

Spencer Kirkham
2024 Keynote Speech

Good morning, Mr Featherston, Mr Angus, Dr Swann, Teachers, my mum Cathy, my sister Grace and most importantly boys.

My name is Spencer and today I want to share with you three key ideas that have made a major difference to my school life, and I hope they will make a difference to yours too.

The first idea is to give something a crack that is outside of your comfort zone. And I'd encourage all of you to think about what that thing might be for you, because it's different for all of us.

For me, I took a huge leap out of my comfort zone in Year 10, when I put my hand up to be a part of the school production. The audition is brutal. I had to perform three different tasks - singing, dancing, and acting - none of which I had ever done before. And to make matters worse, I was on my own in front of a panel of teachers, many of whom were strangers to me. I was literally terrified. Although I had always been in bands, this audition stretched far beyond my musical experience.

Anyway, to my surprise, I somehow got through the audition and into the production. This experience has become one of my favourite BGS memories. The exhilaration of performing on stage in front of an audience, and the friendships I made along the way both at Firbank and BGS, made that experience like no other..... so much so that I performed again in Year 11, and I'm going to do it for a third time in Year 12. Even though my mum said, 'You are rowing 13 sessions a week and you can't really fit it in' - Sorry mum.

We tend to limit our views of ourselves so early. You might see yourself as a footballer, a chess player, a gamer, or a music guy and that then defines you for the rest of school, or even life. But I really encourage you to try something that you may have never considered, even if it's daunting. We are often told to follow our passion, but we need to experience new things to find out what that is. Like me, you might be surprised.

The second thing, which kind of relates to the first, is that you don't need to be good at something from the beginning. Through my experience of rowing, I have learned that you don't have to be the biggest, or the best, or even the second biggest.

If you want something badly enough, and you are determined to do the work, you will improve. This story actually starts back in Year 8 when I was one of the smallest kids in the boat club, sitting behind Jesse Smith in the 8Cs.

Back then Jesse was already six foot and weighed probably twice as much as me..... all muscle of course. I wasn't daunted by my small stature because I really really wanted to row. Even back then, my goal was to one day row in the First 8. From 8Cs, to 9Cs, to 10Bs, and last year in the Second 8, I stayed committed.

Last year as I watched the First 8 receive their jumpers, my determination grew tenfold. Now in my final year of rowing, I am the stroke seat of the First 8, and as I look back over the past five years of rowing, every stroke that I took and the pain I endured seems worth it.

In a sense, I have been lucky to be surrounded by other boys in the boat, whose attitudes and commitment to the team reflect my own, and who have therefore become some of my best mates. The thing is, it may be easier for the one who's the biggest, but it's not impossible for the one who's small.

Commit to the thing that you want, and keep trying to do more towards that goal, and you may accomplish things that you never would have deemed possible when you first started.

The last idea I wanted to share, is this. You need to run your own race. Constantly comparing yourself to others is pointless. One of my biggest disappointments at BGS, is the fact that I never managed to beat my older brother at anything. For those of you who don't know my brother, he was Vice Captain of the School, he was in the First 8 for three years, and he was Captain of Boats in his final year.

He has now gone on to study Medicine. I mean seriously. Any of you who are also younger brothers will know what I mean when I say that, as a younger brother, it sometimes has felt like my older brother could do no wrong. I would get frustrated, which of course achieved nothing. Although in my case, it is somewhat true that my brother could do no wrong, the bottom line is I can't do anything about what he has done before me, I can only do my personal best.

So, I am learning to just let it go and focus on the things that I can control. It's fair to say, that in this instance, I haven't quite nailed the "let it go" part. It's definitely a work in progress.

I hope you'll find something in these three tips that resonates with you.

Thank you and good luck with the year ahead.