A letter from the Leweston Working Group

Leweston School is closed. It does not have to stay that way.

An invitation to help secure a sustainable future for Leweston

Without notice, during the October half-term, Leweston School closed. Around 600 pupils, from nursery through to sixth form, and its teachers and support staff were left facing an abrupt and deeply disruptive loss. Families have had to find new schools and make difficult decisions at extraordinary speed. We are writing to ask whether you would consider helping to give Leweston a future once again.







A school built on service

Leweston began in 1891, when sisters of the Religious of Christian Instruction travelled from Belgium to Sherborne to establish St Antony's, their first school in Britain. Alongside it, they ran St Joseph's, providing free education to local children until legislation required its closure in the 1950s.

In 1948, the senior school moved to Leweston Manor, an estate with roots dating back to the Middle Ages. At its heart stands Trinity Chapel, one of the earliest post-Reformation Catholic churches in the country. Generations of pupils have grown up under the motto *gaudere et bene facere*: rejoice and do well. The school became fully co-educational in 2018 and, for 135 years, combined learning, faith, pastoral care and service.

Why Leweston matters

For pupils and families. Leweston has offered a high-quality education within a nurturing community. It has sought to make independent education accessible to a broad range of families, supported through scholarships and means-tested assistance.

For its Catholic mission. Leweston's Catholic ethos is expressed not only through worship, but through a daily culture of empathy, inclusion and service. The school's motto has been lived through the actions of pupils, staff and families.

For staff and the wider community. The closure has affected hundreds of families and the staff who taught and cared for their children. Since the announcement, parents, former pupils, staff and supporters have mobilised quickly, demonstrating the strength of the community around the school.

What happened

This was a failure of management, not of the school. In December 2025, Leweston's trustees transferred the school to Concept Education. Concept ran it for three terms, then closed it without notice. The company that ran the school has since entered liquidation.

The rescue proposition

The Leweston Working Group, led by parents, is developing a plan to reopen Leweston as a financially sustainable, not-for-profit school with new governance and operational leadership. The current working requirement is £10 million to secure the school's long-term future, including approximately £6 million to support acquisition, reopening and the first two academic years. These figures remain subject to due diligence and will be supported by a detailed financial plan before funds are drawn.

Where the money goes

Broadly, three things: taking on the school and the professional and regulatory work of reopening it; bringing its staff back and running it through the years while pupil numbers rebuild, which includes making up lost October pay and a hardship fund for those hardest hit; and a working reserve, so that the school can withstand difficult years. The detailed allocation will be set out in the financial plan before any funds are drawn.

A stronger and more sustainable model

Independent governance. Leweston will operate on a not-for-profit basis with a new independent board. The aim is to assemble trustees with relevant education, finance, legal, property, safeguarding and commercial expertise, supported by appropriate professional advisers.

Sustainable fees and targeted support. Fees will move gradually towards those of comparable local schools while remaining below the local average. The plan will preserve targeted scholarships and support for families in need within an affordable and transparent budget.

Supporting those affected. Every member of staff will be offered the chance to return. We will make up any October pay not covered by the government's redundancy payments scheme, and set up a hardship fund for staff and families facing real difficulty because of the closure, with clear criteria and confidential assessment.

Clear financial discipline. All surpluses will be reinvested in the school. The board will monitor management accounts regularly, build a cash reserve and report to donors on the use of funds and progress against the agreed plan.

Prudent assumptions. The financial model is being stress-tested against cautious pupil-return and rebuilding assumptions, rather than relying on an immediate return to previous pupil numbers. The detailed case will be made available to prospective major donors as due diligence progresses.

The pathway to reopening

The ambition is to reopen as soon as it is legally, operationally and educationally responsible to do so. A confirmed date will only be announced once the acquisition, regulatory, staffing, safeguarding and financial conditions have been satisfied. The priority is not simply to reopen quickly, but to reopen credibly and with a

structure capable of enduring.

Protecting donors

At this stage, we are seeking expressions of interest and conditional pledges. Donors will not be asked to release funds until clearly defined conditions have been met, including satisfactory due diligence, an agreed acquisition and operating structure, appropriate regulatory approvals, a viable financial plan and the appointment of suitable governance. The final pledge documentation will explain how funds will be held, applied and returned if the rescue cannot proceed.

Why we are asking you

We are approaching people who understand what is lost when a long-established school closes and who may be able to change the outcome. A gift to Leweston will not create a school from nothing. It will help restore a living educational community: pupils and teachers, a historic estate and chapel, and a mission carried from Belgium to Dorset 135 years ago.

This is an opportunity to preserve Catholic education, protect choice for families and rebuild Leweston on stronger foundations. The community has mobilised and the Leweston Working Group is ready to act. What is now needed is the financial support, expertise and introductions that can turn a rescue plan into a sustainable reality.

Can you help?

If you would consider supporting the rescue through a donation, conditional pledge, professional expertise or an introduction to others who may be able to help, please contact:

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Learn more and add your voice:

- Leweston Working Group website (leweston.group)
- @savelewestonschool on Instagram (instagram.com/savelewestonschool)
- Staff fundraiser (justgiving.com/crowdfunding/lewestonstaff)
- Sign the petition (openpetition.org/smcmr)

With gratitude, and with hope,

Paolo Mortarotti
Parent of four Leweston pupils

The Leweston Working Group is independent of the company in liquidation and its owners.