

Cosmonaut Vladimir Solovyov

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This is the story of two Russian cosmonauts who visited the city this week - and the pupils from Brackensdale Junior School and Reigate Junior School who boldly went to meet them.

If an astronaut told you that he believed in aliens you might start taking the X-Files a bit more seriously.

Veteran spaceman Vladimir Solovev has spent more than a year of his life in space and although he hasn't actually seen little green men he's sure they are out there somewhere.

Mr Solovev and fellow cosmonaut Alexander Martynov spoke at Mackworth College after staff arranged for the pair to visit Derby.

As part of a grueling three-day tour of the area, which ended yesterday, the cosmonauts visited the university, Rolls-Royce, and spoke to local school children.

For the two men, talking to the children was one of the most enjoyable aspects of their visit - and one that prompted talk of space toilets and aliens.

"People always seem to be interested in how spacemen go to the toilet, they are fascinated, but it is understandable given the problems with weightlessness and such," said Mr Solovev.

"The other thing people always ask us is about space aliens - but that is not necessarily a bad thing."

If you believe the Washington Post Mr Solovev has already come face-to-face with beings from another planet and seven angels who surrounded his craft on a mission in 1984.

He added: "I could not believe they put that in such a serious paper.

"I've never seen any aliens but I am sure we are not alone in the universe."