

**ACHIMOTA SCHOOL 99th FOUNDERS DAY SPEECH/KEYNOTE ADDRESS -
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Honouring the Teacher: Advancing Excellence and Inspiring Generations

Professor Chairman, Members of Council, Honourable Headmaster and Management, President of the OAA, Distinguished Guests, Dedicated Teachers, the celebrating classes of 2001, 1986, and 1976, Fellow Akoras, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen

As you can see, Achimota has always believed in mobility with the right equipment, aids, and guardians for elevation... Today I have taken all these quite literally. My year group took a bold risk nominating a man who arrives with his own transport, a pair of hand-held false legs, and escorts; and sternly warned to cause no embarrassment. 76ers, I assure you, if I do, it will be aimed at a few deserving individuals and only mildly. Thank you once again Class of 1976, for this privilege.. and for the gamble.

It is not merely an honour to stand here.

It is a homecoming of memory.

For us Old Achimotans, it is a return to laughter, discipline, friendship, and the memory of cherished teachers and classmates called to the celestial realm.

May their souls rest in perfect peace.

As we gather in the forecourt of this iconic institution, surrounded by youthful energy and alumni pride, I am reminded that Achimota is not merely a school.

It is a living legacy.

A community of memory.

A symphony of excellence.

1. The Founding Vision

Nearly a century ago, on this hill, a bold experiment began.

The founders dared not simply to establish a school, but to plant an idea, that education in Africa could be rigorous without being alienating, disciplined without being dehumanising, excellent without being elitist.

Kwegyir Aggrey, Gordon Guggisberg, and Alec Fraser understood something revolutionary:

A nation is not first built in Parliament.

It is built in classrooms.

And at the centre of every classroom stands a teacher.

2. The Teacher as Architect

This year's theme, "Honouring the Teacher: Advancing Excellence and Inspiring Generations," is not ceremonial., it is structural. Remove the teacher, and the architecture collapses.

Before a student becomes a judge, scientist, artist, or entrepreneur,

a teacher has stood before that child and said,

"You can become more."

That sentence has built nations.

3. Student Life

When the rising bell tolled, structured activity burst forth. Dawn jogs around the Oval. Dormitory and house chores executed with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Assemblies that calibrated discipline. The calm of Aggrey Chapel. Disciplines including, literature, carpentry, pottery, and history. The explosion of inter-house sports and athletics. “Way YELLOWS!” Pop Chain! Scorpio, BSB, Woman 7, were the 1976 year group’s Bands; and fierce debates that left the trees shaking!

And through it all; Teachers... Guiding. Correcting. Insisting. Inspiring.

Drumming home one message:

Being an Achimotan is not about where you came from.

It is about the standards you live by.

4. The Emotional Labour of Teaching

Teaching is not a timetable.

It is a burden of hope.

Our parents may manage two or three adolescents. Teachers shepherd forty or more for hours, day after day, absorbing frustration, correcting without crushing, demanding excellence without extinguishing spirit, and often while still young themselves.

I speak with empathy, having taught for thirteen years.

Imagine navigating your own early adulthood while managing the psychological weather systems of teenagers, each convinced they are mature enough to make life decisions based on TikTok trends.

Some days you feel like an educator.

Other days, a counsellor.

Occasionally, a peacekeeping force.

Teachers spend more time with most children than their own parents. That teacher might be the only one that actually knows what that student is capable of and what they're not.

When students fail, teachers feel the disappointment. When students drift, teachers quietly grieve potential being wasted.

That constancy is moral courage.

It is a burden of hope.

5. Now permit me a few mildly colourful confessions from my Achimota years.

Evening prep in our time was sacred. Silence fell like a Covid-19 lockdown or military decree. No talking. No wandering. Just brains at work, or so we thought, until teachers' appraisals proved otherwise.

Sixth Form supervisors discovered lifelong callings as law enforcement officers compiling the Talkatives' Register.

And if your name appeared on that Register, you faced school punishment, or, the legend himself... PETER!

Now, Peter Golby, the Physics master, with the bushy brown hair, and beard, and as tall as we were at age 12, is not to be confused with the dreaded PETER, Mr. Peter Renner, the Assistant Headmaster.

Mr. Golby never entered prep. He conducted raids. One second, silence thick as matron's porridge; the next, he sprang out like a traffic cop on the Accra-Cape Coast road!

