

The small school with a big heart, and strong connection to nature

Words: Lara Pacillo

In today's fast-paced world, it can be easy for children to become disconnected from nature. Many educators recognise this and are incorporating 'Nature Education' into their curriculum.

Nature education teaches students problem-solving and allows children to form a connection with their surroundings. It's a hands-on approach to learning, and it's a concept that Scott Creek Primary School is built upon.

Located amongst the forest of the Adelaide Hills, the small primary school which was established in 1893, blends traditional teaching methods with the benefits of being surrounded by nature.

"We want our students to learn by doing, and connecting with nature," says the new Principal Anthony McIver. "Nature education involves taking students out of the classroom for activities like writing stories or designing and constructing. It's a hands-on approach that encourages exploration and discovery."

Scott Creek's outdoor learning program provides students with opportunities to engage with nature on a daily basis. With its grounds encompassing pine forest, bushland, an oval, and other large play spaces, students can truly connect with the environment.

Nature education at Scott Creek Primary goes beyond gardening and exploration — it also includes building and investigation. Students have participated in creating Kids' Creek, a frog pond, and skink sun lounge.

Mr McIver emphasises that connecting with nature is fundamental to a child's mental and physical health. Learning outdoors encourages curiosity and creativity to flourish. With experience in mainstream and trauma-informed schools, Mr McIver was drawn to Scott Creek Primary as he recognised the benefits of this environment for learning.

Taking on the 'Scott Creek Nature Trail' is a daily occurrence for students, while meeting in morning *Palti Circles* — which represents a meeting place valuing connection where members of the community are listened to and respected — is also a regular ritual and one of many ways the school connects to the Peramangk and Kurna land.

Hunter (Year 6 student), shares that gardening is his favourite part of Scott Creek Primary, as this allows him to problem solve and participate in hands-on learning. Hazel, also in Year 6, enjoys the outdoor community at the school. "I just really like being outdoors," she says. "We have fires when it's safe to and we get to cook on it. Sometimes we cook apples, fish — we've done bananas and chocolate before too." Another aspect that Hazel loves about Scott Creek is its small size. The school provides a supportive and nurturing environment where students can thrive.

"Being in a small school means that students receive more individual attention," Mr McIver says. "Our teachers can focus on each student's individual needs, and we can tailor our teaching methods to suit each student's learning styles."

This individual attention helps students develop a deeper understanding of subjects and builds their confidence. It also fosters a strong sense of community, where everyone knows each other and feels a sense of belonging.

"At Scott Creek, we are like a big family," Mr McIver says. "Everyone looks out for each other, and we all work together to create a positive learning environment." The school also values community connections, which is evident through their close ties with the *Scott Creek Progress Association*, as well as the *Scott Creek Conservation Park*.

Scott Creek also places a strong emphasis on the performing arts, offering singing, drumming, ukulele lessons, and integrated drama in the curriculum. This focus allows students to express themselves creatively and gain confidence.

Students also cultivate produce in the 'Juicy Garden', learning about sustainability and the importance of caring for the environment. Students are also responsible for taking care of the school chooks – *Rosetta* and *Nutella*. Understanding the origins of grown food and the impact of their actions, empowers Scott Creek students to become active citizens ready to make a positive impact on their community and the planet.

In a world dominated by technology and increasing screen time, the benefits of nature education and attending a small school like Scott Creek become increasingly evident. By providing students with a connection to nature, a supportive community, and the skills needed to thrive, schools like Scott Creek shape the next generation of leaders and problem solvers.

As Mr McIver says, "At Scott Creek, we are preparing our students for life. We are giving them the skills they need to succeed, both in and out of the classroom."