

Dorset Centre of Excellence Shareholder Committee

14 September 2026

Report from Chair of Board For Review and Consultation

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.

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

Reason for Recommendation:

The Board, in collaboration with colleagues from Dorset Council, continues to make progress towards its objectives. The Board is mindful that the ongoing support of Dorset Council to deliver the next phases of growth required to deliver the business plan through cooperation with the Council is ensuring the viability of the Company.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Company continues to perform well against its business plan, growing the pupil roll of Coombe House School, improving its quality and developing its wider commercial and community offer.

2. Coombe House School

- 2.1 The School continues to successfully grow its pupil roll in partnership with Council commissioners. The end of year period is one where the highest number of leavers and new starters are planned for, which has gone well.
- 2.2 On top of our typical ‘graduates’, three pre-16 pupils are transitioning back to mainstream schools for 2026/27 as a result of their hard work, the interventions they’ve received, and the progress they have made. These add to the already strong pattern of success the School is developing with

supporting post-16 pupils back to mainstream placements at the end of Key Stage Four.

2.3 During the summer holidays, the School received its external examination results for 2025/26. To avoid a sometimes-intense period of examinations 'all at the end', pupils tend to build their portfolios of qualifications over several years. This year, 14 pupils gained 26 GCSE passes in four subjects, along with various other Entry Level and Functional Skills grades.

2.4 The summer term saw a flurry of adventurous experiences being offered for pupils. Trips to Longleat, our first residential trip, and the overnight Duke of Edinburgh expeditions were all greatly enjoyed and hugely impactful.

3. **White Paper**

3.1 The Coombe House Managing Director attended a meeting of the Dorset Inclusive Education Alliance in July 2026 and was pleased to contribute to the discussion about how the wider educational system could serve all children in Dorset.

3.2 A subsequent planning meeting with senior colleagues at the Council was also welcomed, where opportunities for Coombe House to contribute towards the implementation of the strategic plan were explored.

4. **Commercial and Community Activities**

4.1 The swimming pool required significant maintenance over the summer, requiring it to close, empty and receive remedial works. This has been successful, with a planned re-opening for School and community use early in September 2026.

5. **Business Plan Implementation**

5.1 The Company has been pleased to engage with the Council following the previous Shareholder Committee meeting, where an onward plan was made. We have been invited to participate in sessions relating to two of the three actions from that plan in this reporting period.

6. **HR**

6.1 The period approaching a new academic year is always a busy one for recruitment and this year has been no different. The HR department has been working hard selecting and safely recruiting sufficient staff for the year ahead.

6.2 The HR team has been focussing on further developing our learning and development offer, which has been a focus for feedback during recent staff surveys. We are optimistic that our planned changes will be impactful.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 We had been hopeful that we could give detailed feedback regarding our independent financial audit for the financial year 2025/26. However, some final queries have slightly delayed it being finalised. Verbal feedback and late drafts of the written report seen are suggesting a highly positive outcome can be expected.
- 7.2 The 2026/27 financial year is progressing broadly in line with budget with no significant variations, or unexpected costs impacting on performance so far.
- 7.3 The Company continues to be committed to representing exceptional value for money to the Dorset community, and its Shareholder.

8. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

- 8.1 Historical issues with our Feed-in Tarriff (FiT) payment processes have been resolved, meaning the financial benefits are now catching up with the environmental benefits.
- 8.2 A good summer, with plenty of sunshine has proved beneficial for our now fully operational portfolio of solar panels.
- 8.3 As we move to plan our response to future 'high temperature' weather events, we are keeping in mind the environmental implications of, for example, air conditioning.
- 8.4 The Company continues to engage with Wiltshire Council's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) funding application process, which are being accessed to further impact the work and the environmental impact of Coombe House Farm.

9. Well-being and Health Implications

- 9.1 The Company continues to prioritise the health and wellbeing of the members of its community and carefully monitors the feedback we receive in this regard.

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: Medium

Residual Risk: Low

12. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

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

13. **Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 None