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The Principal Who Knows Every Student by Name Marks a Decade at the Helm

“Making a child feel safe and connected is our core business. If we get that right, we’re changing the rest of their life.”

— Neil Scott, Principal, St Kilda Park Primary School

From a “Short Stay” to a Lifelong Calling

What began as a short stopover in Australia has become a 16-year journey for Neil Scott, and the past 10 of those years have been spent as Principal of St Kilda Park Primary School (SKiPPS), a place he now calls home.

“I was on a working holiday visa, this was only ever meant to be a year or two,” he says. “I would never have guessed that 16 years later I would still be here.”

For Scott, staying was never about career ambition - it was about connection.

“The way that St Kilda Park Primary School and the community welcomed me made me feel like I was part of something I didn’t want to leave.”

He still remembers his first day clearly. Arriving “fresh off the boat from the UK,” he stepped into a school that immediately stood out.

“Really unique,” he says. “There was a clear philosophy and a clear identity, fiercely kept and guarded by the staff. It felt really special.”

More than a decade on, that identity remains firmly intact - but what has deepened is the sense of belonging around it.

“We are still really proud of what SKiPPS is,” he says. “We’re not just an interchangeable, generic primary school.”

What now defines the school most, however, is the feeling it gives families from the moment they arrive.

“We’re a friendlier, more open and more responsive place than we were back then,” he says. “And we genuinely want families to feel welcome and to feel part of the school from the very beginning.”

“As a parent, there’s something incredibly moving about watching your child walk into a place where they feel safe, known, and genuinely valued every single day” – Abby Finn (parent of Georgie and Isabella, Y1 and Y3)

Where Families Don't Just Belong - They Shape the School

At SKiPPS, connection is not an add-on, it is part of everyday life.

Scott says families play an active and valued role in shaping the school community.

“The level of involvement and engagement from our families is incredible,” he says. “It’s not something you see everywhere.”

From the school Fete to the Celebration of the Arts (COTA), to everyday classroom interactions, families are present and deeply involved.

“They bring ideas, energy and time,” he says. “And that really adds to what the school feels like for the children.”

Ten Years of Progress, Without Losing the Soul

Over the past decade, SKiPPS has strengthened its teaching and learning while holding firmly to its culture.

“Our staff work together incredibly well and build on each other’s strengths,” Scott says. “The education children receive now is far stronger than it was 10 years ago, and far fewer children are left behind.”

But just as important, he says, is what has not changed.

“We’ve done that without losing the feel of the school,” he explains. “Children still feel safe, welcome and happy, but with a much higher level of expectation.”

It is a balance he is deeply proud of.

“We’ve lifted the rigour without losing the human side of what makes this place special.”

Leadership Built on Knowing Every Child

For Scott, leadership starts and ends with relationships.

“I really, really value knowing every child,” he says. “They feel seen, they feel known.”

That connection is built in the everyday moments - walking through classrooms, being in the yard, and taking the time to understand each child’s world.

“When a child feels known, they feel safe,” he says. “And when they feel safe, they can learn, take risks and build friendships.”

For some students, those small moments matter most.

“Sometimes it’s the small, consistent moments that make the biggest difference,” he says. “Using their name, checking in, showing you remember - that can change how a child feels about school.”

And for Scott, that sits at the heart of education.

“Making a child feel safe and connected is our core business,” he says. “If we get that right, we’re changing the rest of their life.”

“As a parent of two children at SKiPPS, I’ve seen firsthand how much care, energy and thought Neil pours into the school community every single day. Going above and beyond isn’t the exception, it’s simply business as usual for Neil and the SKiPPS staff and teachers” – Matthew Barbuto (parent)

A Leadership Team Powered by Care and Commitment

Scott is quick to acknowledge that this culture is not built alone, highlighting the role of Assistant Principal Jac Morphy.

“I couldn’t speak more highly of Jac,” he says. “She’s incredibly friendly, thoughtful and empathetic, and outstanding at building relationships with students, staff and families.”

He describes her as someone who mirrors the school’s wider culture of care.

“She’s never too busy. She’ll drop everything for people. She’s always on, always bubbly, always there.”

But behind that warmth is significant commitment.

“The 12-hour days, and the effort behind the scenes are huge,” he says. “That consistency, that care - that’s what really makes the school what it is.”

Public Education at Its Best - Quietly Exceptional

Scott is also passionate about the value of public education.

“What we provide would stack up with any school in the state,” he says. “There’s often an assumption that private must mean better, but that really underestimates the work happening in public schools like ours.”

And when asked what SKiPPS does exceptionally well without even noticing it, he returns to its culture.

“The way families are welcomed, involved and genuinely engaged - that’s not something you see everywhere,” he says. “But here, it just becomes part of everyday life.”

Always Better Than Yesterday

One of Scott’s proudest moments came during a recent school review at the end of 2025.

“The positivity made me incredibly proud,” he says. “It reflected both who we are and how far we’ve come.”

But he is quick to add that improvement never stops.

“I will always focus on the one thing we could be doing better,” he says. “There’s a restless energy - I’m always looking to improve.”

A Future Built on Strength and Belonging

Looking ahead, Scott is confident about the school’s direction.

“We’re on an incredibly strong pathway,” he says. “In the next five to 10 years, I think we’ll be seen as a system-leading school.”

That confidence comes from work already underway in classrooms, with more consistent, evidence-based teaching lifting outcomes while preserving the school’s warmth and identity.

“We’re already seeing improvements,” he says. “And that will only strengthen as the approach becomes more embedded.”

But at its core, he says, the vision remains simple.

“It’s not just about academics,” he explains. “It’s about making sure every child feels safe, connected and ready to learn.”

For Scott, the goal is not change for its own sake - but strengthening what already exists.

“We’ve kept the special identity people love, and we’ve made strong improvements on top of that,” he says.

The Human Side of Leadership

When asked to describe the role in one image, Scott doesn’t hesitate - he laughs.

“If I had to choose an emoji, it would be the laughing, crying one.”

For him, that captures the reality of school leadership.

“It’s an emotional rollercoaster every day,” he says. “And if you don’t feel that, you’re probably not doing it properly.”

And then there are the students, who keep things very real.

“I’ve been asked why I don’t have any hair, and what that spot is on my face,” he laughs. “Kids are brilliant - they’re just so raw.”

He says those moments are part of what makes the job so grounding.

“You’ve got kids who will completely roast you one minute and then want to tell you about their weekend the next,” he says. “It keeps you honest.”

But beneath it all, he says, is something lasting.

“It really is full-on, but it’s also full of moments that stop you in your tracks and remind you exactly why you do it.”

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