

Emit Subasinghe – Prefect (Service & Environment)

Keynote Speech 2026

Good morning, Mr Featherston, Mr Angus, Ms Clark, special guests, my parents, teachers and boys.

Most of the time, we don't really think twice about the small things. Things like holding a door for someone, saying something kind, choosing to listen carefully or not just standing by when you know something is not quite right. In the moment, they feel insignificant. Easy to ignore, easy to move past, and not worth giving much attention to.

But that's usually where we get it wrong

Because a lot of the time, it's those small, almost forgettable decisions that end up having the biggest impact. We tend to think that what really matters are the big moments. The big achievements, the big risks, the obvious decisions that everyone notices. But in reality, most of what shapes our lives and the people around us comes from something much quieter.

It comes from the small things we do every day.

A good way to think about this is through something known as the butterfly effect. It's the idea that something small can eventually lead to something much bigger. The name comes from the theory that something as minor as the flap of a butterfly's wings could, over time, influence weather patterns somewhere else in the world. The idea behind it is powerful. Small beginnings can create consequences far beyond what we expect or what we are even able to see at the time.

Our actions work in the same way. Every decision we make, even the ones that feel small at the time, has an effect that goes beyond that moment. It might not be obvious straight away, and we might not always see what comes from it, but that doesn't mean it stops with us.

I realised the truth of this not through some major moment, but through a conversation that at the time seemed completely ordinary. Someone made a joke about another person, and everyone laughed along. It felt like harmless banter, and I told myself it wasn't serious enough to say anything about it, so I stayed quiet and moved on. But later, I saw the effect it actually had on that person. They went quiet, they tried not to be noticed - what seemed small to everyone else clearly stayed with them far longer than anyone realised. And that stuck with me, it made me realise that moments like that don't simply disappear once the conversation ends.

Staying silent is still a choice. I think all of us have had moments where we hesitate, where we assume, or where we let something small pass because it doesn't feel important enough to act on. But those are often the moments that actually define things. Moments that take only a few seconds - saying something, changing the subject, or checking in with someone afterwards can end up having a much bigger impact than we expect.

And often, that impact extends far beyond the original moment itself. Small acts of kindness and compassion cause a ripple effect where waves of positivity extend beyond the one act. When people experience kindness, they often pass it on to someone else, and then that person may do the same again. However, the opposite is also true. When someone experiences cruelty, they often shut down and become less willing to open up to others.

Because once something starts, it rarely stops with just one person. Over time, those small moments shape how people respond, how they treat others, and what they come to see as normal.

And over time, those repeated actions begin to shape something bigger than just individual moments. They shape the kind of culture people are part of every day. Because the community we're part of isn't built in one big moment. It's built slowly, through small, repeated actions. Through the way we treat people when no one's watching, in the decisions we make when it would be easier not to care, and in the moments when we choose whether to say something or stay silent.

A comment you make might feel small, but it can stay with someone longer than you realise. Choosing to include someone might not seem like much, but to that person, it can change everything. And ignoring something might feel easier in the moment, but that choice still has an effect.

That's the thing about small actions. You don't always get to see what comes from them. You don't always know who they affect, or how far they reach. But they don't just disappear. They continue, in ways you don't always notice.

So the question isn't whether small actions matter, because they do. The real question is whether we choose to treat them like they do. Because it's easy to think that something isn't your responsibility, that it's not a big deal, or that someone else will take care of it.

But every time we think like that, we're still making a choice. And that choice still has an impact.

Real change doesn't come from waiting for one big moment where everything suddenly matters. It comes from consistency. From awareness. From choosing, again and again, to do something small, knowing that it won't stay small.

So as you leave here today, you don't need to remember everything that's been said. Just remember this idea: the things we think don't matter are usually the things that do.

Because the next time you're faced with a small decision, something easy to ignore or brush past, remind yourself that those are often the moments that actually count.

Thank you.