

Notice of Motion - Proposed closure of Corpusty School

Proposer – Cllr A Brown, Seconder – Cllr C Ringer

The Council notes:

The Proposal

This Council notes the current proposal to close Corpusty Primary School by Synergy Multi Academy Trust (the Trust) by September 2026 misdescribed as an amalgamation.

Community Heart

The school has served the parish and wider community since 1881 and was identified by the Corpusty & Saxthorpe Neighbourhood Plan, adopted in April 2019, as a vital hub for local families if not the heartbeat of the village, offering not just education but a focus for family life. It is noted that the school is rated as good by Ofsted. Closing the school will lead to decline in the village's vibrancy and negatively impact local businesses and property values.

Statutory Presumption:

National guidance for education dictates a presumption against the closure of rural schools requiring the Trust to exhaust all alternatives like re-assessing catchment areas to consider a more local alternative in Astley Primary School (4.2 miles) instead of the proposed Reepham (7 miles) or Gresham (6 miles) being offered as alternatives to parents.

Conversion:

The Trust are investigating re-opening the school for Special Educational Needs (SEND) pupils but no analysis of how this will be delivered, timescales or business case has been presented.

The Council Believes

Social and Environmental Impacts:

This closure will lead to increased travel times and traffic movements negatively impacting air quality and the health and wellbeing of young children forced into longer commutes.

Educational Best Interests:

Small schools often achieve high standards of education through nurtured, local learning environments that cannot be replicated in larger, more distant hubs.

Flawed Rationale:

Current projection produced by the Trust on falling pupil numbers as the main driver for closing the school may not fully account for planned local housing developments in Corpusty itself but in Briston and Edgefield or recent management decisions since the advent of the Trust in 2018. The district is experiencing a declining school age population but not at the rate suggested by the figures showing reductions from 103 in 2014/15 to 31 today.

Council Resolves:

1. To write to the DfE Regional Director for the East of England requesting:

- Intervention and review the decision to close Corpusty School
- A pause in implementation pending completion of:
 - A full Equality Impact Assessment under the Public Sector Equality Duty;
 - A rural and coastal access impact review;
- Clarification as to how the decision aligns with forthcoming legislative reforms to MAT accountability.

2. To write to Norfolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Education seeking:

- An explanation of how this decision aligns with Norfolk's strategic vision for 4-11 years education in North Norfolk;
- Details of alternative delivery models explored with Synergy MAT;
- Assurance that a coherent plan remains in place for continued Ofsted rated good schooling provision for displaced pupils at alternative schools.

3. To write to Synergy Multi-Academy Trust requesting:

- **Publication of the Trust's impact assessment:** including projected effects on participation, travel burdens and Free School Meal pupils over five years;
- **Explore Alternatives:** To instruct the Chief Executive to pursue the Trust for further information about viable alternatives to closure including engaging with Astley Primary School in Briston by potentially merging Briston and Corpusty school catchment areas. Further to explore possible combination with SEND children sharing the school premises;
- **Enhanced Consultation:** To conduct an independent Community Impact Assessment to fully understand the long-term social and economic consequences for the Corpusty and Saxthorpe area;
- **Management Audit:** To pursue a review of the Trust's performance in other schools within their federation and the auditing of financial accounts since inception.