Good evening,

11 years ago I came to my first ever speech night here at Derby Grammar, and I have to say, if you’d have told 7 year old Jacob with his blazer two sizes too big so he could ‘grow into it’ and his shoes that were so thick he couldn’t actually get them back on after PE lessons that one day he’d be up here doing a speech as the outgoing head prefect he wouldn’t have believed a word. 11 years later, and more importantly, 11 speech days later, I’ve seen my fair share of Head Prefect speeches, and learnt that they very much fall on a spectrum. Ranging from super formal speeches where we thank our mothers and get them up on stage, which I’ve been told I’m not allowed to do as it’s too embarrassing for my mum, to the speeches where, supported by a trusty member of the music department, head prefect does a rap about the school, which I’ve told myself I’m not allowed to do as it’s too embarrassing for everyone!

So I thought I’d go somewhere in the middle, and try and do the speech that 7 year old Jacob wanted to hear.

What makes this school so special, and one of the reason’s I love it so much, is that every single person here is different, you truly are all unique. You might be sporty, or musical; academic, or creative; or maybe you’re still trying to find your place (that’s who I was!).

I definitely wasn’t sporty – I was more than once moved to the winning team to ‘make it more fair’. Music wasn’t my strongest either – I still get cold sweats at the thought of those music lessons where you have to start your own band and perform to the junior school, which, Junior School staff, on behalf of the whole senior school, I can only apologise for some of the renditions you’ve had to hear over the years!

I guess what I’m trying to say is don’t worry if you haven’t quite found your place yet. Don’t worry if you feel different to the people around you. Don’t worry if your goals and aspirations aren’t the ‘traditional’ career paths.

Be proud.

Be proud of who you are, where you want to go, who you want to be. Be proud to be you.

It took me a while and it certainly wasn’t always easy. But standing here, as the outgoing head prefect and now a first-year medical student, I can say I’m proud. But I’m not just proud of what I’ve done, I’m proud to be me.

So whether you’re the 7 year old Jacob trying not to fall asleep, or the 15 year old Jacob who just isn’t quite sure where your life is going. Take it from me – you will get there, and you should always be proud to be you.