



The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)

Date: Monday, 20 November 2023
Time: 10.00 am
Venue: Council Chamber, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum: 3)

Cllrs Spencer Flower (Chairman), Byron Quayle (Vice-Chairman), Laura Beddow, Jane Somper and Gary Suttle

Chief Executive: Matt Prosser, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic Services Meeting Contact chris.harrod@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting, apart from any items listed in the exempt part of this agenda.

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Agenda

Item	Pages
1. APOLOGIES	
To receive any apologies for absence.	
2. MINUTES	5 - 8
To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.	
3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
To disclose any pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interest as set out in the adopted Code of Conduct. In making their disclosure councillors are asked to state the agenda item, the nature of the interest and any action they propose to take as part of their declaration.	

If required, further advice should be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Representatives of town or parish councils and members of the public who live, work, or represent an organisation within the Dorset Council area are welcome to submit either 1 question or 1 statement for each meeting. You are welcome to attend the meeting in person or via MS Teams to read out your question and to receive the response. If you submit a statement for the committee this will be circulated to all members of the committee in advance of the meeting as a supplement to the agenda and appended to the minutes for the formal record but will not be read out at the meeting.

The first 8 questions and the first 8 statements received from members of the public or organisations for each meeting will be accepted on a first come first served basis in accordance with the deadline set out below. For further information read [Public Participation - Dorset Council](#)

All submissions must be emailed in full to chris.harrod@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk by 8.30am on Wednesday 15 November 2023.

When submitting your question or statement please note that:

- You can submit 1 question or 1 statement.
- a question may include a short pre-ambule to set the context.
- It must be a single question and any sub-divided questions will not be permitted.
- Each question will consist of no more than 450 words, and you will be given up to 3 minutes to present your question.
- when submitting a question please indicate who the question is for (e.g., the name of the committee or Portfolio Holder)
- Include your name, address, and contact details. Only your name will be published but we may need your other details to contact you about your question or statement in advance of the meeting.
- questions and statements received in line with the council's rules for public participation will be published as a supplement to the agenda.
- all questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

5. COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS

To receive questions submitted by councillors.

Councillors can submit up to two valid questions at each meeting and sub divided questions count towards this total. Questions and

statements received will be published as a supplement to the agenda and all questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

The submissions must be emailed in full to chris.harrod@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk 8.30am on Wednesday 15 November 2023.

[Dorset Council Constitution](#) – Procedure Rule 13

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|------------|--|---------|
| 6. | FORWARD PLAN | 9 - 14 |
| | To consider the Shareholder Committee Dorset Centre for Excellence's Draft Forward Plan. | |
| 7. | DORSET COUNCIL COMMISSIONING REPORT | 15 - 20 |
| | To consider the report. | |
| 8. | DCOE - REPORT OF CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS | 21 - 26 |
| | To consider the report. | |
| 9. | REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL ON PERFORMANCE OF THE TRADING ACTIVITIES OF THE COMPANY | 27 - 48 |
| | To consider the report. | |
| 10. | URGENT ITEMS | |
| | To consider any items of business which the Chairman has had prior notification and considers to be urgent pursuant to section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972. The reason for the urgency shall be recorded in the minutes. | |
| 11. | EXEMPT BUSINESS | |
| | To move the exclusion of the press and the public for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph x of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended). The public and the press will be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item of business is considered. | |

There are no exempt items scheduled for this meeting.

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THE SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (DCOE)

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2023

Present: Cllrs Spencer Flower (Chairman), Byron Quayle (Vice-Chairman), Laura Beddow and Jane Somper

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151)
Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Diane Grannell (Director – Dorset Centre of Excellence)
Chris Harrod (Senior Democratic Services Officer)
Andrew Holder (Managing Director - Dorset Centre of Excellence)
Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children)
Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer)
Lesley Mellor (Director – Dorset Centre of Excellence)
Frances Nicholson (Director – Dorset Centre of Excellence)
Matt Prosser (Chief Executive),
Claire Shiels (Corporate Director - Commissioning & Partnerships)
Elaine Tibble (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

13. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr G Suttle

14. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were signed and confirmed as a correct record.

15. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

16. Public Participation

No public participation requests had been received

17. Councillor Questions

No councillor questions had been received

18. Forward Plan

The forward plan was noted.

19. **Dorset Council Commissioning Report**

The Corporate Director for Commissioning, Quality and Partnerships introduced the report which set out an updated position for the school since the previous update in June 2023.

Officers responded to Members' comments and requests for clarification, details included:

- There was an ambition to develop the facilities on site for curriculum enhancement activities and development of life skills. Focus was currently centred around the walled garden, which would be opened up and used as allotments for growth of food, although a full range of opportunities were being explored.

NOTED

20. **Report of the Independent Chair of Board of Directors**

The Chairman of the Board for Dorset Centre of Excellence introduced the report, which set out the operational progress made and the successes of the school since the previous update in June 2023.

Officers responded to Members' comments and requests for clarification, details included:

- The "Schools within schools" principle was not a new concept. The aim was to divide the school up to three within one campus into manageable units, which in turn would provide the optimal support for children that are on site. It was a method that allowed groups of children with particular needs or those of particular age groups to be focussed upon, whilst delivering a curriculum that worked for them, without any compromise to the quality of teaching as the school increased in size.
- The school was currently operating on a hybrid two schools arrangement as it wasn't yet at capacity, but there was a very clear pathway to the three schools model as capital investment came and classrooms were handed over.

The Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing and Children, Education, Skills and Early Help thanked the school, its directors and indeed commissioning officers of the council for the work that had been undertaken in working with the local community to open up facilities for community use. This was echoed by the Chairman of the Committee.

NOTED

21. **Urgent Items**

There was no urgent business.

22. Exempt Business

It was proposed by Cllr B Quayle and seconded by Cllr J Somper:

DECISION

That In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in item No 11 because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

23. Remuneration Policy

The item was deferred at the request of the Chairman of the Board of Directors to allow further work to be undertaken prior to consideration by the Shareholder Committee.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.38 am

Chairman

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The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) Forward Plan For the period 1 MARCH 2024 to 30 JUNE 2024

Explanatory Note:

This Forward Plan contains future items to be considered by the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence. It is published 28 days before the next meeting of the Committee. The plan includes items for the meeting including key decisions. Each item shows if it is 'open' to the public or to be considered in a private part of the meeting.

Definition of Key Decisions

Key decisions are defined in Dorset Council's Constitution as decisions which are likely to -

- (a) to result in the relevant local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the relevant local authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates (**Thresholds - £500k**); or
- (b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority."

In determining the meaning of "*significant*" for these purposes the Council will have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State in accordance with section 9Q of the Local Government Act 2000 Act. Officers will consult with lead members to determine significance and sensitivity.

