

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

16 September 2024

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education and Skills

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

Report Author: Claire Webb
Job Title: Strategic Commissioner Education
Tel: 01305 221766
Email: Claire.Webb@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Brief Summary:

This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) against the commissioning agreement, and the enhanced co-operation between Dorset Council and DCOE.

This is a relatively short report in part due to the continued stable position of the company and the school, with the good progress made now embed as 'business as usual'; in addition the last report to Shareholders was towards the end of the last academic year, while this report falls at the very start of the new academic year.

Recommendation:

Shareholders are asked to consider the progress made and support the continued co-operation 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, growing school places, the breadth/quality of the offer and preparing for further growth.

1. Report

1.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) against the commissioning agreement, and the enhanced cooperation between Dorset Council and 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 between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for Education, focused on the performance of the school. Regular operational meetings are in place to support conversations about individual children and to plan admissions. Contract management focuses on assessing progress on the School Development Plan, operation of the school, stability through growth and progress since the Ofsted Inspection.

1.3 Commissioners continue to attend the DCOE Board.

1.4 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:

- **Recruitment and retention:** No issues to report – see paragraph 1.7 for further information.
- **Ofsted and key performance indicators:** No issues to report. DCOE will submit a report on pupil outcomes for the previous academic year through contract monitoring and in reporting to Shareholder Committee in the Autumn; this will include feedback from families.

Good progress has been made since the Ofsted inspection, which is now embedded within the operation of the school. See paragraph 1.7 for further information.

- **Pupil growth:** allowing for the normal fluctuations in pupil numbers (for example pupils leaving due to start at a mainstream college), the requirements of the commissioning agreement have been met. The school has also worked proactively with Dorset Council to create places that meet the needs of pupils with more complex needs, which were not available in local special or independent school.
 - **The learning offer:** Enrichment and broadening of the learning offer continues. Leaders are highly ambitious for all pupils, and this is reflected in the broadening of the curriculum offer and plans for further expansion. For example, the ambition for all students to receive a qualification in English and maths – either GCSE or Foundation Skills to access ‘21st Century Skills’, last summer the first pupils at Coombe House sat a GCSE exam.
- 1.5 **Community engagement:** Arrangements for use of the swimming pool by local community groups and schools are in place, have expanded and are well received. – No change
- 1.6 As reported in the previous commissioner’s reports, 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 educated to focussing on assurance (including enhanced contract management) and managing growth.
- 1.7 Two criteria were set, against which to assess whether the enhanced cop-operation agreement should cease. These criteria have been met:
- a) **Assurance that teacher recruitment and plans for the new academic year will enable DCOE to successfully manage the next growth in pupil numbers** – commissioners are assured that sufficient teaching staff have been recruited for the growth in pupil numbers
 - b) **Evidence that improvements made following the Ofsted inspection have been embedded** – following a site visit, carried out by Principal Lead - Best Education for All, Education Challenge Lead and Strategic Commissioner Education, commissioners are assured that significant progress has been made since the Ofsted

inspection and that this is embedded (see paragraph 1.8 for further information).

1.8 There were two areas of focus, below is a summary of evidence which was used to determine that:

Gaps in pupils' phonic knowledge are identified and addressed:

- An English specialist teacher has been appointed for September 2024.
- Read, Write Inc Phonics Scheme (RWInc) and Fresh Start are used to support Phonic development.
- Children and young people are identified under the 'Coombe House Reading Scale' (unable to decode, reading for life, reading for pleasure).
- 'YARC' Reading Assessments are used to identify areas of need for all children and provide a more detailed analysis of reading skills: reading accuracy, reading rate and comprehension, which are reviewed every 6 months to monitor progress.
- They have been writing their own stories using AI to ensure engagement of children with specifically focused storyline, characters and plots that intend to encourage children and young people to read.
- During the learning walk, there were specific displays around books in each classroom.
- The library is being redeveloped to make it an attractive reading area with 'short reads' and 'long read' rather than reading ability.
- The CHS Reading Tree identifies the books that the children will be exposed to during their time at the school.
- During the learning walk, children and young people were seen engaged in several reading activities and independent book time.
- Older children are encouraged to read to the younger children. This has been reported as being instrumental in developing a love of reading for younger children.
- When talking to the young people, they were able to identify that reading was something they do regularly. One KS2 child said that he reads with his dad. One of the children identified that he knew "reading was calming".

- Commissioners are also very proud to report that 3 pupils at CHS are now published authors, and their books available for other pupils to enjoy.

The curriculum help pupils to build and remember useful knowledge

- ‘Learning Ladders’ are used to demonstrate pathways for all children and young people. A detailed Learning Ladder for English was shared during the visit, which will be replicated across all foundation and core subjects.
- There is a focus on the History Curriculum this half term – to be completed by the end of summer term.
- A ‘roadmap’ of curriculum map for History identified the National Curriculum Framework from KS1 to KS4. This is to be developed into a bespoke learning map.
- The ‘Triple Helix’ (Therapeutic, Academic and Vocational) approach is used to identify the key/core learning that the school wants to ensure is taught to the children and young people.

1.9 The enhanced co-operation agreement is therefore being ended, with regular contract management meetings and joint working to manage growth and admissions continuing. A site visit and learning walk will be carried out annually to provide an additional depth of assurance of provision at the school. Commissioners have also asked DCOE to begin reporting on any net zero or other activity which supports tackling climate change and supporting our natural environment.

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, Legal Services, Assets and Regeneration and Children’s Services.

2.2 As described in 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 to

support the delivery of the Business Plan. Contractors have been appointed for the Phase 2 works, with work underway on site and progress being managed by Assets and Regeneration. The contractor has reported a delay, and we are seeking a confirmed completion date. The school has put in place mitigation measures to support a small number of pupils. Assets & Regeneration and the external project team will continue to push the contractor to improve on timescales wherever possible.

- 2.3 Assets & Regeneration have now agreed the overall site rental costs associated with progressive handover of the buildings in use by DCOE. These will now be incorporated into a document which will be prepared by external solicitors to sit alongside the lease to reflect where derogation from the original lease terms have been agreed for a period of time. The aim is to ensure the commercial content of the lease is consistent with DCOE business plan.

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.

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

11. **Report Sign Off**

11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)