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Keynote Speech 2026

Comfort or Fulfilment?

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

There is a difference between being comfortable and being fulfilled. But sometimes I think we get the two confused.

Of course, we all want comfort. After a long day of school and training, there is nothing better than collapsing on the couch at home, watching a movie, and forgetting about it all for a while.

It's an escape. It's an opportunity to reset, to relax, and there isn't anything wrong with seeking that comfort.

But I've realised that comfort and fulfilment are two very different things.

Comfort is something we provide ourselves in the short term. Fulfilment is something we build for the long term.

The difference becomes important when the comfort of a short-term escape becomes a long-term avoidance.

I learned this through something I have carried with me for years.

When I was in primary school, I had a really good friend called Beau.

He was a funny, bright, outstanding kid. Anyone who went to Brighton Primary with me will remember we all just loved to be around him. His energy was infectious.

But, in Year 3, when we were all nine years old or so, Beau developed Leukodystrophy, meaning he was effectively losing control of his own body. This meant that in Year 4, he could barely talk and was confined to a wheelchair.

Then during Year 5, Beau passed away; we were only around 10 or 11 years old. At that age, I didn't really know how to process something like that.

But as I got older, one feeling stayed with me. Unease.

I sometimes wondered whether I did enough. To see him lose all ability to look after himself and be a normal kid was so heartbreaking, and I was just always worried that I didn't do enough to try to bring some of that life back. Whether that was as simple as trying to talk to him more, even when that was

near impossible for him, or if it was just sitting with him at recess. I don't know specifically, but it was always a feeling of regret.

I mean, here was one of the most incredible people I'd ever known, unable to talk to us anymore, or play cricket with all our friends. But for a while I honestly couldn't remember if I had gone out of my way to make him happier, like he always seemed to do for us.

I guess I never really resolved that, because whenever those thoughts came up, I did something easier than confronting them. I ignored them.

And honestly, there was nothing necessarily wrong with that at first. We were all only 11 years old.

I didn't know how to deal with those feelings, and sometimes you need to put difficult things aside just to keep moving forward.

Ignoring it gave me a short-term escape. It made me feel better. If I didn't think about it, I didn't have to feel uncomfortable. If I didn't ask the question, I didn't have to hear an answer I might not like.

That was comfort.

But I now realise comfort isn't the same as a resolution. Although ignoring those thoughts made me feel better in the moment, the question never actually disappeared. It just waited.

Then, this year, I had to ask my parents: *'Did I do enough?'* I didn't feel uncomfortable asking, but at the same time I was scared to hear that maybe I hadn't. But my parents helped me to understand that I was a 10 or 11 year old kid. There were things I couldn't have known, things I could have never controlled, but there were things that all my friends and I did do.

For example, my parents reminded me that we went on holidays with Beau and his family before he passed, and that is a very special week in our memories.

Ultimately, because I'd stopped running from my fear, I got some sense of fulfilment about Beau. I could look back and more so remember our friendship, and just be so grateful to have known him.

I realised most of all: comfort had given me temporary relief from grief. When I started questioning and confronting my discomfort, I was able to find lasting fulfilment. And I think that's important to understand while we're all still young. Comfort isn't the enemy.

Sometimes, we need to rest. We need to switch off. We need to escape for a little while. But comfort is short-term. Fulfilment is long-term.

Comfort asks, *'What will make me feel better now?'* Fulfilment asks, *'What will make me proud later?'*

Sometimes, what makes us feel better now is exactly what stops us from feeling fulfilled later.

For years, I chose the comfort of not asking myself whether I had done enough for Beau. It made things easier in the short term, yes. But eventually, I realised that avoiding the question wasn't giving me peace. Asking the question did.

At the end of the day, that's what has given me more peace of mind about Beau. I couldn't change what happened. I still miss him, of course. I know all of us here today who knew him do too. But by finally confronting that question, I changed what I carried with me. So, if there's one thing I leave you all with, it's this: don't let the comfort you need today prevent you from finding the fulfilment that will make you happier tomorrow.

There will always be things we can escape from. Difficult conversations we can postpone. Opportunities we can avoid. And sometimes, we should take the break. Sometimes, we should rest. But eventually, we have to decide whether we're going to stay there.

So whether you're in Year 7 or Year 12, when you're faced with that choice, ask yourself: *'What do I need right now?'* And then: *'What will I thank myself for doing later?'* Because while comfort is valuable, it is temporary. Fulfilment is what we build with the choices we make after the comfort fades.

And just like Beau always had a way of lighting up a room, I think finding that sense of fulfilment can help us light up our own lives.

Thank you.