



Prefect Address

Prefects' Assembly – Friday 27 June 2025

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If you had told me in Year 9 that I'd be standing up here giving the Prefects' Address, I probably would've laughed. Or panicked. Maybe both. And yet, here we are. There's something about standing in front of the school, hundreds of faces, younger students, teachers, and parents, that feels a little daunting. At first when I began writing this speech, I had no idea where to begin. But then I thought back to the motto that the Head prefects chose this year: *Grounded by the thistle, surrounded by connection*. That line sticks with me. Maybe because it's quite poetic, maybe it's the Scottish vibe. But most of all because it's something we all feel. In just seven words, it captures something we all search for – something I've been searching for – a sense of stability, and a sense of belonging.

During the 2024 summer holidays, I was lucky enough to go on a volunteering trip to Cambodia with my family, where we worked with the charity, One2One. I thought I was going there to help – to make a difference. And yes, we did help in some ways: we taught them English and helped hand out food in the slums. But what I didn't expect was how much I would be changed by the people I met. We spent some time in the poorest parts of the country – families living in slums, on dirt floors, all with limited access to clean water, food, or healthcare. Kids ran around barefoot, some half my age but already looking after younger siblings.

And yet... they smiled. They laughed. They welcomed us with open arms. I remember thinking, how? How can people with so little be so open and full of joy? I went there thinking I would be helping them. But the truth is, they were the ones helping me. I actually thought about this moment during a Religious Education class this year, and for the first time, I connected it back to the motto. Because grounding isn't about standing still. It's about knowing who you are, even when things aren't going your way – whether you're a kid in Cambodia, or someone like me standing here today – you know who you are. You know what you stand for. And that's what makes *Grounded by the thistle* so special to me.

Now at first glance, a thistle isn't the most captivating symbol. It's spiky. It's tough. It doesn't really scream "comfort," or "ease". But, if you know its story, if you know why it was chosen to represent Scotland and our College, it all starts to make sense. The thistle survives. Its roots cut deeply into the earth, it withstands the roughest conditions, and it will keep growing no matter what. That's powerful. Being grounded by the thistle means to find strength in who you are, even when life throws stuff at you. And let's be for real. High school is full of "stuff." The pressure to succeed when going to such a prestigious school, to



fit in – sometimes being grounded is to cut all the noise and ask yourself, who am I when nobody is watching? What actually matters to me?

But grounding your thistle doesn't happen by yourself. And that brings me to the second half of the motto: *Surrounded by connection*. This part sticks with me. Because connection – true connection – isn't about having 1000 followers on Instagram, or getting snaps from everyone in your year. It's about being understood. Seen. It's about knowing there are people everywhere who have got your back, not just when things are easy, but when things are hard.

The people around us, our friends, family, and teachers, they can be the reason we keep going. And not because they always have the answers, but because they remind us we don't have to face everything alone. One of the things that I've really come to appreciate at StAC is something as simple as our tutor groups in the mornings. It might seem like an irrelevant 10-minutes to start your day, but it's more than that. It's a routine. A pause. A place where someone asks how your weekend was, or remembers your game from Saturday. And even if you're not in the mood to talk, just being in that space surrounded by familiar faces, starting the day together, is all part of the real connection at St Andrew's College.

For those who don't know, in Year 13 we recreate our Year 9 tutor photo. If you're in Year 13, you would've recently seen all our Year 9 tutor photos printed out in Senior College. We looked so different. Some of us were tiny. Some of us didn't even know each other's name properly back then. But standing here now, five years later – same people, same tutor group – look how much we've grown; and not just individually but as a group. And I think that's what being surrounded by connection really means. It's not flashy. It's not hard to understand. It's real. In fact, I want you all to take a second, students and staff look to your left. Now look to your right. These are the people who have been with you through it all. One day soon, everyone here will leave this place. But the roots we've grown here, in each other, will stay with us. And that to me, is what makes this school so special.