

# **The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence**

**15 June 2026**

## **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

**Report author and job title:** Ross Bowell, Head of Service – Health, Education and SEND Commissioning

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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.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Shareholders are asked to note the report.

**3. Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 The report is to note as there are no Shareholder decisions required.

**4. The report**

- 3.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the DCOE against the commissioning agreement.
- 3.2 The Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning Group, which includes senior officers from Corporate Development, Place and Children's Services, continues to oversee Council activity in relation to DCOE.

- 3.3 Recent quarterly commissioner reports have reported positive progress in the performance of Coombe House School as summarised in the Annual Performance report presented to the December Shareholder Committee meeting and as 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. There is no material change to this assessment to report in this quarter.
- 3.4 Attendance continues to rise, reaching 77% in Spring 2026, which is up from 75% in Autumn 2025 and 69% in Spring 2025. Work is underway to improve reporting on the timeliness of EHCP annual reviews; this is to ensure completeness of routine assurance rather than in response to a specific commissioning concern. We are working with the school's leadership and practice colleagues to improve the referral process to ensure timely responses to consultations.
- 3.5 Regular contract review meetings continue between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for Education, focused on the performance of CHS and on development of service to meet identified and emerging needs, with the spring 2026 review having taken place on 19 May.
- 3.6 The review noted that CHS continues with a strong focus on high aspirations, progress and reintegration into mainstream where appropriate, notably at post 16. Recent activity to support this (and demonstrating good work against the Gatsby Benchmarks) includes a careers & apprenticeship show, and employer visits and talks in school. The implementation of Therapeutic Thinking continues, supporting practice and curriculum delivery.
- 3.7 DCOE continues to find opportunities for community activities, the most recent example being the open farm event on 7 June which is a charity event that will enable the local community to see how the farm has been created as well as promoting understanding and visibility of CHS in the local community.
- 3.8 Aligning with the council's priority of responding to the climate and nature crisis, it is pleasing to report that the school's renewable energy infrastructure, including solar panels and biomass systems, is now operating reliably, resulting in RHI payments for contributions to the National Grid and that there is ongoing woodland management aimed at restoring traditional English woodland, with the initiative expected to be cost neutral but beneficial for the environment and educational engagement.
- 3.9 As of 20 May, there are 142 children on roll of whom 140 are Dorset Council placements against the current commissioned capacity for Dorset pupils of 152, with 16 confirmed starters for September, 7 placements in progress and

further consultations in progress. The expectation is that, allowing for leavers, the school will be close to or at capacity in September.

**4. Alternative options considered**

5.1 Not applicable.

**5. Legal considerations**

5.1 There are no specific legal considerations arising from this report.

**6. Financial implications**

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

**8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

8.1 There are no specific natural environment, climate & ecology implications arising from this report.

**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 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

**13. Background papers**

13.1 N/A

**14. Report sign-off**

14.1 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)