



Dominic Norrish
Chief Executive Officer
Unity Schools Partnership
By Email: DNorrish@unitysp.co.uk

30 June 2026

Response to consultation on proposal to close the Sixth Form at Felixstowe School

Dear Mr Norrish,

I am writing to you to share my response as part of the ongoing consultation on the proposal to close the Sixth Form at Felixstowe School.

I cannot support the permanent closure of Felixstowe School Sixth Form on the basis of the proposal as currently presented.

Whilst I recognise the serious challenges set out in the consultation document, including declining student numbers and financial pressures, these challenges do not demonstrate that permanent closure is the right or only answer at this time. I have significant concerns that the inevitable impact of this closure has not fully been considered and that alternative options have not been adequately explored.

1. Accessibility of post-16 options for young people in Felixstowe

The closure of the Sixth Form would remove the only state school or college based post-16 provision within Felixstowe. This would represent a huge loss for the town and surrounding communities.

The consultation document lists alternative providers, but the nearest state sixth forms and colleges identified are far outside Felixstowe, with the table shown in the proposal document putting the closest option, Kesgrave High School, at 6.5 miles away. This necessitates at least a 40-minute drive or, for the many reliant on public transport, over 2 hours on a bus each day.

For some students, travelling further afield will be manageable and may be the right choice. For others, it will mean longer days, additional cost, reduced study time, and less time for other responsibilities.

I am very concerned that the proposal risks shifting the burden of an institutional financial problem onto students and families and that the financial impact of this proposal would not fall evenly. Families with the means to pay for travel will have more post-16 choices. Students from lower-income households will have fewer. That is a real narrowing of opportunity. A proposal which removes local post-16 provision must consider not only whether alternative places exist, but whether all students can genuinely access them.

The proposal recognises transport links and bursaries, but, as I have heard from many parents, bursaries do not offer a universal guarantee of affordable access. They are means-tested, often with limited nuance, may not cover all costs, and do not address the practical impact of longer daily travel.

The proposal does not provide a full transport impact assessment. It does not set out actual journey times or costs and does not consider the impact that these factors will have on students. Before any final decision is



taken, there should be a clear assessment of travel times, travel costs, eligibility for support, and the likely wider impacts.

Without that evidence, I do not believe the Trust can safely conclude that the alternative provision listed is genuinely accessible for all Felixstowe students.

2. The consultation has not sufficiently tested alternatives

I am concerned that the proposal itself identifies partnership provision as “an attractive possibility” and “worth investigating” but proposes permanent closure before that work has been completed.

The proposal document says a partnership model with other further education providers could allow some core A Level provision to be maintained at Felixstowe School, with pupils studying part of the week there and part of the week with a regional provider. That is exactly the kind of option which should be explored seriously before permanent closure is pursued.

The proposal states that such a model is complex and not an immediate solution, partly because of the Government’s new T and V Levels coming onstream between 2027 and 2030. But that is not a sufficient reason to close the door now. If the future of post-16 provision is changing nationally, that strengthens the case for a local transition plan, not an immediate move to permanently remove provision.

I would like to see the Trust work with the Department for Education, local authorities, Felixstowe Town Council, local providers, parents, students and the wider community on a serious options appraisal. That should include:

- a partnership model with local colleges or sixth forms;
- a smaller core academic offer alongside vocational pathways;
- shared staffing or shared curriculum arrangements;
- transport and bursary guarantees;
- an interim model for the cohorts affected before any longer-term provision could be developed.

At present, I do not believe the proposal demonstrates that these alternatives have been exhausted.

3. Impact on aspiration, continuity and the wider school

The proposal should also be considered in terms of its wider effect on Felixstowe School and the town.

Removing sixth form provision would change the character and status of Felixstowe School. An 11-18 school can support aspiration and progression for younger pupils by giving them a visible route through to post-16 study in their own town. It can also help with curriculum depth and staff recruitment, particularly for subject specialists who value the opportunity to teach A Level.

Removing the town’s only state school or college based post-16 provision would reduce the educational offer of the town as a whole and make Felixstowe a less attractive place for families who want their children to be able to continue their education locally.

4. Impact on groups with protected characteristics



The most obvious potential impact is on students with special educational needs, particularly where longer journeys, unfamiliar environments and larger settings, create significant barriers.

I welcome the fact that the proposal identifies pupils with disabilities as an important consideration. However, the mitigation proposed is limited. Communication, signposting to bursary funding, and discussion with providers about reasonable adjustments are necessary, but they do not amount to a full assessment of whether the proposal creates a disproportionate barrier in the first place.

I am also concerned about students with health needs, young carers, and students whose family circumstances make travel more difficult.

The Trust should publish a full equality impact assessment before any final decision is made. That assessment should include transport accessibility, extra cost, reasonable adjustments, and the specific effect on students who would otherwise have chosen to remain in a smaller local school setting.

Conclusion

I recognise that Unity Schools Partnership faces a difficult decision. I do not dispute that the current Sixth Form model faces serious financial and educational challenges.

However, the proposal as presented does not yet justify the permanent loss of Felixstowe's only state post-16 provision. It identifies a problem, but it does not provide sufficient evidence that closure is the only viable solution, nor does it show that alternative local or partnership models have been fully tested.

Felixstowe's young people need strong, accessible post-16 opportunities. I urge Unity Schools Partnership not to proceed with permanent closure at this stage, but instead to work with the Department for Education, local councils, education providers, parents, students and the wider community to develop a credible plan for the future of post-16 education for Felixstowe students.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP

Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal