

Leo Reeve – Prefect (Inclusivity & Diversity)

Keynote Speech 2026

‘When I started being authentically me, everything started to change.’

Good morning, Mr Featherston, Mr Angus, Dr Swann, Ms Clark, my parents, staff and boys.

Those words belong to Dylan Alcott, someone we all know today as an Australian of the Year, multiple Paralympic Gold medallist, and most importantly, a member of the Brighton Grammar Hall of Fame. What made these achievements possible was an unwavering sense of pride in his own identity, a pride that has driven him to advocate for inclusion and shine a spotlight on para-sport and thus propelled him to the accolades he holds today. Yet as he sat in this very hall as a student at our school, that same pride was nowhere to be found. In its place was a deep sense of embarrassment for who he was.

What embracing his own identity looked like for Dylan is unique to him, just as it will look different for every single one of us in this room. But his story reveals something that I believe is true for all of us: we can all only begin to truly fulfil our potential when we are true to ourselves. Until then, we are limited in who we pretend to be and that person we pretend to be is never better than the true version of ourselves.

In a school like ours, it is no secret that we all feel pressure to show up in a certain way each day. A way we think will make us most comfortable. A way that helps us fit in.

This is something I have struggled with myself. Like Dylan, I was born with a disability - cerebral palsy - which affects the function of the entire right side of my body. Because of this, I have had the incredible opportunity to compete in para sport and in my sport of Athletics, and as a kid who loves all sport, it has genuinely changed my life.

It has given me something I can work towards each day, allowed me to become more involved in the school through Cross Country and Athletics, and I have formed many great connections with others. But when I was younger, there were many times I didn't want to show up to a race, or came close to quitting altogether, because I felt embarrassed to be a para-athlete, different from my peers who I thought were just normal.

If I had just stopped, I would have no idea what I would be doing today, but through the incredible support I have had from my family, teachers and friends, thankfully, I never did quit.

And just like Dylan, as I began to be more authentic and embrace that part of who I was, I became more comfortable in my own identity, and I stand here today with a real sense of pride for what I do.

Authenticity is a trait that, thanks to our school's Positive Masculinity program, we can all understand and recognise. But to actually apply it every day in the choices we make and the way we show up is the most daunting challenge young men our age face. It's not something any of us can simply walk away from this speech and switch on.

It's a journey, and one that never really has an endpoint. But I'd encourage you to ask yourself these questions: What do you really value? What are the things about yourself you are most proud of? You might not have any answers now, but maybe this will give you just a little seed to think about.

As I said, this journey is daunting and never easy. There will be times you feel judged by others, and times you feel embarrassed. Often, we feel envious of others as well. Despite how grateful I am for my own journey, there are times when I find myself wishing I could be out playing footy on the Crowther or in someone else's shoes. But in lieu of all these things, when did anything we were truly proud of ever come easy?

But here's the thing. We have the ability to make this easier for each other as well. We all have a role to play in building a culture in our school community where everyone feels comfortable in their own skin. Something that I think many of us are guilty of, and definitely I am, is passing judgment on things that are different to what we do, whether that's dismissing the co-curricular activities other boys are involved in or just generally making jokes about things. But that judgment, without us realising, is what helps to make us and others think we should be different to who we truly are. And as I said, I'll admit this is something I can improve on myself.

Instead, I'd encourage you to bring curiosity. Ask questions. Take an interest in what other people do and why it matters to them. You might be surprised at what you find, and the impact of just showing a small interest in someone else could be the difference between them feeling comfortable or uncomfortable as themselves. Who knows what impact this could have across our entire school if we all did this a little bit more.

When Dylan Alcott sat in this hall, embarrassed by who he was, he couldn't have imagined where life would take him. It was only when he began to embrace and love himself that everything else became possible.



None of us truly knows what we are capable of. But I can promise you one thing: you will go much further if you start by embracing who you really are, not who you want to be. Not everyone in here can go on to be an Australian of the Year, but we can all control our potential to achieve things we are truly proud of.