Committee Membership 2023/24

Spencer Flower	Leader / Governance, Performance and Communications
Gary Suttle	Deputy Leader / Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy
Jane Somper	Adult Social Care, Health and Housing
Laura Beddow	Culture and Communities
Byron Quayle	Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Subject / Decision	Decision Maker	Date the Decision is Due	Portfolio Holder	Officer Contact
Standing items for consideration				
March				
Dorset Council Delegated Decisions Key Decision - No Public Access - Open	Decision Maker The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)	Decision Date 11 Mar 2024	Councillor Byron Quayle	<i>Executive Director, People - Children (Theresa Leavy)</i>
Dorset Council Commissioning Report Key Decision - No Public Access - Part exempt	Decision Maker The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)	Decision Date 11 Mar 2024	Councillor Byron Quayle	<i>Executive Director, People - Children (Theresa Leavy)</i>
DCoE - Report of the Chair of the Board Key Decision - No Public Access - Part exempt	Decision Maker The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)	Decision Date 11 Mar 2024	Councillor Byron Quayle	<i>Executive Director, People - Children (Theresa Leavy)</i>
June				

Subject / Decision	Decision Maker	Date the Decision is Due	Portfolio Holder	Officer Contact
Review of Terms of Reference Key Decision - No Public Access - Open	Decision Maker The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)	Decision Date Exact Date TBC	Leader of the Council	<i>Chris Harrod, Senior Democratic Services Officer chris.harrod@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk Director of Legal and Democratic Services - Monitoring Officer (Jonathan Mair)</i>
Dorset Council Delegated Decisions Key Decision - No Public Access - Part exempt	Decision Maker The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)	Decision Date Exact Date TBC	Portfolio Holder for People - Children, Education, Skills and Early Help	<i>Executive Director, People - Children (Theresa Leavy)</i>
Dorset Council Commissioning Report Key Decision - No Public Access - Part exempt	Decision Maker The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)	Decision Date Exact Date TBC	Portfolio Holder for People - Children, Education, Skills and Early Help	<i>Executive Director, People - Children (Theresa Leavy)</i>
DCoE - Report of the Chair of the Board Key Decision - No Public Access - Part exempt	Decision Maker The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)	Decision Date Exact Date TBC	Portfolio Holder for People - Children, Education, Skills and Early Help	<i>Executive Director, People - Children (Theresa Leavy)</i>
Annual Reports				
Annual Performance Report to Council	Decision Maker The Shareholder	Decision Date	Portfolio Holder for People - Children,	<i>Executive Director, People - Children</i>

Subject / Decision	Decision Maker	Date the Decision is Due	Portfolio Holder	Officer Contact
Key Decision - No Public Access - Open	Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)		Education, Skills and Early Help	<i>(Theresa Leavy)</i>

DRAFT

Private/Exempt Items for Decision

Each item in the plan above marked as 'private' will refer to one of the following paragraphs.

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the shadow council proposes:-
 - (a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

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The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

20 November 2023

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): Cllr

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Claire Shiels
Job Title: Corporate Director Commissioning and Partnerships
Tel: 01305224682
Email: c.shiels@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to the enhanced cooperation between Dorset Council and the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) and the progress made in the recovery plan previously described in earlier meetings.

Recommendation:

Shareholders are asked to note the progress made and support the continued cooperation between the Council and the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

Reason for Recommendation:

Progress continues to be sustained enabling the company to focus on delivering the business plan and preparing for growth.

1. Report

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to the enhanced cooperation between Dorset Council and the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) and an update on Dorset Council activity required to realise the delivery of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Business Plan.
- 1.2 Regular contract review meetings continue focused on the performance of the school, with continued engagement between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for SEND. Regular operational meetings are in place to support conversations about individual children and to plan admissions. Contract management focuses on assessing progress on the priority action plan, stability and operation of the school and learning from the Ofsted Inspection.
- 1.3 Commissioners can report that the Executive Leadership team of the Dorset Centre of Excellence and the Board of Directors are continuing to make good progress in the following areas:
 - **Governance:** Regular Board meetings and sub-committees are in place, meeting regularly and providing assurance, support and challenge to the executive leadership team. Dorset Council Commissioners continue to attend in an advisory capacity. The Ofsted inspection found that the leadership of the school and the arrangements for governance have been significantly strengthened; Leaders have the confidence of staff, parents and pupils. Inspectors also found that leaders had “significantly improved the school in a short time”. Following the inspection it is now deemed that all the requirements of the independent school standards are met in full. This triangulates with our assessment through contract management arrangements, the pace of improvement has been swift, prudently balanced with a sustainable approach to long term sustainability.
 - **Recruitment and retention:** Recruitment activity continues to be a high priority for the school, with continued activity on recruitment to support the planned growth in pupil numbers for January 2024. The 13 new teaching staff were employed, starting September 2023; a further recruitment round for January 2024 is just being completed. No staff resignations have been received (during the window in the academic year for resignations).

Subject leaders are being recruited to bring a specialist focus to enable greater depth to the curriculum; this breath of curriculum is not always present in special schools and should be a strength of the school offer. Current subject leaders are in place for art, design and design technology, and PE and outdoor learning, English and Maths is the next focus.

- **Ofsted and key performance indicators:** The school was inspected by Ofsted in the Summer Term, areas of strength and areas for development were identified, particularly related to the development of curriculum. The company has updated the School Development Plan to include actions from the Ofsted Inspection and these have been shared with commissioners as part of the contract review arrangements. Officers from the council (Commissioners, Education Challenge Lead and Head of Service for Children Thriving in Education) met with the Headteacher and DCOE Managing Director at the school on the 6th November, this included a tour of the school. Based on this quality assurance we are assured of the robustness of the plans in place, and the Education Challenge Lead will meet with the school curriculum lead to review evidence of impact and progress in more detail. This will include reviewing evidence of the learning ladders that have been established for all core subjects and the progress in embedding phonics this year.
- **Pupil growth:** Identification of additional pupils is now underway for a trajectory of 72 by the end of this Autumn Term – progress is being made in the identification of pupils and the focus now is on ensuring that transitions arrangements can be put in place to deliver a strong start. A weekly tracking system has been introduced to oversee progress. The opening of the Oak building has enabled a focus on the needs of different pupils and expansion – with Oak for pupils with internalised behaviours and Birch and Cherry for those with externalised. This significantly benefits pupils' experience at school and supports the model of 3 schools within a school.
- **Pupil experience:** Capturing pupil voice is a priority for the coming year and commissioners look forward to receiving information about this in ongoing reporting. The Ofsted inspection found the following regarding pupil experience: Pupils like their new school; Some

pupils have made friends within their class groups; they have formed trusting relationships with staff who have a detailed understanding of their needs; the attendance and motivation of most pupils improve over time; pupils feel safe in school and they see that staff want the best for them

- **Enrichment and broadening of the learning offer:** teachers are actively encouraged by the Headteacher to make use of the site for learning for example forest school approaches and the walled garden. There is now an established focus on cultural capital and community engagement for pupils, so they begin to be prepared to be part of their local community, providing valuable life skills.

1.4 **Community engagement:** Arrangements for use of the swimming pool by local community groups and schools are in place and are well received.

1.5 As in the last commissioner's report, the enhanced co-operation agreement remains in place, however the executive leadership team and the Board of Directors continue to be in a place where the support from Dorset Council officers continues to reduce. A summary of the position against each is provided below:

- Monthly contract reviews are in place
- Regular operational meetings continue
- Admissions process – joint working continues to identify new pupils to attend this term and beyond will continue for the foreseeable future until the school is a maximum capacity
- On-site presence of DC officers – this continues to be at the expected levels with no requirement for on-site presence identified
- Commissioner attendance at the board continues
- Joint approach to complaints and communications – DCOE are fully leading this, with no input from Dorset Council required
- Recruitment activity – continues to be successfully led by DCOE
- Support Offer – all DC support offered continues to be accepted and action taken as a result. This is continues to be focused on planning for growth including ensuring the delivery of appropriate classroom space.

2. **Support required to deliver the Company Business Case**

2.1 The Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning Group, chaired by the Chief Executive of Dorset Council continues to meet to oversee the next phases of growth required to deliver the business plan. Attendance

includes officers from Finance, Assets and Regeneration and Children's Services.

- 2.2 As described in the previous commissioner's report, increasing the number of additional classrooms available to the school and suitable for the delivery of a high quality Special Educational Needs curriculum is essential by September 2024 to support the delivery of the Business Plan. Contractors have been appointed and progress is being managed by Assets and Regeneration, Dorset Council.
- 2.3 The review of the lease arrangements is due to be completed by the end of December subject to the successful completion of on-site surveys to enable the legal team to complete their work.

3. **Financial Implications**

Fee price continues to be maintained at the previously agreed rates.

Work continues to develop the site to meet the growth trajectory required in the business plan. The funding for this work is contained within the Capital Budget which was approved by Cabinet in March 2023.

4. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

None identified at this stage – further work will be required as the programme develops.

