

**THEY'RE ALL BEAMING, SCOTTY: Heronsgate launch their new outdoor classroom**



# In a class of its own

Primary lessons learned in the great outdoors

by Pat Greenwood

**SOMETHING** from outer space has landed in Heronsgate School. Well, that's what the Mayor of Greenwich Allan MacCarthy thinks!

The mayor was at the 550-pupil primary in Whinchat Road, Thamesmead, with Cllr Jackie Smith - the council's cabinet member for children's and young people's services - to officially open the 'Pod', their new outdoor classroom.

It's utterly unique - designed from scratch by Camden-based architects Catherine Burd and Buddy Haward, with the help of the pupils.

It's a self-assembly job made from specially-treated polyester, and laminated plywood from Scandinavia which has been cut out like a clothes pattern using the latest computer-technology.

The tiered seating can double up as desk-tops and the classroom floor is astro-turf.

The Mayor asked the children: "How many people think it looks like a flying saucer? I hope you'll enjoy learning in it."

Cllr Jackie Smith told GT: "I think it's wonderful! It will give the children a real opportunity to experience the 'outdoors' in a learning environment."

The story of the Pod started a couple of years ago when the two young North London architects volunteered to work with some Heronsgate nine-year-olds as part of a London-wide challenge to create a sustainable school building.

The results from their drawing board ended up in front of judges at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) - and Heronsgate, recently graded an "outstanding" school by inspectors,



**FUN WAY TO LEARN: one of the first lessons in the new classroom**

won "best in show" against entries from both primary and secondary schools across the capital.

Later, Heronsgate headteacher Nicholas Prockter managed to find the money to turn the award-winning design into reality for the children.

And the outdoor classroom has landed - right outside the school's Key Stage 2 block!

Ronke, aged 10, and nine-year-olds Jalini and Michael, all from Thamesmead, told GT how much they were enjoying the new space. Jalini said: "We've done some drama, acting out different animals in there. I was a lion!" Michael said: "I've done some work at

the desk. It's fun doing our writing outside."

Their headteacher said: "At Heronsgate, teachers try wherever possible to bring the outside in. Classrooms and corridors are brimming with plants, trees and flowers and the main entrance contains a huge pond bursting with natural life.

"The new building has surpassed all our expectations. The classroom provides an excellent space for learning with natural light and fresh air."

He added: "The building backs onto a huge outdoor environmental area where pupils can pond-dip or watch birds feeding on the school web cams."