

Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

1 December 2025

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

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Statutory Authority: N/A

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

1. Executive summary

- 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 with the Council.

2. Recommendation(s)

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

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The company continues to focus on delivering high quality education and preparing for further growth.

4. **The report**

- 4.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) against the commissioning agreement with the Council.
- 4.2 Recent quarterly commissioner reports have reported positive progress in the performance of Coombe House School and this has now been externally recognised through the recent Good OFSTED report, which evidences strong performance as well as the governance to sustain high standards and continue to make further improvements.
- 4.3 The DCOE Board report to this Committee will include the Annual Performance Report. We wish to celebrate all pupils for their achievements in the year, including those who sat formal examinations and achieved passes in subjects including GCSE English, Maths, History and Science, and Entry Level and Functional Skills English and Maths qualifications.
- 4.4 Leadership in DCOE and the school is building on the maturity of the school to develop practice and the offer further, with a particular focus on developing pathways for reintegration into mainstream schools and an outcome focus on destinations for pupils.
- 4.5 The school is being innovative in developing the offer to meet the needs of pupils with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) behaviours. For example, a virtual classroom approach for EBSA is working well in first term, and commissioners will continue to monitor impact for these pupils as it becomes more established.
- 4.6 Alongside the core provision, the school has also responded to Council requests to provide personalised and cost-effective provision to meet the needs of a small number of pupils with very complex needs. As at the end of October, six pupils are currently being supported in this way.
- 4.7 Following formal recognition of the strength of practice at Coombe House School, commissioners are in discussion with the school and DCOE about how the school can share the good practice as part of Dorset's local education community, building on the proactive role the school already takes in its local community.
- 4.8 As at the end of October, there are 135 pupils on roll, with 8 placements being progressed. Fortnightly placement panels are taking place between Council practitioners and the school's leadership and this is expected to bring the school to its current commissioned capacity for Dorset pupils of 152 for the

start of next term. Attendance of pupils on roll continues to improve in the context of increasing pupil numbers.

- 4.9 The Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning Group, which includes senior officers from Corporate Development, Place as well as Children's Services, continues to oversee Council activity in relation to DCOE including taking forward the action from the June Shareholder Committee for a report on the longer-term intentions for the site. This work is underway and a report will come to a future Shareholder Committee meeting.
- 4.10 At the invitation of the DCOE Board, the Head of Service – Health, Education & SEND Commissioning attends the DCOE Board meetings. Regular contract review meetings continue between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for Education, focused on the performance of the school and on development of service to meet identified and emerging needs.

5 Alternative options considered

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6 Legal considerations

- 6.1 No decisions are requested from this report. As such, there are no specific legal considerations arising from this report.

7 Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 DCOE continues to take step to improve its environmental impact, recent developments include:
- Increasing the biodiversity of the land and forest
 - Bringing several solar arrays online
 - Biomass being operational
 - Purchase of a second hand electric van
 - Establishing an environmental committee of pupils and staff

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 There are no specific wellbeing and health implications arising from this report.

10. **Other implications**

10.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

11. **Risk implications**

11.1 There are no specific risk implications arising from this report.

12. **Equalities**

12.1 No decisions are requested from this report. As such, an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background papers**

14.1 N/A

15. **Report sign-off**

15.1 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)