5. **Well-being and Health Implications**

The health, safety and wellbeing of children and employees is of paramount importance so close collaboration between Dorset Council and the Dorset Centre of Excellence will continue.

6. **Other Implications**

None identified

7. **Risk Assessment**

- 7.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

8. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Not required for this report

9. **Appendices**

None

10. **Background Papers**

None

Dorset Centre of Excellence Shareholder Committee

20 November 2023

Report from Chair of Board

For Decision

Report Author: Ian Comfort

Title: Director and Chair, Dorset Centre of Excellence Ltd

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides an update on the current situation at the Dorset Centre of Excellence (“the Company”) and the Coombe House School (“the School”). It considers progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate, community use and finance.

Recommendations:

1. The Shareholder is asked to note the content of this report and to continue its support for the Company.
2. The Shareholder is also asked to agree to the filing of abridged accounts as set out in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 of the report.

Reason for Recommendation:

The Board, with the support of colleagues from Dorset Council, continues to make progress towards its objectives. The Board is mindful that the ongoing support through enhanced cooperation with the Council is ensuring the viability of the Company.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Shareholder is aware of the background to the opening of the School in May 2022 and of the improvement trajectory since.

2. Coombe House School

- 2.1 Shortly after the last Shareholder Committee meeting in September 2023, the Ofsted report that followed the Coombe House School inspection in June

2023 was published and was as expected based on the verbal feedback and early drafts that had been received.

- 2.2 The Shareholder Committee was provided with a copy of the report promptly upon its publication.
- 2.3 The publication prompted a range of media coverage, which was reviewed alongside the Council's communications team and was generally positive and reflective of reality.
- 2.4 Coombe House School continues to further its quality and has integrated the feedback from Ofsted into its wider School Development Plan.
- 2.5 Coombe House School welcomed a visit from the Dorset Council commissioning team in November 2023, who came to review progress made since the Ofsted visit. Their feedback was positive and reflected the Company's view that progress continues to be made.
- 2.6 Shortly after the publication of the Ofsted report, the Department for Education (DfE) wrote to the Chair of the Board of Directors to confirm that due to all the Independent School Standards now being met, there were to be no further regulatory action to be taken by them. The DfE shared that they had instructed Ofsted to 'return to a typical inspection cycle for the school'.
- 2.7 Coombe House School continues to make progress with its planned growth and is on target compared to the commissioning intentions outlined in the June 2023 business plan. Pupil transition is improving with most pupils reaching a full-time timetable far more quickly than had been achieved previously.
- 2.8 Coombe House School welcomed a planned quality assurance visit from Wiltshire Council in October 2023. The focus was on safeguarding and the feedback shared via the verbal feedback and the draft written report is positive and reflects the progress made over the last twelve months. A final version of this report shall be shared with the Council when it is received.

3. Commercial and Community Activities

- 3.1 The Company has continued to progress the opening of its leisure facilities to the local community since the update provided at the last Shareholder Committee meeting in September 2023.
- 3.2 The community swimming sessions are proving to be popular, with the size of the membership now having grown to 70. Further growth of this opportunity is currently limited by our recruitment of suitably trained and qualified lifeguards but there has been significant progress with this recently, meaning there can be optimism.

- 3.3 The regular hiring of the swimming pool by a local swim school has now commenced, with two sessions a week operating initially, and plans to grow this provision to circa six sessions per week. The operator is particularly focussed on providing inclusive tuition to learners with a variety of needs and starting points and offers tuition to local community groups, as well as to local children.
- 3.4 The local primary school, who had previously struggled to source a venue for their swimming tuition, has embraced the opportunity to hire our pool and is likely to extend their commitment. Although this occurs during school hours, it does not unreasonably impact upon the access afforded to pupils at Coombe House School.
- 3.5 Plans are developing to further extend our efforts to ensure that the all-weather pitch and sports hall are fully utilised.
- 3.6 The training and conferencing offer continues to be worked upon although the Company is mindful that the only suitable venue for this (Pear Tree) is now likely to be needed as contingency classroom accommodation whilst the works to develop new classroom spaces across the campus is completed.
- 3.7 In November 2023, the Commercial and Community Committee received a paper from the Executive Leadership Team about the development of the planned residential social care provision. Useful discussions took place and a clearer plan regarding next steps has been reached.
- 3.8 The Company is grateful for the Council's commitment to fund a master planning exercise to fully explore the opportunities that exist. This exercise has still not yet begun but the Company is liaising with the Council about the most effective way to do this.

4. **Business Plan Implementation**

- 4.1 Following the loan facility being agreed in August 2023, the Company requested its first draw down during October 2023, which was actioned on 1 November 2023. This request came later and at a lower level than had been forecast within the business plan, largely due to the careful financial management and some overperformance against budget.
- 4.2 Also implicit within the business plan was a need to review the commissioning agreement and lease agreement that are in place between the Council and Company. The Company understands that significant work has taken place since the last Shareholder Committee but the matters are not yet concluded. The Council and Company will continue to work together to finalise these important documents as a priority in the coming weeks.

4.3 The Company continues to welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to plan the development of further classrooms for Coombe House School. There has been significant activity. The Council has made a firm commitment to this investment and for the new accommodation to be ready for use for an intake in September 2024. All understand that this milestone is pivotal to the growth intentions that were outlined within the business plan. Planning for the next required phase, which shall be required to be available by September 2025, have begun well.

4.4 The Company can report that it is performing ahead of its scheduled position stated within its business plan. Pupil enrolment targets have been met and the additional commercial activity, which was not forecast to have had a positive commercial impact in this financial year has been progressed.

5. **HR Update**

5.1 The Company continues to make progress with its recruitment intentions. Recruitment for January 2024 has gone well, although targeting teacher recruitment mid-way through an academic year was predictably more challenging than recruitment for September 2023.

5.2 The Company continues to be mindful of the recruitment challenges that are approaching. Recruiting for Coombe House School for September 2024 is the largest single 'step-up' in staffing in the business plan and the development of the residential social care provision is also likely to bring significant challenge.

5.3 The ongoing work on the People Strategy, including implementation of the proposed Remuneration Policy, will assist the Company in meeting its recruitment intentions.

5.4 Staffing continues to be stable, with no significant HR matters being managed currently.

6. **Annual Performance Report**

6.1 The Company was requested to produce an Annual Performance Report to the Shareholder Committee. A copy of this has been provided for consideration by the Shareholder Committee later on the agenda, prior to its consideration by the Council in December 2023.

7. **Financial Statements for the year ending 31 March 2023**

7.1 The Company is required to file its financial accounts for the period ending 31 March 2023 with Companies House by 31 December 2023. The Directors consider that abridged accounts should be filed rather than filleting full accounts.

7.2 The Shareholder is asked to consent to the preparation and submission of abridged financial accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 in accordance with Section 444 (2A) of the Companies Act 2006. Abridged financial accounts are required to be filed at Companies House by 31 December 2023.

8. **Financial Implications**

8.1 The Company is performing ahead of its budget and business plan and has enhanced financial security following the arrangement of a loan facility with the Council.

9. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

9.1 There are no natural environment, climate and ecology implications associated with this report.

10. **Well-being and Health Implications**

10.1 The Board has a duty to ensure the health, safety and well-being of its staff and the children attending the School. It has been mindful of this when considering the transition of children into the School; how it builds numbers; and how it provides community use of facilities.

11. **Other Implications**

11.1 No other implications have been identified.

12. **Risk Assessment**

12.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Low.

13. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

13.1 The Board has not conducted an Equalities Impact Assessment for this report.

14. **Appendices**

14.1 There are no appendices to this report.

15. **Background Papers**

15.1 There are no background papers to be included with this report.

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Annual Performance Report

November 2023

**Dorset Centre of Excellence
Annual Performance Report**

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1. Introduction

The Dorset Centre of Excellence (the Company) is asked to report on its performance to the Shareholder annually and has been asked to provide its first report to the November 2023 Shareholder Committee Meeting so that it can be then shared onwards by that committee to a meeting of Full Council in December 2023.

