

Arki Butler – Prefect (Fairweather House Captain)

Keynote Speech 2026

Good morning Mr Featherston, Mr Angus, Dr Swann, Father Waterhouse, Ms Clark, Ms Hower, staff, my Mum and Dad, and boys.

‘Sometimes the road to redemption is a winding one.’

If there’s one thing not only life has taught me but Brighton Grammar, it’s this: your story is never defined by where you start. It’s defined by the decisions you make along the way, and the people who shaped those decisions.

For a long time, I never thought I’d be standing here. If I’m being completely honest, I was never the student people expected great things from, and I brought that on myself. I was below average. I struggled in class, doubted myself, and often found it easier to take the wrong path than the right one. There were moments when making the right decision felt harder than giving up, and sometimes, I didn’t always get it right.

But life has a funny way of offering you another chance.

There comes a moment for all of us when we have to decide whether we’re going to let our past define us or let it prepare us.

For me, the Great South West Journey was a turning point. It was the first time I really stopped and took a hard look at myself, without the rose-coloured glasses.

The journey is built to challenge you. It pushes you to grow up a little, step outside your comfort zone, and take on leadership. But if I’m being honest, for the first six days, I completely missed the mark. I made life harder for the people around me and, at the time, I didn’t even realise I was doing it.

That all changed when someone pulled me aside and told me what I needed to hear. That someone was Mr Moore.

I’m sure he won’t mind me saying, I was petrified of him, like a lot of you boys probably are, but this day, he showed me a side of him that I hadn’t seen.

What stuck with me wasn’t just what he said, it was the fact that he believed in me. Even when I hadn’t given anyone much reason to, he still believed I could be better.

That made me ask myself some pretty uncomfortable questions. Am I too far gone? Can I actually turn this around?

Looking back now, I think there's something incredibly powerful about someone else's belief in you. Sometimes, it takes one person seeing potential in you before you can see it in yourself. Mr Moore gave me that belief, and because of that, I started believing I could change too.

It's also a reminder that the biggest moments in our lives aren't really about us. They're about the people who walk alongside us. Because are the big moments really that big if there's no one there to share them with?

GSWJ changed me, but my turning point wasn't one dramatic moment. It wasn't a single conversation or one decision. It was a series of small moments: someone believing in me, choosing to listen, and deciding, day by day, to become a better version of myself.

These decisions aren't major. For me, it was wearing my uniform correctly. Doing things I wouldn't typically do. Exploring opportunities at school and trying just to be me.

Those choices didn't change my life overnight. But they changed the direction I was heading.

Today, I have the privilege of standing here as Fairweather House Captain. If you had told the younger version of me that one day I'd wear this badge and represent this school, I probably wouldn't have believed you. Not because I didn't want it, but because I didn't think someone like me was capable of it.

What I've realised is that leadership isn't about being perfect. It isn't about always getting the highest marks or never making mistakes. Leadership is about growth. It's about learning from your failures instead of being defined by them. It's about having the courage to keep moving forward, even when the road ahead is uncertain.

To the younger students sitting here today, I want you to hear this.

If you're struggling, if you think you've fallen behind, if you feel like everyone else has already figured life out while you're still trying to find your way, don't believe that your story is over. Some of the greatest comebacks don't happen because people were naturally talented. They happen because someone decided that today would not look like yesterday.

It's never too late to change your habits. It's never too late to choose a different path. It's never too late to become the person you want to be.



The decisions that shape your future are often the hardest ones to make. Doing the right thing isn't always easy. Working harder isn't always comfortable. Believing in yourself isn't always natural. But those difficult choices are the ones that build your character and determine who you become.

I stand here today not as someone who has always had it together, but as proof that change is inevitable, and you have control over the change that occurs. That setbacks don't have to become endings. That ordinary students can achieve extraordinary things when they refuse to give up.

So whatever chapter you're in right now, remember this: your comeback can begin with a single decision. Not tomorrow. Not next year. Today.

Thank you.