

Sixth Form New School Year Address – Monday 7 September 2026

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to a new school year. Hopefully you know who I am already. I am looking forward to getting to know each of you during the course of this year.

I might not be able to make that promise to every pupil in the school straight away, because there is something slightly different about the Sixth Form and the start of a Sixth Form year.

For some of you, Stonar has been home for a long time. For others and quite a number of you, today is the beginning of something completely new.

Some of you are already thinking seriously about what comes after school. For others, that might still feel comfortably distant for now. But all of you are at a point where school begins to change. There is more freedom. More independence. More choice. And, inevitably, more responsibility.

You are no longer the younger pupils watching what everyone else does.

You are now the people others watch.

Not because you have all the answers. Not because joining the Sixth Form suddenly makes you infinitely wiser than you were a few months ago, but because you now have real influence over the kind of school Stonar is.

Younger pupils will notice how you speak to each other. How you speak to staff, teachers and non-teachers. Whether you throw yourselves wholeheartedly into Stonar life or decide you are too old for school.

The younger pupils will notice whether it is normal here to work hard; whether it is normal to care about things; whether it is normal to be kind. And whether being successful at Stonar means simply doing well yourself - or helping other people to do well too.

They will look for leadership and they will follow your lead. And this message isn't confined to prefects, captains or those with titles.

Leadership is more than that and I expect you all now to be leaders. How you behave when no-one is organising you. Whether you notice someone who needs help. Whether you join in or stand back. Whether you pick up that bit of litter or add to it.

I want to make one thing clear. I might be the new Head here at Stonar, but this is your school, not mine. I'm just here to help it institutionally and you personally to be the best versions of yourselves possible.

I want to hear what you think about this school. What works. What doesn't. What matters to you. What traditions we should protect. What we should do differently.

I won't promise always to agree with you, and I won't expect you to always agree with me, but I do promise to listen and to take you seriously because your education here is more than just transactional, in which your parents pay and we provide a service. It is personal, emotional and will impact on your future lives.

Stonar's old motto was:

Sincerity. Honour. Service.

Old-fashioned words, perhaps, but I think they ask three quite modern questions.

Are you genuine?

What kind of choices do you make you have freedom?

And what do you contribute beyond thinking of yourself?

Those aren't bad questions to carry through Sixth Form — or, for that matter, into adulthood.

Today, of course, we express our Stonar values differently:

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

You know the words. You should, but maybe it just sounds like you've heard this all before. I do think they have real meaning and value however, but the far more interesting question is what you do with them. Theory into practice, values into action.

I. Work Hard

Yes, academically.

The next year or two will bring public examinations, applications, auditions, interviews and decisions about what happens after Stonar. Your results matter. Your ambitions matter, so take them seriously.

But don't confuse working hard with simply being busy, and don't reduce your education to a collection of grades. Read something because it interests you; ask a question that isn't on the syllabus; talk to someone who knows more than you do; be prepared to change your mind.

Become someone who thinks - rather than simply someone who passes exams.

2. Be Kind

That can sound like a very simple instruction and even a little childish. It isn't.

Friendships become more complicated as you get older. Competition becomes more real, and people become much better at hiding, when things aren't going particularly well.

So, notice people.

And remember that kindness isn't the same as just smiling and always agreeing. Sometimes it means having an awkward conversation. Sometimes it means telling a friend something they don't particularly want to hear.

Sometimes it means including somebody when everyone else has failed to notice them. Kindness can require courage.

3. Get Involved

Please don't spend your Sixth Form years waiting for your real life to begin. This is it.

Play the match. Do the production. Make the music. Ride horses. Debate. Volunteer. Start something new. Help run something. And occasionally do something you aren't already good at.

Don't become one-dimensional. There is more to each of you than:

"I get good grades."

"I play rugby."

"I ride."

"I play music."

Or whatever your particular thing happens to be.

You benefit in Sixth Form from being able to narrow down what you like and don't, but you will have plenty of time later in life to specialise. For now, stay curious, and occasionally say yes to an opportunity when your instinct is to say no, not for me, not my thing.

And finally:

4. Shape the World

You are old enough now for that **not** simply to be an aspiration, because you are already doing it.

You shape the culture of this school, more than you know and way more than I can.

You help decide what is normal here.

Whether enthusiasm is something to be embarrassed about or encouraged.

Whether trying hard is respected.

Whether kindness gets noticed.

Whether younger pupils feel included.

Whether people are allowed to be different.

Those things aren't created by school policies.

They are created by people like you.

There is something else about Sixth Form that I think is worth mentioning.

You are reaching the point where people start asking you a lot of questions about the future.

What subjects are you doing?

What are you applying for?

Which university?

Which career?

It can sometimes feel as though everyone expects you to have a plan, but you don't have to have it all worked out. Plans are useful. Ambition is good. But changing your mind isn't failure.

Discovering that something you thought you wanted isn't actually for you, isn't failure either. Nor is getting a disappointing result, being turned down for something, or having to take a different route from the one you imagined.

I have made mistakes. I have failed at things. I've changed direction. Coming to be your new Head was not the plan when I was your age; when I started my career over 25 years ago; in fact, not until earlier this year was it even a consideration... but here I am, and I will do my best for you and for Stonar.

But I certainly won't get everything right, either.

What matters, is what we do when things don't go according to plan.

Learn.

Adapt.

Ask for help when you need it.

And keep going.

Which brings me to another key Stonar strapline:

Achieve with joy.

I like those words because there is a danger, particularly in Sixth Form, that achievement becomes very serious.

- A-level and BTEC grades.
- Elite performance in sport, equestrian, music, drama
- The UCAS process.
- Universities and Colleges.
- Careers.

Be ambitious, but don't become so focused on the future that you miss the life you are actually living here and now.

Enjoy conversations with your friends and teachers, have a laugh, have a bit of fun, because for those of you in Upper Sixth especially, there will come a day pretty soon when you walk out of Stonar for the last time as a pupil and I suspect that what you'll remember most when you look back won't be a grade; it will be people, moments, and the person you became while all of that was happening.

So, this year:

Work hard.

Be kind.

Get involved.

Shape the world.

But as the Sixth Form, I want to add one more challenge.

Set the tone.

Be the people younger pupils can look up to without you ever having to tell them to. Make this a school where it is normal to try, normal to care, normal to contribute. Normal to be ambitious for yourself - but also normal to be generous towards other people.

That is leadership.

And you have an opportunity this year that no other Sixth Form will have. You are the first of my time as Head, so let's make the most of that together. And when your time at Stonar eventually comes to an end, don't simply leave with good results.

Leave it a better place than you found it.

And while you are here, enjoy every day as much as you can and really try to...

Achieve with joy.