2. Context

Following challenges when Coombe House School opened in May 2022, there were significant changes within the leadership and wider teams, reductions in pupil numbers and amendments to the plans for future admissions. The Company moved into a recovery phase, which included entering a state of enhanced cooperation with the Council.

From September 2022, an Interim Managing Director / Headteacher was in post leading the Company and Coombe House School. In October 2022, Ofsted visited to undertake an emergency unannounced inspection following receipt of some parental complaints regarding the schools' initial operating period. During this inspection, some Independent School Standards were found not to be met. The subsequent Ofsted report was published in December 2022, which was accompanied with formal correspondence from the Department for Education (DfE), who sought formal reassurance that plans to improve matters were robust.

This challenging period led to further consequences for the Company, its other intended commercial activities, and its ability to deliver the business plan.

3. Governance

Since the Company experienced the challenges described above, the Board of Directors has been significantly strengthened. With consolidation of its more established members and the initial addition of two Non-Executive Directors in September 2022 and a further three Non-Executive Directors in January 2023, under its chair, Ian Comfort, it has proved itself to be a strong and impactful body that has led a period of significant performance.

The Board has developed its committees, which consider school quality, finance and risk, and additional commercial and community opportunities. All committees, along with the wider Board, have led the Company forward to a more stable and positive position. During Ofsted's most recent regulatory visit to Coombe House School in June 2023 and its subsequent report published in September 2023, the effectiveness of the Board (the Proprietor) and their impact on governance were highlighted as a particular strength.

"Leaders, including the proprietor, have acted decisively and effectively to stabilise the school following some challenging first months."

(Ofsted June 2023)

Work to further strengthen the governance arrangements for the Company and School are ongoing to ensure that there is high quality support and challenge, close monitoring of compliance against the independent school standards and the expectations of the business plan.

4. Leadership

In the same period, the Executive has also been strengthened. A new Managing Director, Andy Holder, Senior Finance Manager, HR Manager and Facilities Manager all joined in the latter part of 2022 and together have assisted the Board to deliver significant progress.

As the Company seeks to develop and launch its residential social care offer, a further leadership line will be added. It is mindful of the potential challenges it is likely to face in its recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced social care leaders and so made provision within the approved business plan for an updated People Strategy, which will contribute towards overcoming these challenges.

5. The Business Plan

The Company welcomed Shareholder approval of its business plan in June 2023. Following the acceptance of the series of closely interconnected variables, came a commitment to review and update the wider arrangements that exist to ensure alignment with this updated plan. The working capital loan required to support the delivery of the business plan is in place and work to update the lease and commissioning agreement are ongoing.

Whilst the Company continues to work closely with the Shareholder to resolve the remaining foundational matters that exist between them (the updated lease and commissioning agreements), good progress is being made with the delivery of the business plan, which is ahead of target in terms of its financial position, the school roll and the additional commercial and community activities that had been detailed.

6. Coombe House School

Coombe House School operates in alignment with Dorset Council's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy, which states "*we want our children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to be healthy, happy and safe, and able to achieve their potential to lead a fulfilling life.*" For the Company, the school is and shall always be the core of its business. All other activities will be developed with the understanding that they should complement and not unreasonably risk the successful operation of the school.

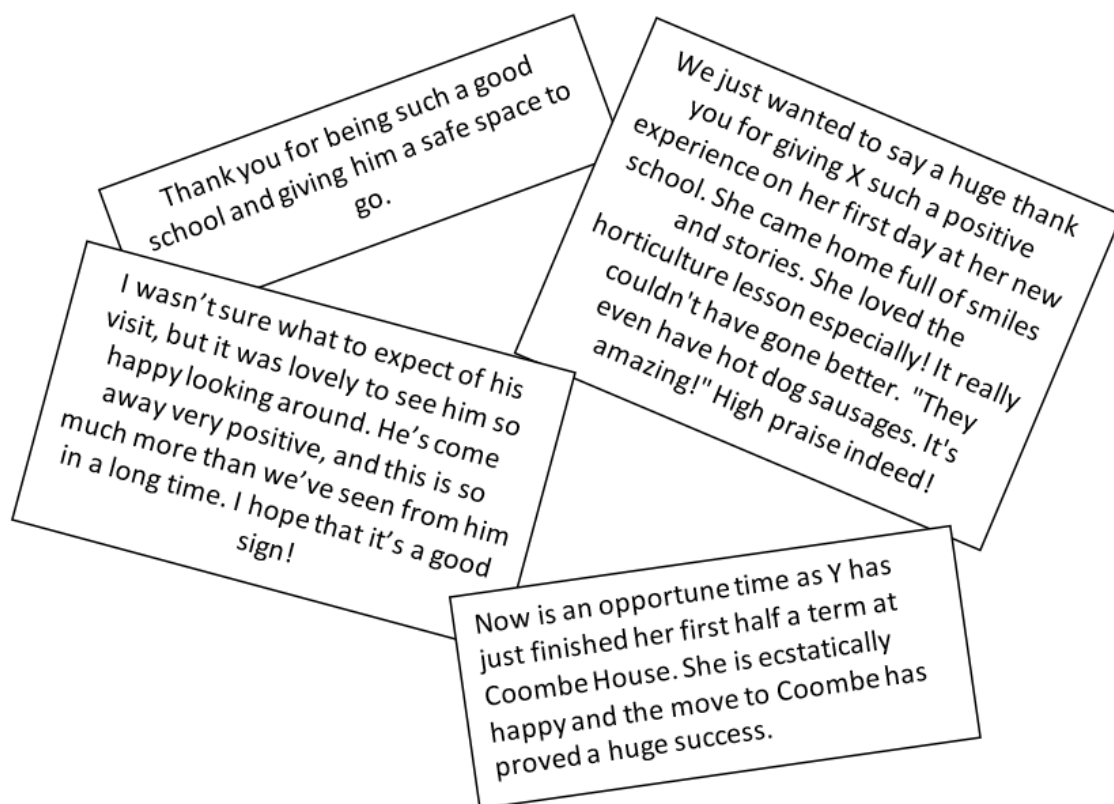
School leadership is strong and stable. A new Headteacher, Darren Harte, joined in February 2023 and was joined by a new Deputy Headteacher in June 2023. As the Company continues to develop its 'Schools within a School' model, further school leadership layers shall be added in line with the approved business plan.

The leadership team at the school welcomes the commitment to further develop the campus to allow for its growth and to ensure a high-quality curriculum offer through a 'Schools within a School' model.

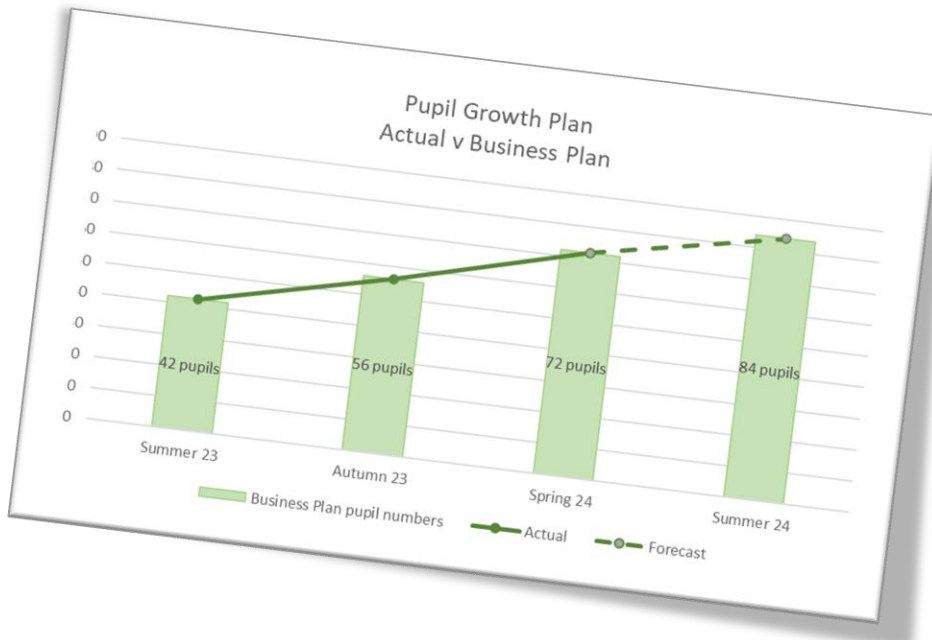
Schools within a School

As Coombe House School grows, it will retain a single registration but will operate as three different 'parts' that are spread across the campus. This operating strategy of placing children with others who will learn well together, and reducing the size of any single group of pupils significantly reduces risk. Many resources will be shared and accessible to all, but the model allows for both flexibility and an ability to manage what would otherwise be a large number of pupils in one single group.

