

Oskar's Speech

First of all, I'd like to start by thanking Jess Morisson and Ian Burrage for the opportunity to speak to you all today.

Education is a partnership — that's not groundbreaking information. But we need to ask ourselves: who is this partnership trying to support? The obvious answer is students. Yet too often, that partnership is something that happens to us, not with us.

Policies and decisions in education shape what we live every single day. In the classroom, in the yard, online, and at home. It's our lives.

Being at the heart of education can't just mean being considered after everything has already been decided. It means having a seat at the table before decisions are made. It means asking us what we need — and enabling us to help co-design the solution. Because real partnership is built on respect. And if we're serious about respecting students, then our voices have to matter — not as a token, not once a year, but as a core part of how the education works.

Examples of this at a school-based level include the continued rollout of Amplify, which gives students direct input into the curriculum and how it's delivered, and Teach the Teacher, a peer-led program that empowers students to have constructive, collaborative conversations with educators about teaching and learning.

When schools commit to models like these, students aren't just learning, they're shaping the very way learning happens.

At Beaumaris Secondary College, student choice is partnered with student voice. Especially in Years 9 and 10, we're encouraged to shape our own paths. Core Maths is the only compulsory subject — everything else is designed to let us explore our interests within each learning area. That might mean diving into creative writing in English, or unpacking global politics in humanities.

It's not just about ticking boxes. It's about discovering what excites us, what drives us — and maybe even what we want to do with our futures.

Teachers and educators play a vital role in a student's life — and depending on which teacher you have, your entire experience of school can be made or broken. When writing this speech, I was given a list of guiding questions to help shape what I wanted to say. One of those questions was, "Can you describe a time when a teacher made a real difference for you?"

And honestly, I couldn't pick just one. Because I can't think of a single teacher who hasn't shaped who I am in some way.

Life is complicated — and as the child of a single father who is chronically ill, I know that all too well. There were times when Dad was in hospital, or nights when I didn't sleep because something had gone wrong. And in those moments, it was the teachers who removed barriers — not added more — that made things just a little more bearable.

When a student misses a deadline or doesn't finish an assignment, the first question shouldn't be, "Why didn't they do it?" but, "What's going on for them right now?" Because behind every late task or empty seat there is a story. And the teachers who take the time to ask, to listen, and to understand — they're the ones who truly make a difference.

Oskar Edwardes