

## **Sam Anderson – Prefect (Community Engagement)**

### **Keynote Speech 2026**

Think about this for a moment.

You are not just one person.

To some people, you may be quiet – almost invisible, to others, you never stop talking. Some remember you for your kindness, others for the moment you walked away. You are a villain in someone's story, yet a hero in another's. And to most, you're just a passing thought, a name they once knew. It's a strange reality that you don't exist as one person, but as countless versions of yourself, shaped by fleeting moments and personal perceptions.

And here's what is uncomfortable.

You will never truly know yourself the way others do. You will never hear your own laughter the way someone else does. You will never see the way your absence lingers in a room you used to fill. To yourself, you are just you. But to the world, you are a thousand different stories, none of which you will ever get to read.

Good morning, Mr Featherston, Mr Angus, Dr Swann, Ms White, my family, staff, and boys. It is the realisation of this idea that you are not just one person, that feeds one of our greatest fears – the fear of rejection.

It's rooted in our nature. As social beings, we desire to belong, to fit in, to just be accepted. But in the process of finding that validation, that we are good enough, we don't realise how much we change ourselves. We begin to laugh at jokes we don't even find funny, change our style into clothes we find ugly, adjust the way we speak, knowing that we still sound foolish. We let go of our independence and put authenticity on the back burner.

Why?

Because we are worried that any single moment will define us as someone who we don't want to be – someone who doesn't fit in.

Despite surrounding myself in a group of people that I can confidently call my best friends today, a couple of years ago, I found myself questioning who I was. It was like walking onto a stage without knowing the script – terrified, at any moment, I could say the wrong thing.

I refrained from cracking jokes, didn't use any of my leadership skills, and just kept my mouth shut in general, all because I didn't want to be known as the 'unfunny' or 'annoying' one. And as a result, I became quiet, not a chill or relaxed quiet, but a quiet where I felt restricted, in expressing myself, in my confidence, and in my growth as a person.

Famous conspiracy theorist David Icke once said, “The greatest prison people live in is the fear of what other people think.” And for a long time, I didn't understand how true that was. Nobody asked me to change. Nobody was forcing me to be a different version of myself. But yet I still chose to value other people's opinions over my own. I was building those prison bars personally – I wasn't being protected from rejection; I was rejecting who I actually was.

As personal as this experience felt, I slowly realised that it wasn't unique to me. In fact, fear of rejection is something that can shape all of our schooling lives here at BGS.

For many, it may have been those daunting early days of Year 7 when we scavenged the Urwin Centre halls desperate to find someone alike. But when it came to introducing ourselves, we became secluded and shied away.

Why? We feared rejection.

It may have been the time when we sat motionless in class, hesitant to answer a question just in case we got it wrong.

Why? - We feared rejection.

But here's the truth: fear of rejection doesn't just silence us – it shapes us. It tells us who to be, how to act, and what parts of ourselves are “acceptable”

But if this fear is the so called prison, then authenticity is the key.

In the words of psychologist Brene Brown, “Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we were supposed to be and embracing who we are.”

Putting behind the concerns of other people's views and being proud of the men we have become.

And every day, we gather ourselves into this confined campus, squeezing over 1500 students. And because of that, it's inevitable that we will get stuck in social situations where we just follow the crowd.

And I get it, being authentic in these situations can be hard. It means risking judgment. It means standing out. It means finding confidence in yourself when confidence isn't always present.

But it is also the only way to belong – not to a group, but to yourself.

Authenticity doesn't all come at you at once; rather, it's the small actions that build it within you - choosing to speak when you would normally keep quiet, choosing to lead when you want to hide, facing your fears when they are blazing the most.

And when you begin to live this way, something shifts. The fear doesn't necessarily disappear, but it no longer defines you. You start to realise that the person you were trying so hard to protect was the very person holding you back, and understanding this led me to take a step that I otherwise wouldn't have.

Initially, the Community and Engagement Prefect role frightened me. All I saw was a never-ending obligation to meet new people, only just to go home worrying about what they thought of me.

If I was still my old self, I wouldn't have dared to apply for such a role.

But then why did I go for it? What changed?

Why do I stand in front of you all with pride in the leader I've become?

Because I committed to authenticity. In discomfort, with concern, unconfidently.

I knew that staying true to myself is the path to regaining confidence. I knew that embracing individuality is the key to loving yourself

And now every time I meet that old boy, that parent or one of you guys, I believe in myself. I trust the person I am, and I don't hesitate to be me.

And to be like that, all it takes is a little courage, throwing yourself out there, being vulnerable and taking a risk you otherwise wouldn't have.

Now, before this speech concludes, I want to assure you all that I know exactly what some of you are thinking. Some of you may have already made a judgment about my speech. Some may not be able to recall a word I have said, and some may be sitting eagerly just waiting to see me stuff up.

And yes, all that fear still sits at the back of my head.

But most importantly, I'm still here.

I'm still here delivering a speech to you all on a topic that I am genuinely passionate about, and I'm still here facing all the concerns that I may not be good enough.

So, to the Year 7s starting a new chapter, to the Year 12s who are frightened of the year ahead, and to all the Tonners representing this school.

Never doubt yourself. Never think you aren't good enough.

Embrace your authenticity, because to yourself, you aren't just you. Instead, you are one big story that everyone wants to read.

Thank you.