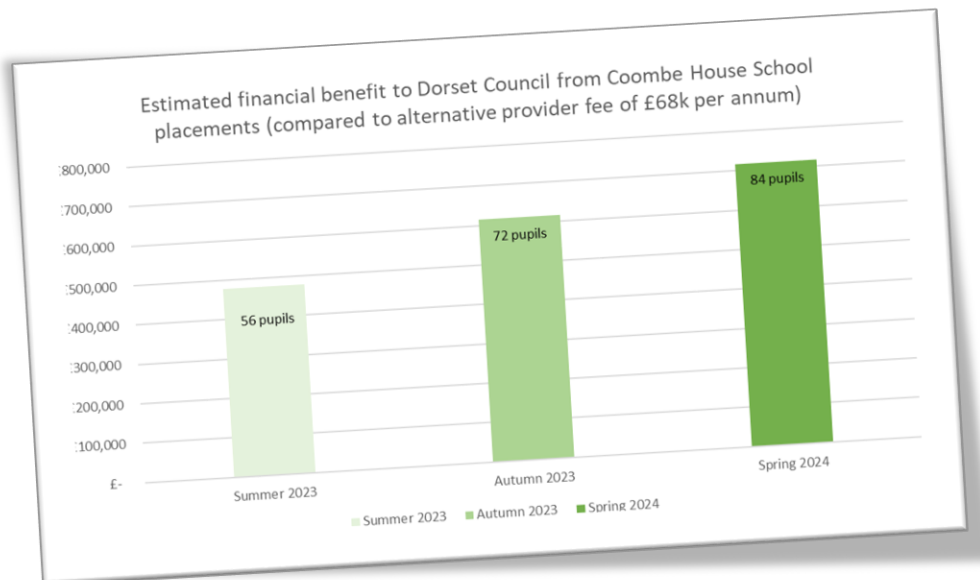
Parents and carers are increasingly choosing to feedback positively about their experiences, a selection of which is shared below.



The growth of the pupil roll at Coombe House School is on target and the admissions process is becoming more refined over time so that there is strong onward visibility on both sides about future intended commissioning patterns.



A significant intended outcome of the business plan was to provide savings compared to pupils at Coombe House School being placed at alternative independent special schools. Based on commissioned pupil places within the current financial year, potential savings for the Council for pupil fees is already significant. The chart below shows this indicative potential saving compared to pupils being placed with alternative independent special school providers with annual fees of £68,000.



The capital investment into the growth of Coombe House School supports the delivery of the Council's SEND Capital Strategy to increase the availability of local specialist places. It will provide spaces for pupils who are commonly placed with the more expensive independent special school providers and represents a growth in the number of available places for the pupils with the most common categories of need.

The next phase of classrooms that shall be made available to the Company are due by September 2024 and are likely to be similar in construction and design to the images below (which are of another similar development completed by the same contractor), with further classrooms being made available as part of a phased project.



7. Ofsted

Following the initial Ofsted visit in October 2022 detailed above, the most recent Ofsted inspection of Coombe House School found that new leaders have *“significantly improved the school in a short time.”* Inspectors visited the school in June 2023 and found that all the necessary (independent school) standards were met.

They wrote *“Since the last inspection, the proprietor has considerably strengthened the leadership of the school and the arrangements for governance. Leaders have the confidence of staff, parents and pupils.”*

Safeguarding was found to be effective with inspectors commenting that *“safeguarding underpins every aspect of school life.”*

During the inspection, pupils explained that they *“like their new school”* and *“see that staff want the best for them.”* The report explains that they have *“formed trusting relationships with staff who have a detailed understanding of their needs.”*

“I have been very pleased by the manner in which the school community has pulled together to ensure it develops a culture of continuous improvement. This report reflects the hard work of the team and pupils, who rightly deserve the positive comments within. Although inspectors agreed that there is more to do, the feedback from our pupils and their families was humbling and shows we are on the right path.”

Darren Harte, Headteacher

Whilst judgements for 'behaviour and attitudes', 'personal development' and 'leadership and management' were found to be good, inspectors agreed with the new leaders' assessment that the 'quality of education' required further improvement. Leaders continue to work through their development plans at pace to ensure the positive improvement trajectory is maintained.

The Department for Education (DfE) have written to the Company to confirm that they are now satisfied with the improvements made and of the regulatory status at Coombe House School. They have asked Ofsted to return to a typical inspection cycle.

8. Additional Commercial and Community Activities

Since the approval of the business plan in June 2023, the Company has made significant progress with the development of its 'non-School' commercial and community activities.

Short break provision (day)



During August 2023, its campus hosted two weeks of short break day provision for local children, including 28 children with additional needs who were eligible for funding from the Holiday activities and food programme (HAF) 2023.

Family Fun Day



The Company was also pleased to offer its campus for Dorset Council's 'Family Fun Day', which was very well attended. Meals were provided to those who were eligible for free school meals and a range of activities were provided. The Company was able to open its swimming pool to the families who attended, which was greatly enjoyed. Two members of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Board were in attendance to engage with families and young people about the work of the Company and its future intentions.

"I have a 10-year-old with ADHD and a 2 ½ year old on the pathway for autism assessment and they both loved the whole day thank you so much for all your hard work for all the children."

"All the time and effort involved to give families a free day out is very much appreciated. We loved being able to use the pool. It was our first time in this pool. Are there plans for local families to be able to use this lovely facility again in the future please?"

"I thought this was amazing, it's the first time my children have been able to have a bit more freedom to explore, it was safe and secure!"

Leisure

The efforts to offer the leisure facilities for local community use have moved on considerably. Following consultation with Shaftesbury Town Council and the Friends of Shaftesbury Swimming Club, a membership and booking portal has been developed by the Company to facilitate regular community swimming sessions outside of school hours. The portal provides paperless management of membership subscriptions and swim session bookings, with all payments made online.

The number of membership places has been incremented gradually since September 2023 and numbers currently stand at 70. Membership levels are currently capped until lifeguard availability allows us to offer additional swim sessions but recruitment to improve this is going well. In addition, a local primary school commenced hire of our pool facilities in September 2023 to deliver swimming lessons to their pupils, supporting local children and increasing the accessibility of the site.

Arrangements with a high-quality, local inclusive swimming lesson provider, who will hire our pool facilities at commercial rates, have been finalised. This arrangement will offer a range of benefits to local children and other community groups.



Plans are developing to further extend our efforts to ensure that the all-weather pitch and sports hall are also fully utilised.

Residential Social Care

The Company has made progress with its plans to register the proposed residential social care settings. The Managing Director has engaged with Ofsted to get preliminary feedback about the proposed operating model, with feedback being encouraging. There have been reciprocal visits with the Council's social care teams to ensure the opportunities to share best practice are maximised.



