



MASH hysteria



MASH STREET KIDS . . . pupils and staff of Yattendon Primary with Peter and farmer Graham

THE Sun has cultivated an army of more than a MILLION green-fingered schoolchildren.

More than 11,000 primary schools are planting their spuds this week thanks to our Potatoes for Schools competition in association with the Potato Council.

At the national launch on Monday at Newbury Showground, I chatted with 200 pupils from schools across West Berkshire who are all growing potatoes.

They also got to meet Graham Nichols, a Gloucestershire potato farmer, who gave them the benefit of his expertise and were shown



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how to make potato salad and potato cakes from their crops.

It was great to be surrounded by the excited, bright-eyed youngsters clutching their sprouting potatoes in egg boxes.

They couldn't wait to put their hands into the compost and get planting. One lad on the way out said it had been his "best school

trip ever". I think he may have been influenced by the potato chocolate cake he'd eaten earlier.

Sue Clackett, head of Cold Ash St Mark's Primary, Thatcham, said: "The children started gardening last Easter, digging up part of the school field. They love being out in the fresh air."

Joanne Poole, from Parlaunt Park Primary School, Langley, now has a school allotment where the children she teaches have also been growing rhubarb, pumpkins, marrows and strawberries.

Schools who grow the heaviest crops this year will win an allotment makeover. Runners-up get picnic tables. The Sun is also

offering Suttons Seeds vouchers worth £350 for the heaviest single potato grown and for the largest number from one pot.

Pupils around the country have been planting two varieties of spud, Rocket and Vale's Emerald. As the name suggests, Rocket is very fast-growing. It's also one of the very earliest varieties. Vale's Emerald is a more recent introduction of very high quality and good taste.

The junior growers, including those from Yattendon Primary, above, will "tip out" their crops for judging in the third week of June.

It's too late to enter this year's contest but to take part next year see potatoesforschools.org.uk.