the room after making due with cramped, confined, and occasionally dark spaces elsewhere in the school, the younger students were eager to begin leaving their mark on the space next year.

?On a simple level, the renovation was just to increase the efficiency of the room and all those things, but also to continue to support the idea that this is a place where creativity, critical thinking, and community involvement is happening, where we can continue to be a hub and a centre of new things to happen.?

The art room renovation is part of an extensive and ongoing plan of renovation at Aurora's oldest operational high school. The art room itself was constructed in 1956 and very little about it had changed since then. According to Principal Christopher Hilmer, a lot of thought was put into how this space could be turned into the ideal art room.

?We really put some thought into how we could make this a practical space where creativity can still run free,? he says. ?With the room being so long and narrow, it wasn't an efficient teaching and instructional space because you would have the teacher at one end and the students so far away at the other end. Because it was so narrow, there weren't a lot of options for storage as well.?

Storage, he says, was a top priority, as was keeping the maple strip flooring which combines with sunlight coming in from the courtyard windows to provide ideal conditions for art.

While Mr. McClure is looking forward to the space to be complete, he is also looking forward to a fresh crop of students getting into this room on the ground level.

?The nice thing about this is we have a new generation of students all coming in and what we have said to them is they are actually

part of the planning and organization of this space," he says. "What they tell us is what is working and what is not working and they will be a part of the continuum of how this room functions and operates. We're still learning how to adapt to the space that we have. The kids that are coming in are now part of the way in which the room is being shaped."

Science labs, structurally untouched since 1952, have now been upgraded with new lab stations, allowing for space both for desks for traditional classwork as well as experiments, new heating systems and lighting. All of this started when Williams looked to upgrade their boiler systems and the school board looked for ways to get the best bang for their buck on the project.

Further renovations on the docket include work on athletic spaces such as the weight room.