Sometimes he chose the acrobatic option, a dramatic Spider-Man "thief-vault," through the window, landing mid-sentence with a startling screech: "Ah-haa! Gotcha!" before the culprit could swear by Kuzinik or chant a refrain from Shaggy's popular song with the infamous chorus, ".It wasn't me.."

The first time I was marched to PETER..., after three years of unscathed mischief, was courtesy Mr. Mensah, known affectionately and cautiously as “Akola.” Because in a fit of pubescent rage, I tore in half my failed Geography test paper... “Eiish!”

Strategic padding was immediately activated by sympathetic allies and veterans like Toro, Presh, Chester, Abla, and Abi, who passed me military-grade shields – sheets of paper and handkerchiefs, that vanished into my back pockets when Akola took a corner to PETER’S office.

PETER was efficient. No committees. No appeals. Swift justice.

The cane descended;

Then an embarrassing THUD..., like beating dust out of a sofa!

Palpable silence. “*It wasn’t me..*” A baleful look and the botched BBL ‘Shield’ underwent immediate surgery.

After the remaining strokes, now emitting correct acoustics, I limped out behind a skipping Mr. Mensah, with my dignity on life support.

From behind the desk came Peter’s dry epilogue:

“Narnor! Come and put the papers in the bin... and return the handkerchiefs to their rightful owners. Ee-diot!”

And yes, Mr. Mensah would be pleased to know, I became a Geography teacher. Life does have a sense of humour.

Adrian Sherwood, co-author of English for Modern West Africa, the no-nonsense lanky British chap, aka “Terrorr,” marched me to Peter two weeks later, for the high crime of reading notices! Just a few seconds after snack break!.. right here, three meters to my right.

I don’t look for trouble. Like my good friend Ajit, trouble has our home address and spare key.

I locked eyes with PETER. He exclaimed in Ga, “Narnor! O ba biε e-kon?”

“Groan.”

But this time, ‘Terror’ had brought me to be registered for school punishment! Glorious Kuzinik. Thank you!

Lugging ten buckets of dry human or bovine excreta from the processing plant to the school farm, was most welcome. Why? Because organic agriculture builds character! And more importantly, it doesn’t leave you sitting at a 45-degree angle for a week!

Long before social media made “organic” fashionable, we were pioneers. Farm-to-table. Nose-to-farm. Species-ambiguous fertiliser and all. Sustainable development-Achimota ‘sty-le.’

Who can forget Larry Cobson? May his soul rest in perfect pedagogical peace.

After every class test, he delivered post-mortems worthy of a streaming comedy special. Reading exam bloopers so outrageous they seemed extracted from the 10th edition of “The World’s Dumbest Test Answers.”

Evolution, at that moment, clearly had unfinished business for some.

Paper raised to cover half his face, battling laughter, while we battled ignominy with even louder laughter, and thankful that he never identified the day’s Neanderthals! *“It wasn’t me..”*

Mrs. Sey encouraged my creative writing. One day, in her honour, I will publish.

Mrs. Amegatcher, then Ms. Dowouna, predicted that less time braiding my hair and more time studying French would improve my fluency.

Madame, as my hair retreated, my French advanced. I am now bald. I leave you to assess my proficiency.

6. Discipline as Formation

These stories are not meant to sport our teachers.

It was never about humiliation.

It was about formation.

When teachers insist on punctuality, it is not about minutes.

When they enforce uniform standards, it is not about fabric.

When they correct behaviour, it is not about control.

It is about character.

High expectations.

High responsiveness.

Clear boundaries.

Not authoritarian.

Authoritative.

That balance built generations.

7. Teacher Appreciation

Achimota alumni have consistently improved this school's infrastructure: classrooms, an assembly hall, laboratories, etc..

For nearly fifteen years, the Class of '76 has celebrated the last Saturday of December with our teachers. Over time, teacher and student have blurred into family. Bound by memory and the silken tie of Achimota.

We laugh at old suspicions of staff romances, confess escapades, and sometimes sit teary-eyed, as when Mr. Afortoworvlo recounted the trials of his early teaching years. Students' exuberance can sometimes be toxic!

These shared moments are reflective and priceless.

8. 1976 Year Group 50th Anniversary Legacy Project

When it was time to choose our legacy project, we asked: How can we honour our teachers apart from citations?

We discovered something sobering.

In a school of nearly 5,000 students on a nearly 1,000 acre estate– the accommodation deficit for teachers is alarming..; indeed scandalous!