Through its development of its residential social care provision, the Company is having regard to the Council's Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023 to 2033. In particular, the provision that is proposed will help to:

- “make sure that there are a range of short breaks available to support families with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities to be able to continue to care for their children.”
- “provide better value for the taxpayer as out of county placements can be more expensive and more difficult for (the Council) workforce to support.”
- “ensure (the Council) has a wide range of care options in place locally by ensuring (it) has the right number, type and quality of foster carers, residential homes and accommodation.”

Conferencing and Training

The Company has begun the development of its conferencing and training offer. It has hosted a conference for Dorset Council's Educational Psychologists and a group of local Youth Workers. In Autumn 2023, it has bookings to host a 'Children's Services Strategy Day' and is hosting a 'Mental Health First Aid' course. These activities are bringing in nominal commercial benefits so far, but it is anticipated that this will change as this arm of the Company's work grows.

Master Planning

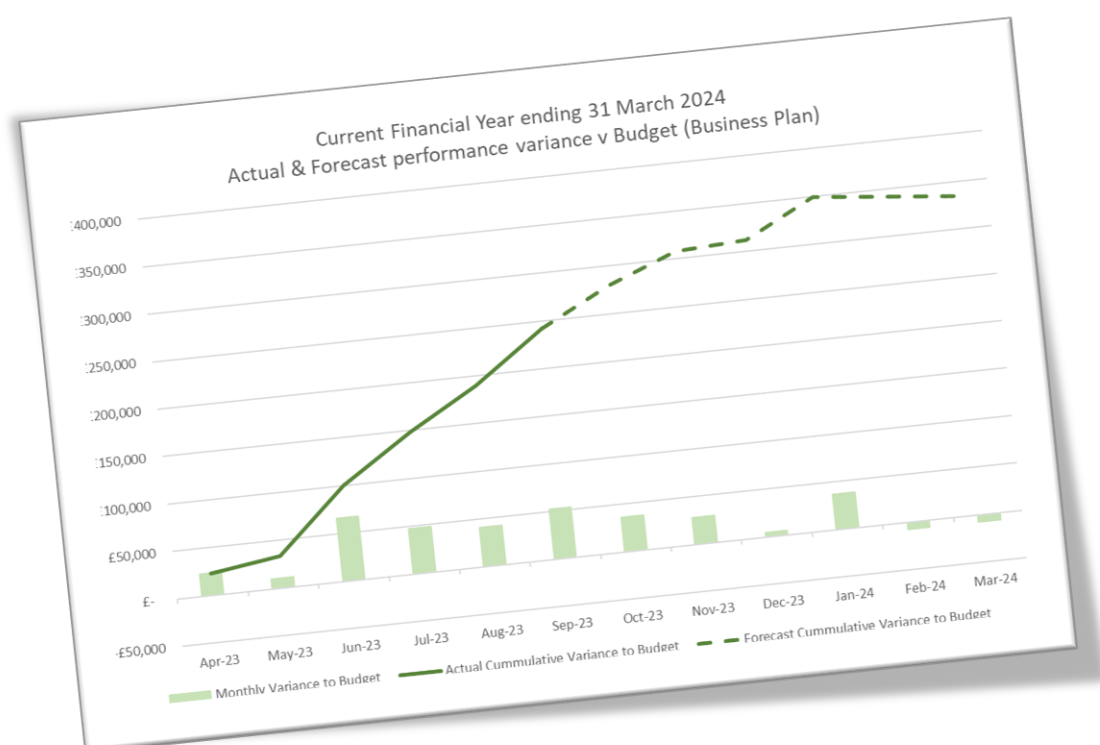
The Company is grateful for the Shareholder's commitment to fund a master planning exercise to fully explore the opportunities that exist. This exercise has not yet begun but the Company is liaising with the Council about the most effective way to do this.

9. Commercial / Financial Position

The Company has increasingly developed resilience in its financial management and governance thereof and through careful management has reached a place of significantly improved financial stability.

Year-end accounts have been filed with Companies House for the financial year 2021/22 and will be filed imminently for 2022/23. At the appropriate point, the Shareholder will receive detailed Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ending 2022/23 in line with the Companies Act 2006 and the relevant Financial Regulation Authority guidelines.

The financial year 2023/24 is proving to be a positive one. Through some overperformance on pupil roll and additional commercial and community activity the Company is performing ahead of the approved business plan. A drawdown from the working capital loan was required later than anticipated in the budget and at a lower than expected amount.



10. People

Following its initial period of operation, the Company faced many workforce challenges. Key themes were leadership capacity and continuity, staff retention, recruitment, and well-being. The Ofsted inspection in October 2022 showed that improvements were also urgently required to HR compliance and process.

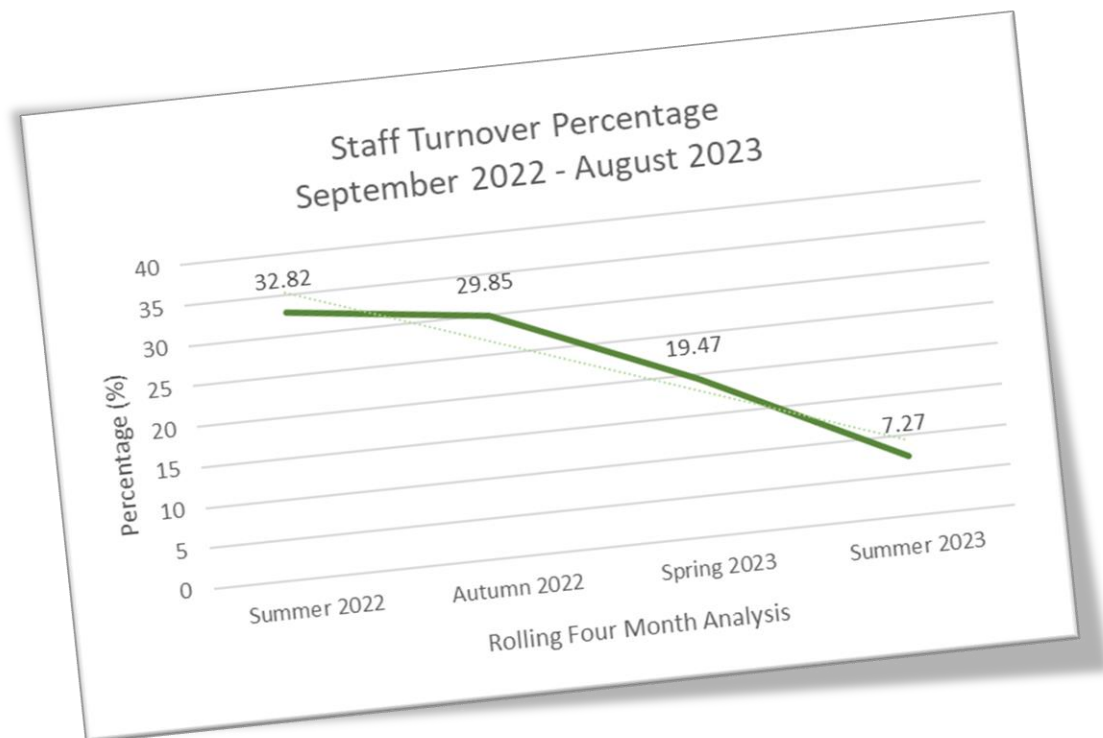
The new HR Manager, who took up their post in November 2022, has led a period of significant improvement by focussing on regulatory compliance, improving the clarity of expectations regarding the required level of skills and experience required to be appointed, improving induction and training provision, improving staff well-being and reducing employee retention. The change of approach has had a significant impact on the Company's ability to meet its growth intentions.

The Company continues to be aware of the challenges that exist within the recruitment landscape and through its ongoing development of its People Strategy, is creating an approach to counter

these. The recruitment challenges in the lead up to September 2024, and the recruitment challenges associated with launching our residential social care provision, shall be mitigated by the People Strategy.

