

Y 8-11 New School Year Address – Monday 7 September 2026

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to a new school year.

For some of you, this morning will feel very familiar. You know where you are going. You know the teachers. You know where every nook and corner leads.

For others, everything is new. New faces. New buildings. New routines. Maybe even a new country. And perhaps that slightly strange feeling of wondering where, exactly, you fit into all of this.

But wherever you are starting from, today we **all** begin again.

And at the beginning of a year, I think it is worth asking two simple questions:

- **What sort of school do we want this to be?**
- **And what sort of people do we want to become while we are here?**

Stonar has been asking versions of those questions for a very long time.

Cottles Manor, our estate is 924 years old!

Cottles House, our main house, is over 250 years old.

Stonar itself was founded more than 130 years ago.

We have been here at Atworth for nearly 90 years.

We have been part of the NACE group for more than a quarter of a century.

And today, as part of Globeducate, we belong to a family of more than 65 schools around the world!

But there is one relationship here with no history at all.

- Mine with you, as your new Headmaster.
- Yours with me, as the pupils and staff of Stonar.

That begins now.

Stonar started life in a different place and a very different world. It has moved home.

Generations of pupils have come and gone. It has become a school for both girls and boys.

A great deal has changed. But some things have been worth carrying with us. Stonar's old motto consisted of just three words:

Sincerity. Honour. Service.

You can still see them here, on this table (which I am sure could tell a few stories). They may sound rather formal today, but the ideas behind them aren't complicated.

Sincerity means being genuine. Doing your best when nobody is checking. Admitting when you've made a mistake.

Honour means trying to do the right thing, particularly when it isn't the easiest option.

Service means remembering that life isn't just about us.

Today, at Stonar, we express those ideas differently:

Work Hard. Be Kind. Get Involved. Shape the World.

There is a connection between the old words and the new.

Sincerity: mean what you do. **Work hard.**

Honour: think about how you treat others. **Be kind.**

Service: don't stand on the sidelines. **Get involved.**

And when enough people do those things, we can: **Shape the world.**

Now, this being Stonar, let me borrow an example from equestrian.

You cannot learn to ride simply by being told how to ride. You can understand the theory, but when you get on an actual horse, theory only takes you so far. Perhaps you get the stride wrong. Perhaps you don't clear the jump. Perhaps you fall off. And then comes the important bit.

What do you do next?

You get back on!

Because getting it wrong is part of learning how to do it better and there is something in that for every one of us. Your version of falling off might be forgetting your lines in a play... getting an answer wrong... playing the wrong note...dropping the ball before grounding a try... an essay covered in feedback... or a friendship that you relied upon, changing.

There will be moments this year when things don't work. There will be disappointments and mistakes. I know that feeling too. I have made mistakes. I have failed at things. And, as your new Head, I certainly don't expect to get everything right either.

But getting things wrong isn't the opposite of achievement. Very often, it is how achievement begins.

Which brings me to another phrase that matters here at Stonar:

Achieve with joy.

We sometimes make the error of thinking that achievement has to be painful.

Do more. Get the part. Get the grade. Win at all costs. Podium or nothing.

Of course, achievement does take determination, discipline and resilience, but it is bigger than the result at the end. It is discovering you can do something today that you couldn't do six months ago. It is the moment something you struggled with suddenly makes sense. The laughter in a rehearsal. The winning goal or try when we were up against it. Clearing a jump that once frightened you. Making something. Performing something. Discovering something. Helping someone.

And sometimes it is simply being brave enough to begin.

So, as we start this year, I have a challenge for every one of you.

Because what Stonar becomes next isn't something I will decide alone. It is something we will build together.

Work hard. Especially at something you don't yet find easy.

Be kind. Especially when it would be easier not to notice someone who needs kindness.

Get involved. Try something. Join something. Say yes to opportunities.

And don't be one-dimensional.

"I study hard."

"I play rugby."

"I ride horses."

"I play music."

You are more than that. More than one talent. One subject. One sport. One identity.

But above all, try to **Shape the world.**

For the youngest of you, that might sound like an impossibly enormous instruction.

How am I supposed to shape the world?

Well, you don't have to change the whole world before Friday!

You shape the world every time you change the little bit of it around you.

A classroom, by the way you behave in it...a team, by the way you treat your teammates...a friendship, by whether you listen...this school, by what you contribute to it.

And in future assemblies, I'll tell you true stories of young people I've known who have gone on to shape the world.

More than a century ago, the first girls at Stonar could not possibly have imagined the school you are sitting in today. And none of us knows what the world will look like when today's youngest pupils eventually leave Stonar.

But we do know something about the qualities all of us will need.

Sincerity. Honour. Service.

Work Hard. Be Kind. Get Involved. Shape the World.

Different generations. Different words, but a thread connecting them.

I hope those first pupils and teachers would be proud of the school we have become. And now it is our turn to decide what comes next.

So this year, be ambitious, but enjoy the journey. Try something difficult...get something wrong.

Get back on.

Notice other people...help somebody... say 'Yes' to something new...laugh... be curious.

And when we get to the end of the year, I hope you have achieved things. Won things. Passed things. Performed things. Made things.

But I hope you have something more: that you feel a little braver; a little kinder; a little more curious; a little more generous. Because what you achieve matters.

But so does the person you become along the way.

So, work hard.

Be kind.

Get involved.

Shape the world.

And enjoy doing it.

Achieve with joy.