Do we consider the time Ms. Boahene travels home after supervising a DJ night at 10:30 p.m.? Do Ms. Gaveh and Ms. Becky have children waiting while they stay late for debates? What is it like for Mr. Fiifi Arthur sharing quarters at Katanga with Mr. Gacious, Mr. Pogas, and Ms. Edith Adorkor?

We visited some of the shared garage dwellings with their plywood extensions, funded by the teachers!

I refuse to describe the improvised washrooms, some without running water. It was sad.

In that moment, the Class of 1976 resolved to act.

I am proud to announce that the 1976 class for its 50th Anniversary Legacy Project, started in March of 2025, the construction of an eight-unit, HALF a MILLION US DOLLAR teachers' accommodation facility... in memory and to the honour of all who taught us.

It is scheduled for completion by October this year. Being pensioners and retirees, this is no small undertaking.

We had hoped for a Public-Private Partnership to ease the burden on GETFund and the Ministry of Education. But repeated attempts yielded little response.

9. A National Shame We Must No Longer Ignore

For close to a century, teacher accommodation at Achimota has not meaningfully expanded; despite swelling enrolment and increasing need for more staff.

GETFund constructed student dormitories: Joyce Aryee and New Block. But can you imagine? The New Block came without a Housemistress' residence! Unbelievable!

This is not administrative oversight. It is moral failure.

This situation is a blight on our national conscience. It reflects the broader and reckless treatment of the managers, staff, and teachers of this school; the custodians of legacies and assets bequeathed to us by our forebears.

Of the teaching staff, 148 live in cramped quarters with their families. Nearly 100 are non-resident.

No meaningful addition.

No decisive intervention.

No visible urgency.

Alumni support must complement state responsibility; not replace it.

Achimota is no ordinary school; it is a national monument. Its grounds have shaped Ghana's leadership - Kwame Nkrumah, Kofi Abrefa Busia, Edward Akufo-Addo and William Ofori-Atta, to Jerry John Rawlings, John Atta Mills, and even our current President John Dramani Mahama, who began at Achimota Primary, are notable figures. Beyond our borders, Sir Dauda Jawara, 1st president of The Gambia and Mrs. Sally Mugabe, 1st lady of the President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, all walked here.

Achimota draws tourists and scholars from around the world, inspired by the giants who once called it their school. Yet today, its teachers wake at 4:00 a.m., scrambling for trotro from Kasoa, Amasaman, Ningo, Gbugbla..., because accommodation in West Wuogon-Ayawaso is beyond reach or pay cheque.

They arrive exhausted, and expected to teach with excellence. No fuss. No complaint.

This neglect is unacceptable.

While we press for accountability and partnership, we must not retreat into paralysis. Achimotans have never waited helplessly for rescue. We mobilize. We organize. We build. We lead. Let's fund staff housing units; refurbish existing staff quarters; contribute to a structured accommodation endowment; advocate strategically at policy level.

To individuals and corporate organizations: join us. Your contribution will be thankfully received, faithfully applied, and visibly acknowledged.

Honouring a legacy is not only to praise the past.

It is to protect those who sustain it today.

Let the effort of 1976 become a movement.

Not anger without action.

Not charity without accountability.

But shared responsibility; courageous and enduring.

10. Conclusion

Today, Achimota calls on each of us, not as observers, not as distant admirers, but as stewards of her future.

Let us ensure that teacher housing is dignified, that maintenance and security are no longer overstretched, and that the school's upkeep rests on shared commitment by all, not generosity alone.

For this institution has shaped leaders, nurtured ideals, and carried the hopes of a nation.

Ninety-nine years ago, a seed was planted.

Through colonial rule, independence, upheaval, and coups. Governments changed.., and Generations changed.

Teachers stood.

And because they stood.., Ghana stands.

Somewhere in your life, a teacher said, “You can do better.”

Multiply that sentence across ninety-nine years, and it becomes a national force.

Students.., one day you will discover the greatest gift this school gave you was not prestige, not advantage, not even opportunity.

It was formation.

And behind that formation.., stood a teacher.

If you believe Ghana’s future depends on disciplined excellence...

If you believe nations are strengthened in classrooms...

If you have ever been shaped by a teacher...

Then rise...

Rise not merely in gratitude;

Rise in commitment.

Rise to protect standards.

Rise to carry the second century with the courage with which the first was built.

Let our applause declare today!

Achimota and its teachers will never stand alone!!

God bless our teachers.

God bless Achimota School.

And God bless Ghana.

Thank you.