

A green house of rare power

■ By Peter Trott

A GROUP of students from South Leeming Primary School spent yesterday learning about recycling and global warming in one of Australia's best environmental teaching sites.

The City of Melville's \$1.4 million Piney Lakes Environmental Education Centre has been named best building in the Banksia Environmental Foundation's 2002 national awards.

The building is not connected to mains power, water or sewerage but has capacity for up to 600 children a week to attend sessions in the centre or in the adjoining bush and wetland areas.

Power comes from a wind generator charging batteries, supplemented by two solar panel sets.

The smaller set generates as much power as the bigger set and demonstrates the efficiencies of the process.

When extra visitors put more load on the system, a diesel generator runs on biodiesel, a fuel made from recycled cooking oil, canola oil and other hydrocarbons.

Rainwater is collected from the roof and pumped by solar power into header tanks.



Comparing notes: Melville environmental programs officer Ian Davis talks to South Leeming students Matt Olivieri, Christine La Greca and Jesse Robins about the award-winning building. PICTURE: ROD TAYLOR

A Gough hybrid toilet system using bacteria breaks down sewage.

Education officer Carolyn Ryder, a Murdoch University final-year science student, said the students were fascinated at seeing the toilet operate.

She allowed each group to flush a couple of Weetbix down the toilet to watch them go through a section of see-through plumbing. The building incorporates recycled timber.

Insulation and placement of windows

maximises warmth and light in winter and minimises heat in summer.

The city council's environmental programs officer, Ian Davis, said the project had been supported by Melville Rotary Club and corporate and agency sponsors.

Banksia award judges said the design pushed the envelope to produce a building which was sensitive to the local and wider environment on a very tight budget and provided an educational experience of the highest order.