

## Jesuit aged 99 sets record as world's oldest schoolteacher



As the world's oldest full-time teacher, Sydney priest Geoffrey Schneider knows a thing or two about how to bring the best out of students.

The secret, according to the 99-year-old, is “a mountain of patience”.

“If things are going wrong, don't start shouting. Just proceed quietly and things will settle down eventually,” said Father Schneider, who turns 100 in December.

“Their books will eventually open.”

The Jesuit priest has taught at schools in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, shaping the intellects and values of leading figures of Australian government, business, academia and sport, including Tony Abbott.

But as most workers switch between jobs or eagerly plan their retirement, Father Schneider yesterday signalled no intention of ending his 47-year tenure at Sydney's St Aloysius' College, where he is touted as the world's oldest full-time teacher.

Nobody has so far come forward to challenge that title.

“Retirement?,” he says.

“So I can read the paper every morning and then forget what's in it?”

“That's what a retired friend told me happens to him,” he said, recounting a recent visit to a home for retired priests.

“At 3pm there's afternoon tea and if you don't turn up in the first minute they come knock on your door and say, ‘It's tea time now’.

“Really, I shouldn't be frightened of it, but it just doesn't appeal to me. I just feel I can be more useful

here.”

Father Schneider’s thousands of former pupils also include Liberal frontbencher Joe Hockey, ABC political correspondent Mark Simkin and Wallabies star Pat McCabe.

Asked whether Mr Abbott was an unruly youngster, Father Schneider chuckled he could never “invent anything better than has been in the news of late”.

He politely added neither Mr Abbott nor Mr Hockey were particularly “troublesome children”.

Father Schneider’s ripe age has some particular advantages, such as his lived experience of 20th century history and a handy grasp of Latin, preferred by some older Catholics.

He enjoys a fierce popularity at St Aloysius’.

In the early 1990s, Year 3 students were asked to name a new building after their favourite Jesuit saint. Innocently, they chose “Saint” Schneider.

“I didn’t worry about it at the time, really, but after that we received a direction that the Jesuits were not to have any buildings named after them while they are alive,” he said.

“I don’t believe it wasn’t a direct consequence of what happened, but they managed to name the building before that order came down.”

Father Schneider is also the namesake of the annual Schneider Cup, which recognises excellence in soccer and rugby.

UCA News - Jared Owens