The Company is now fully staffed in line with its business plan and is experiencing increasingly strong interest from a range of high-quality prospective candidates. Staff turnover has decreased dramatically and regular staff surveys enquiring about engagement and well-being show a steady and improving picture.

Staff turnover data demonstrates the overall improvements that have been made across the board. The chart below shows this reducing from 32.82% in to 7.27% over the course of the previous year.



11. Health and Safety / Facilities Management

The Company continues to work in close cooperation with the Council on the exact processes that will ensure the Dorset Centre of Excellence site is and will continue to be safe. This is working well but will be further strengthened through the amendments that are being finalised regarding the lease.

The Company would like to thank the Council for its extensive work to undertake full surveys of the campus during the summer of 2023, which has helped with long term planning.

The Company has developed robust processes for compliance and risk management. Due to the safe culture that has been developed, there have been no significant incidents or accidents in the last twelve months. Preventative and proactive measures, and a strong culture of training and awareness are in place.

During the recent Ofsted inspection report, commenting on their June 2023 visit, inspectors wrote that *'Risk assessments are now detailed, and updates are demarcated clearly. Leaders apply*

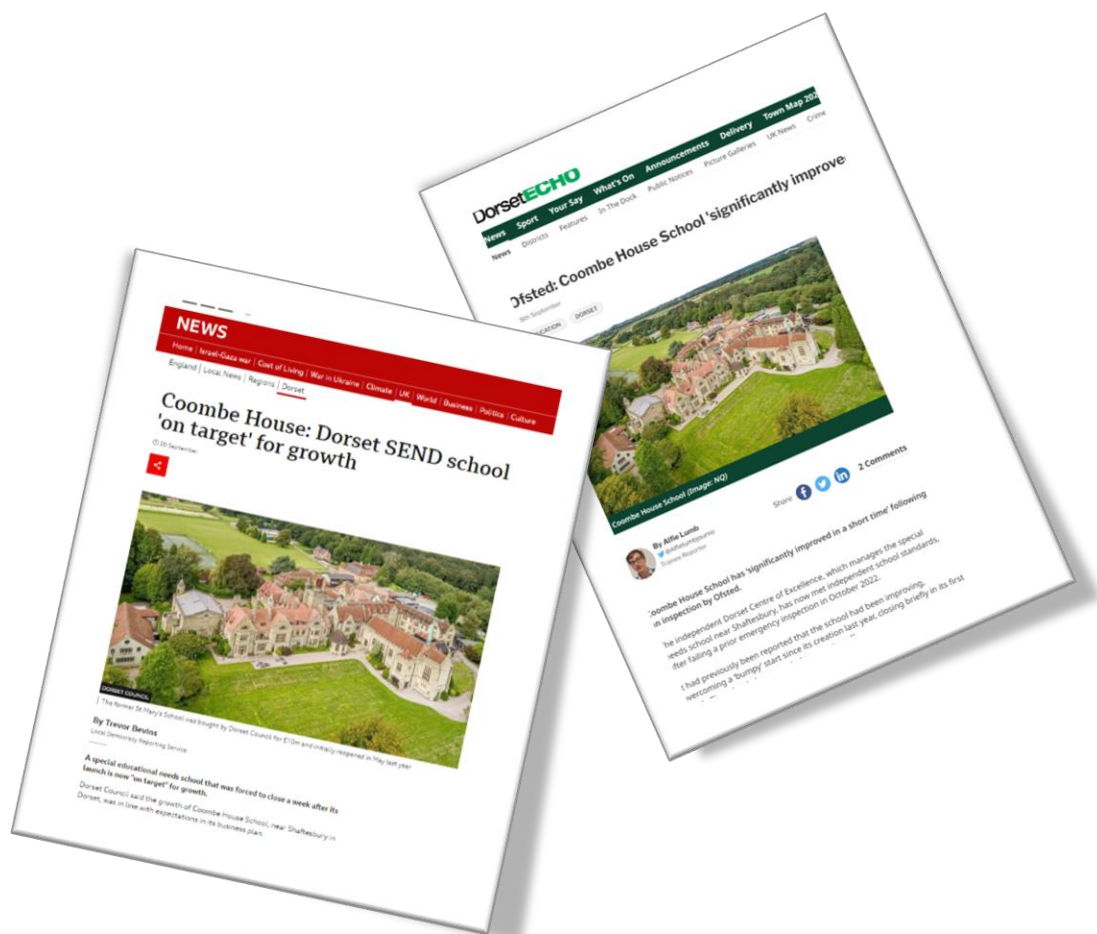
appropriate caution when taking pupils beyond the immediate school grounds. A comprehensive set of risk assessments covers the full range of school activities.'

12. Sustainability

The Company is proud of the sustainable credentials of the campus and has worked hard to ensure that the Biomass and solar facilities are working optimally to minimise its carbon footprint. Opportunities to further this are being explored.

13. PR / Reputation

The Company has been pleased to notice a gradual but notable improvement in the way its operations are being perceived by all stakeholders, including local residents, pupils, parents and families, professional partners and various media outlets. Some of the positive outcomes being achieved have more recently been reflected in some reasonably prominent news articles.



14. Appendix One – Biographies

DCE Board of Directors

Ian Comfort – Chair of the Board



Ian has a long and distinguished career in both educational leadership and management and work in the legal sphere. He is an experienced chair of a range of organisations including a further education college, a local authority trading company and Notting Hill Carnival. His experience in education is extensive, including being a teacher in a special school, a local authority director of education and group CEO of a large academy trust; he brings a wealth of knowledge and detail to his role as chair of the Dorset Centre of Excellence. Ian is a barrister and holds a range of legal and professional regulatory roles including being a Commissioner for the Criminal Cases Review Commission, an employment judge and judge of the first tier tribunal.

In his spare time he is chair of the Ebony Steel Band, an acclaimed and award winning steel band providing performances, workshops and classes, locally, nationally and internationally, awarded the Queens Award for Voluntary Service for its work with young people.

Anil Patil – Entrepreneur and former Barrister



Anil is a former barrister specialising in children act, family and matrimonial finance law. As an entrepreneur he was the worlds' first Starbucks franchisee, and now a principle shareholder of an organisation employing more than 1,500 team members across 92 sites. He currently volunteers as a mentor to looked after children; is an independent member of a fostering panel; NED of two health and social care CIC's; a governor of Walhampton school; and is a respite carer of a child in care. He is married, daddy to two boys and lives in the New Forest.

Dame Susan Jowett DBE - International education adviser, holistic leadership and lifestyle coach



Susan is a Trustee and lead practitioner for Trust Peer Reviews for Challenge Partners, a successful national network of schools and trust. Susan retired in 2017 as the CEO for Spencer Academies Trust, where she was a founding member.

Susan retains her passion for education and leadership and has provided leadership support for Schole's groups of schools in Uganda and Kenya. She has presented at national and international conferences. Susan's leadership and services to education were recognised in the Queens honour list, 2016. As a leader of Education, she has impacted widely on system leadership and school improvement. Her previous work as an Ofsted inspector has enhanced school to school support. Her public work was recognised by the Derbyshire – Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce in 2010 when she was a regional finalist for the Enterprising Woman of the Year award in 2011 for the Enterprising Team of the Year Award. She is also an active support of WomenEd and Woman in Leadership.

Diane Grannell – Retired Principal and Chief Executive



Diane recently retired following six years as Principal & Chief Executive of Bournemouth & Poole College, after a long career in further and higher education. She led her college to develop a curriculum that better met local skills needs and to improve the quality of student outcomes resulting in an Ofsted judgement of Good in all categories in January 2022.

A qualified Chartered Management Accountant, Diane has worked as the executive finance lead at a number of different institutions. In addition to financial expertise, she has extensive senior level leadership experience of education policy and regulation, institutional strategy, culture, organisational development and quality assurance. At one time or another, she has led most of the different professional services functions relevant to education institutions.

