

Archie Bull – Prefect (Melville House Captain)

Keynote Speech 2026

Good morning Mr Featherston, Mr Angus, Mum, Dad, staff and boys.

I want to start with a question. Have you ever received a test back and immediately asked your friend, 'What did you get?' Or watched someone else on your team and thought, 'How are they that much better than me?' Or scrolled through Instagram and wondered how everyone else seems to be living the perfect life?

I've done all three.

And I think that's why a quote from Theodore Roosevelt has stuck with me: 'Comparison is the thief of joy.'

It's a simple quote, but the more I've thought about it, the more I've realised how true it is. When we constantly compare ourselves to the people around us, it becomes difficult to appreciate where we are and recognise our own progress.

For a long time, I compared my grades to the strongest students in the class, my performances to the best athletes on the sporting field, and me to people who seemed more confident, more social, or simply better at things than I was.

The frustrating thing was that there was never really a point where you could win. Even if you did well, there was always someone who had done better. You get a good mark, someone gets a higher one. You have a good game, someone else has a better one. Eventually, I realised I was spending more time thinking about where I stood compared to everyone else than thinking about whether I was actually improving myself.

That was probably the biggest change I've made this year. Instead of constantly comparing myself with the people around me, I've tried to improve myself day to day.

One example of this has been the House Captain role.

Before me, we had Billy Burgess as House Captain. A lot of you would know Billy; he's hard to miss. He's eccentric, he's loud, and he led with an enormous amount of enthusiasm. He brought a huge amount of energy to Melville House and was very good at getting people involved.

So, when I was fortunate enough to be awarded the role, I wondered whether I could fill his shoes. Could I lead the House with the same energy and have the same impact that Billy did?

Eventually, though, I realised something obvious: I'm not Billy, and I don't need to be.

If I spent the year trying to replicate the way he led, I probably wouldn't become the best version of myself. Instead, I could take the qualities I admired in Billy as well as my own personal strengths and apply them in my own way.

That made me realise there is a difference between being inspired by someone and comparing yourself to them. I can look at someone who is better than me at something and think, 'I want to be able to do that,' without thinking, 'I'm not good enough because I can't do it.'

I think that distinction is particularly important at Brighton Grammar.

We are surrounded by people who excel in different areas. There are outstanding athletes, musicians, academics and leaders throughout this school. That is one of the great things about Brighton Grammar, but it also makes comparison very easy.

There will always be someone getting a higher mark, running faster, performing better, or appearing more confident or successful. If you constantly measure yourself against all of them, it becomes very easy to feel like you're falling behind.

So instead, I've started asking myself different questions.

Am I better than I was last year? Am I working harder than I used to? Am I becoming a better teammate? A better friend? Am I becoming someone I am genuinely proud of?

I think those are much more valuable questions.

Most progress doesn't happen in one huge moment where everyone notices. It happens through the extra training session, the test you studied a little harder for, the mistake you learned from, or simply making a better decision than you would have made before.

None of these things seem particularly significant on their own, but over time, they add up.

I don't think ambition or competition are bad. Competition pushes us to improve, and ambition gives us something to work towards. The problem is when someone else's success makes us believe that our own achievements aren't good enough.

There will always be someone ahead of you in something. So, if your happiness depends on being better than everyone else, you're never really going to get there.

That's why I keep coming back to what Roosevelt said: 'Comparison is the thief of joy.'

I don't think the answer is to stop looking at everyone else completely. I think it's about knowing when to look away. Let other people inspire you, learn from them and compete with them, but then look back at yourself and ask whether you're moving forward.

Because at the end of the day, the person you're going to spend the most time with isn't the guy sitting next to you in class, the person on your sporting team, or the person you follow on Instagram.



It's yourself.

So don't spend your time trying to become someone else. Take inspiration from other people but follow your own path.

And if you can finish each day knowing that you're a little better than you were yesterday, I think you're doing pretty well.

Thank you.