

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

14 September 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 (maximum of 500 words)

- 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.
 - a) The Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning Group, which includes senior officers from the Resources, Assurance and Governance, Economy and Environment, and Children's Services Directorates, continues to oversee Council activity in relation to DCOE. The group has oversight of the delivery of the Dorset Council Cabinet decisions on 28 July 2026:
 - (a) That the Executive Director for Children's Services work with the Company to model the impact of the 2026 Schools' White Paper and the impact of the proposals relating to Osprey Quay.
 - (b) That the Chief Executive establishes a working group to review the commercial options for the site, with the Company.
 - (c) Cabinet recognised the need for a short-term investment plan for the site to ensure it was being maintained, (whilst acknowledging the work required in respect of the long-term plan for the site) and instructs the Executive Director Economy and Environment to prepare the short-term investment plan.
- 3.2 Regular contract review meetings continue between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for Education, focused on the performance of Coombe House School and on development of service to meet identified and emerging needs. The Headteacher of Coombe House School meets frequently with Dorset Council's contract manager for DCOE to review operational matters which relate to the delivery of the commissioning agreement.
- 3.3 Dorset Council's Educational Challenge Lead (ECL) for Coombe House School completed an educational practice review on 15th July 2026. Evidence considered by the ECL included a leadership discussion, safeguarding and behaviour information, attendance and qualification data, information about interventions, curriculum and post-16 planning along with a learning walk led by the school's Deputy Headteacher.
- 3.4 The visit provided positive assurance about leaders' understanding of the complex needs of the pupil cohort and the links between safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and curriculum provision. Therapeutic Thinking is increasingly embedded as a whole-school relational approach. Safeguarding

oversight is regular and responsive, and leaders are using information more purposefully to identify patterns and refine support.

- 3.5 Attendance remained above 77% in Summer 1, a continuation of the positive three-year trend. During the very hot weather in June and July the school closed for three afternoons. The decision to remain open during the morning sessions was based on providing as much continuity and safeguarding oversight for pupils as was safe and practicable.
- 3.6 Admissions and transition arrangements are being finalised for the new school year with the expectation that the school will be close to or at the current pupil number capacity in the autumn term.
- 3.7 From a wider community perspective, the open farm event on 7 June which was a charity event to enable the local community to see how the farm has been created as well as promoting understanding and visibility of Coombe House School was attended by over 500 people.

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 – Assurance and Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director - Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)