

Speech of The Starehe UK Chair, delivered at the Palace of Westminster, UK Houses of Parliament, during the forum on *'Transforming lives through building character - The Starehe approach'*, hosted by Starehe UK, and The Council for Education in the Commonwealth, on 3rd July 2026.

Distinguished champions of education, good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy lives to travel to this event. Your efforts, care and genuine commitment continue to transform lives on a daily basis across the world, in ways that you can never imagine.

In this grand UK Parliament building today, you have real people that can share some evidence on the power of transformative education. Thank you to Starehe UK and the Council for Education in the Commonwealth, for co-hosting this Forum.

It is an absolute honour to stand before you today, united by a shared profound conviction: that education is the most powerful equaliser humanity has ever established, to shape a fairer and more resilient world.

Too often, the global metric of a school's success is reduced to a cold statistic. We look at exam percentages, league tables, and memorised facts. Yet we know that a child is more than a test score. That non-academic activities are equally important and transformative. If we only focus on training the brain but neglect the character, we are failing the child and our societies.

The Starehe Way purposefully integrates academics and character at both the Starehe Girls' Centre and Starehe Boys' Centre. These two Kenyan schools did not begin in luxury. The Founders believed that poverty of pocket should never mean poverty of ambition. They did not build schools of strict rules and walls. They desired an ecosystem of **absolute trust** towards the students.

Since inception, The Starehe Way has proven that academic excellence, extracurricular activities and deep character development are not exclusive. They are partners. But how does this model work, and what would intrigue supporters of education like you about these schools?

1. **Leadership, not governance:** Starehe is largely run by the students themselves through a robust Prefectship and a democratic school parliamentary system. Students self-manage their own dormitories, the dining halls, and help in the collective character-building of their peers and their leaders. By trusting young people with such realistically tangible heavy responsibility, the schools transform passive rule-followers into active, accountable leaders before they even turn eighteen. Baraza is a town-hall style open forum, where anyone is free to air their concerns to the whole student body in the presence of the Director and the school leadership team. Responses are given promptly and any follow-up actions are accountably completed.
2. **Civic duty as a curriculum:** During school holidays, Starehe students do not just sit back, relax and literally enjoy the holiday. Through the Voluntary Service Scheme, they go out into hospitals, clinics, and government offices across the nation to work without any pay in return. They learn that their education is not a private luxury; it is a public trust for them to uplift their nation whenever the opportunity knocks.
3. **The power of trust:** Discipline is built from within. Measures to address shortfalls in character focus on restoration, reform, and individualised conscience. The schools trust the students to look after themselves, their environment, and fellow students.

4. **Spiritual excellence and academics:** Every religion is freely practiced at the schools. Muslims, Catholics, Protestants freely observe their faiths as desired. On academics, the schools are household names for sending over 93% of their graduates to universities and higher learning institutions. The self-driven desire to learn is inspiringly admirable and a great motivation to their teachers and carers.

The outcomes and impact of this wholesome education model are undeniable. These schools have produced cabinet ministers, company CEOs, doctors, international scholars, founders of businesses, sports personalities, musicians, parliamentarians, and many more.

As we continue to support education at Starehe, across the Commonwealth, and beyond, our goal cannot simply be putting children behind desks for good grades. Our goal must be to foster environments that build the *whole* person into a responsible global citizen. We need schools to teach mathematics alongside empathy, computer coding alongside civic duty, and literacy alongside integrity. One of the Starehe Founders, the late Dr. Griffin, used to tell the students: *'Whatever your duty is, do it as fully and as perfectly as you can.'*

Let us continue to promote education that builds character, not just classroom grades. Let us support schools that trust young people, challenge them, and teach them to serve others. Let us continue to cultivate future leaders, peacemakers, and visionaries for generations to come. As I finish, please allow me to paraphrase one of the Chinese sayings:

If you want 1 year of prosperity, grow grain; If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees, but if you want 100 years or more of prosperity, please go out there and grow people.

Thank you very much for your company and attention.

Mr David Kisiaky
Chair - Starehe UK
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