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Books cast aside for dinosaur fun in Sidmouth Park

Lessons on the Jurassic period, or a practical class in dinosaur aviation? That was the choice facing Leyton school children today and predictably it was the dinosaur which won out, as Dawlish Primary School Year 4 children converged on Sidmouth Park to test their flying skills on the new resident pterodactyl.

The pterodactyl, carved from a hunk of reclaimed cedar, didn't mind 30 small pairs of feet clambering over it. Featuring dramatic extended 'wings' of timber and chains, it is specifically designed to be climbed and forms the centrepiece of a spectacular new natural play area in the park – designed and built by charity London Play and funded by Waltham Forest Council. As well as the dinosaur, the play area features play trees, logs and a new artificial safety surface.

Unbeknown to many Waltham Forest residents, Leader of the Council Chris Robbins holds a diploma in dinosaur aviation, and was on hand to offer advice and oversee the issuing of Dinosaur Club Flying Licences to those who proved their competency.

Speaking at the event, Chris said: “The pterodactyl is great – watching the kids trying their flying skills today shows how such innovative natural play features have the potential not only to inspire children to be physically active but also to stimulate their imaginations.”

The council, which has invested around £2m in play areas in the past 18 months, has embraced similarly creative play features in other parks across the borough. Pirate ships, dragons and other animals are among the gems to be found – usually by following the excited screams of children.

Lucy, aged 8, clutching her freshly-acquired licence said: “It’s really fun; you can play different games like monsters!” Hasan, also 8, added: “I can’t wait to play on it and throw my ball from it!” Classmate Hannah, who comes to the park every weekend, was pleased with the new addition. “It’s so fun because it’s like you’re climbing a mountain,” she said.

Watching the new dinosaur pilots happily clambering over the pterodactyl’s wings London Play trustee Barry Walden commented: “This is exactly the sort of result we hope to achieve through our work. We want to give more of London’s children more opportunities to play outdoors freely. We look forward to working with other London councils that are committed to upholding this fundamental human right of the capital’s children.”

For media enquiries please contact:

- Fiona Sutherland, London Play Policy and Communications manager via fiona@londonplay.org.uk or 0203 384 8513.

Notes to editor

1. London Play is a small charity that strives to get more children in London playing out more often. We promote children’s right to play, campaign for more and improved out-of-school play services for children and young people across London, and support play providers in the capital. We also directly provide more play opportunities for children by supporting residents and councils to develop play streets, building nature play areas and running events.
2. London Play’s unique natural play design and build service is available to any public, private or voluntary organisation. 100% of profits are invested into London Play’s core charitable activities. Please contact max@londonplay.org.uk to discuss your requirements. Will Lee is a Watford-based chainsaw carver who was named European ChainsawCarving Champion in 2011. www.chainsaw-carvings.co.uk

3. London Play's work is supported by a variety of funders including the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Programme, People's Millions, Department of Health and the Tudor Trust.

89-93 Fonthill Road, London N4 3JH - www.londonplay.org.uk
phone: 0203 384 8510 - email: info@londonplay.org.uk

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