Diane holds a Masters Degree in Business Administration from Manchester University. She is married with one adult son and lives on the Dorset/Hampshire border. Having been involved in education for most of her working life, she is passionate about providing all young people with opportunities to fulfil their potential whatever their starting point and is a strong advocate for high quality education as a route to future individual success and wider economic prosperity. Diane has served as a Director of Dorset LEP and as Chair of their Finance, Audit & Risk Committee. She has recently been appointed as a Board Member at Falmouth University.

Cllr Frances Nicholson – Councillor and charity trustee



Frances was Lead Member for Children’s Services in Somerset for ten years up to May 2022, through a long period of improvement from inadequacy to a very solid Ofsted Good judgement this year. She is co-chair of governors of a federation of small rural schools, and is their SEND and Children Looked After governor. She represents Exmoor on Somerset County Council and is currently opposition spokesperson for Children and Families, as well as being a trustee for a number of local charities all with a purpose of enabling young people in the area to achieve their potential and be the best they can be, no matter what challenges they may face. She has had a varied career from making pottery through magazine publishing to software development and is passionate about valuing equally all the different skills, aptitudes and aspirations that young people may have and supporting them to reach their goals.

Hilary Morris – Commercial Director



Hilary has a wide range of commercial leadership experience through delivery of organisational change programmes and outsourcing/insourcing operating models in local authority as well as further education sectors. Hilary has a strong governance background having been secretary of a national association and board observer. In her substantive role as Commercial Director at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Hilary has developed an effective company governance framework and overseen the creation and development of several independent boards across the portfolio.

Katie Kennedy - Educational leader in transformation and improvement



Katie has been working for over twenty years at the forefront of educational leadership. Initially at The Institute of Education, responsible for the engagement strategy of The London Leadership Strategy, part of the The London Challenge. Katie has taught in mainstream and the SEN sector, having been a leader in both primary and secondary schools, notably at Dame Alice Owen's School, named The Sunday Times Secondary School of the Decade, where she acquired more knowledge of teacher development through her postgraduate research in Teacher Development at The University of Cambridge. Following this and having been part of three Outstanding Ofsted inspections, Katie worked at County level as a School Improvement Lead. With a passion for helping more schools, Katie authored 'The Way to Outstanding' school improvement programme. Katie is focused on ensuring success for all students regardless of background or previous levels of performance. As a Company Director of Tutor Interact, she led the delivery of holistic tutoring programmes for hundreds of students to overcome barriers to learning with transformational results. Katie has also led and been part of new school bids for academy trusts and an international schools' group; understanding both the state and private sector.

Outside education Katie has been an ambassador for The Sick Children's Trust and on the Board of her local country parks charity providing accessible play equipment for all. Katie has fought for equality for children of all abilities throughout her career and brings this passion to her role at Coombe House.

Lesley Mellor – Chair and founder member of the Dorset Parent Council



Lesley set up the DPCC, a voluntary forum and registered charity, after moving to Dorset with her two sons who have special educational needs. Lesley is passionate about making positive changes for children and young people with disabilities in Dorset by giving a voice to families. She has worked closely with Dorset Council and the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group to share the issues relating to the SEND community living in Dorset and to ensure the services meet the needs of disabled children and families locally. Lesley represents families and also facilitates networking of volunteers through participation events, steering groups/boards, working groups and co-production events.

Stuart Jones – Property and Development Consultant



Stuart is a Chartered Surveyor, who has specialised in all aspects of property development for over 30 years, with experience in both the residential and commercial property sectors. Stuart is a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. He has also established a track record in dealing with property in the Education Sector, with a client base including schools, academy trusts and the HE/FE sector. In addition to his main job, Stuart has been a Governor of Bournemouth University since 2016.

DCE Executives

Andy Holder – Managing Director



Andy has worked in both the maintained and independent sectors for education and children's services and has a proven track record for opening and operating high quality special schools and children's homes for vulnerable children and young people. Having worked previously for a rural local authority in the southwest, where he had a focus on reducing the spend on 'out of county' independent special school places, and at director level within various independent provider groups, he has significant experience of leading growth for new services and in developing systems to ensure high quality and strong governance. A professional that is skilled and experienced in safeguarding, Andy fully understands the various expectations of the regulator.

Louise Hughes – Senior Finance Manager



Louise is a part-qualified Chartered Accountant, experienced in managing the financial performance of education-based companies, having previously overseen a thriving independent school in the southwest. Louise has been pivotal in improving the confidence in the Company’s financial reporting since she joined in December 2022 and has demonstrated an ability to communicate the priorities to various stakeholders in an accessible way. With a clear focus on careful cost control and financial governance, and strong skills in financial modelling, stakeholders can have confidence in the integrity of the financial information provided.

Mark Beckett – Facilities Manager



Mark has over 15 years of experience in the Facilities Management sector. He previously worked as an IT professional in the Financial Services Industry, specialising in the development and management of HR and Procurement systems. He has worked in both the private and public sectors including school settings and has extensive experience of facilities-based compliance and Health & Safety as well as planned and reactive maintenance, project management, energy efficiency and value for money.

Michelle Heywood – HR Manager



Michelle worked in the independent school sector for 8 years before joining the Dorset Centre of Excellence in November 2022 as the HR Manager where she leads on all aspects of the HR department. She has strong knowledge and understanding of KCSIE in the context of Safer Recruitment, and as an Associated Member of the CIPD she is a qualified HR professional with extensive experience and knowledge in employee relations and people management, combined with 25 years recruitment experience. She has previously run her own businesses in recruitment, resourcing and online advertising, and worked as a Project Manager for a suite of online jobs-boards.

Michelle is passionate about embedding the right staff to share the Company's values, ethos and strategic goals. She offers sound, practical advice and has a firm commitment to providing a positive experience for all our staff and prospective applicants.

School Leadership

Darren Harte - Headteacher



Darren has worked within the maintained and independent sector since qualifying in 2003. The majority of his career has been based within SEND taking up his first role within the sector in 2009. With a wealth of experience and knowledge of the sector he has been part of and led senior leadership teams through a number of Ofsted inspections with many of these resulting in outstanding judgements. Darren prides himself on building positive relationships with pupils ensuring that they are provided with the best possible opportunities and access to education.

Jemma Taylor – Deputy Head



Jemma has worked with the independent SEN sector since 2013, starting as a keyworker in an SEMH school in Blackburn where she then trained as a Teacher qualifying in 2016. After moving to Wiltshire, she worked at an SEN dyslexic school. Jemma quickly rose to head of department, Head of Year and finally Director of Studies. Jemma is from Northern Ireland, moving to England in 2009 to attend university. Creating an environment for young people where they can feel safe and happy is very important to Jemma and she is excited to support the growth and development of Coombe House School over the coming years.

Martin Marshall – Assistant Head



Martin has worked mainly within maintained schools since qualifying as a teacher in 1997. The first part of his career was based in a Middle School as a PE teacher and then he went on to progress through leadership, becoming a Headteacher in 2014. In more recent years he has been based within SEND, taking up his first role within the sector in 2017 leading a 'National SEND Award Winning Alternative Provision' for Most Innovative Provision. Despite the wealth of experience and knowledge he has gained in the past 26 years, he is always learning and continuing to enjoy the energy and challenge that the young people bring to school every day. Martin's most rewarding aspect of his job is the opportunity to enable young people to flourish, find something that inspires them and to see visible changes to their lives.

Outside of school Martin is married and a proud dad of four children.

Rebecca Smith – Assistant Head



Rebecca has over twenty years working in a variety of educational settings, including mainstream primary, special schools and a Category C prison. Writing as Rebecca Westcott she is the author of more than ten books, four of which were cowritten with an autistic teenager and are bestsellers. She is passionate about enabling young people to have their voices heard and this is central to her role at Coombe House School.