

# **Dorset Centre of Excellence Shareholder Committee**

**19 October 2022**

## **Report from Chair of Board**

### **For Decision**

Report Author: Ian Comfort

Title: Director and Chair, Dorset Centre of Excellence Ltd (“the Company”)

**Report Status:** Public

#### **Brief Summary:**

This report provides an update on the current situation at the Dorset Centre of Excellence and the Coombe House School ( “the School”). It considers progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate and finance. It confirms that the School was able to re-open to pupils on 13 September 2022 with a phased transition plan for all pupils.

#### **Recommendation:**

The Shareholder is asked to note the content of this report and to continue its support for the Company.

#### **Reason for Recommendation:**

The Board, with the significant support of colleagues from Dorset Council, has looked to address the issues that impacted on the successful opening of the School. It has sought to swiftly and systematically recover the position to ensure that it can deliver a safe and rewarding learning experience for its pupils. The Board is mindful that without the ongoing support of the Council as its shareholder the Company is not viable.

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Shareholder is aware of the background to opening of the School in May this year and the issues that arose. There have been significant challenges in recovering the position to enable the School to open for September. These have included not only remedial works to the site but also the recruitment of a significant number of staff including leaders, teachers and support staff.

## 2. **Governance**

- 2.1 The Board has been strengthened by the appointment by the Shareholder of two new directors: Frances Nicholson and Stuart Jones. A recruitment process is being undertaken to secure an additional director by 31 October 2022.

- 2.2 The Board has had to operate in a recovery mode for the past months. With the School now able to re-open the Board will meet monthly with sub committees meeting in between. The quality and curriculum committee, chaired by Dame Susan Jowett, will oversee the operation of the School and will monitor its effectiveness. Until a director with financial experience is appointed, the chair of the Board will chair the finance, audit and risk committee.

- 2.3 A Board skills audit is currently being undertaken alongside the preparation of a development programme for Board members. This will ensure that the Board has the right skill set of Directors and that the Directors have the necessary knowledge and understanding to be effective in their role.

## 3. **Leadership**

- 3.1 The Board is thankful for the support provided by Sean Kretz, headteacher Westfield Arts College, Weymouth, who stepped in acting headteacher at the end of the summer term. He continues to provide consultancy support for the School. Dr Sharina Klaasens has been recruited as an interim headteacher and took up post at the end of August. Dr Klaasens has extensive experience in work with children with special educational needs, has been a headteacher of special school and a local authority adviser.

## 4. **Staffing**

- 4.1 With significant support from Council officers the Company has been able to recruit the required number of teachers and support staff to enable it to

open the School. A number of those recruited are temporary agency staff and recruitment for permanent staff continues.

- 4.2 A comprehensive programme of professional development is in place to ensure that teachers and support staff have the necessary knowledge , skills and understanding to provide a safe and effective learning experience for all pupils.
- 4.3 Additional training and development days have been set aside for all staff to enable them to participate fully in the programme.

## 5. **Pupils**

- 5.1 The Shareholder is referred to paragraph 4 of the Commissioner's report, which is included on the agenda of this meeting.
- 5.2 A review of all pupils on the School roll has been undertaken with Council officers. The School has accepted 36 pupils on roll from September 2022. Pupils are from all key stages. A transition plan has been agreed for each child to ensure that the School manages the intake as it builds. Alternative provision has been secured to support the transition process.

## 6. **Progress on completion of building works.**

- 6.1 The Shareholder is referred to paragraph 5 of the Commissioner's report, which is included on the agenda of this meeting.
- 6.2 There has been some slippage on the completion of works but this is being managed and does not impact on the opening of the School.

## 7. **Financial Implications**

- 7.1 There are significant financial implications arising from the delay in the full opening of the School and the associated delays in the development of the Centre.
- 7.2 The Board is currently in the process of re-forecasting its budget and this is not finalised at the time of writing this report. Alongside the budget, the Board will also be reviewing its longer-term business plan for future consideration by the Shareholder.

## 8. **Climate Implications**

- 8.1 There are no climate implications associated with this report.

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

9.1 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 its recovery plan and in its decision to have a managed transition for re-opening the School.

10. **Other Implications**

10.1 No other implications have been identified.

11. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium. There is a recovery plan in place which is being closely monitored by the Board and Council officers.

12. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

12.1 The Board has not conducted an Equalities Impact Assessment for this report. The specific needs of each child has been considered when developing the transition plan for opening.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 There are no appendices to this report

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 There are no background papers included with this report.