



Coombe House

Annual Performance Report 2024



Introduction



It is a pleasure to introduce our annual performance report. When working at pace, you often miss opportunities to pause and reflect on what has been achieved.

This is why revisiting the successes, the stories of progress, the individual case studies and the optimism for achieving even more in the future has been so rewarding.

In a year where Coombe House has been able to operate 'normally' after its period of recovery, it has gone from strength to strength, and it is heartening to summarise how far has been travelled.

There are many people to thank. We are incredibly lucky to have such a proactive, positive and relentlessly optimistic staff team, who demonstrate their exceptional commitment to our work every day. Increasingly our local community is offering support and collaboration to enhance our offer and our parent / carer community are supportive, encouraging and ambitious for us to achieve as much as we can.

The company has been expertly guided by its Board of Directors, who continue to offer highly effective support and challenge, and keep us all true to our mission, and the ongoing collaboration with Dorset Council has created opportunities that otherwise would not have been possible.

Which leaves the most important thank you until last. Our children and young people inspire us every day. For them to give education another chance, and to find the motivation to push themselves towards such positive outcomes could teach us all about resilience and optimism.

Here's to many more years of similar and greater success!

Andy Holder

Managing Director



Summary of the year



The previous year was always going to be a busy one. In our five-year business plan, it was the year where we would scale most quickly. Growing our pupil and staff numbers at a more significant rate than we had done before or would do again.

The way that this growth was approached by the team was exceptional. Careful admissions work ensured that pupils who joined were the ones who most needed the help offered by the school, and the staff appointed were those who were appropriately qualified experienced and motivated to help move us to the next level.

The improvement at Coombe House School has been significant. The school has registered as an exam centre, entered its first cohort and supported pupils to get excellent GCSE grades. An ongoing review of our curriculum approach and our strategies to overcome the barriers to learning that some of our pupils’ experience has meant that in all areas, they have made excellent progress.

Outside of the classroom, work to develop our walled garden for horticulture and animal care has broadened our offer and growing our ‘learning outside the classroom’ provision with Forest Skills has had real impact. Our work to make links with the community has led to our pupils experiencing new things, not least through our registration with the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.

It has been a year of firsts. The school has offered its first overnight school trip, has operated its first sports day, opened the school for whole community events for parents and carers and started to work collaboratively with other schools working to support pupils in Dorset.

We are proud of our innovation. Through redefining our support for pupils who find reading more challenging, many have been engaged and motivated in learning for the first time in their school careers. Partnering with trailblazing entrepreneurs working with Artificial Intelligence, we’ve supported our pupils to become writers and to be published!

As the national strategy moves towards making the education system better and more inclusive for all children and young people, our work to redefine our own curriculum will, we hope, help us to be part of the conversation. With government ministers now talking about happiness, belonging and community through an approach based on collaboration, shared responsibility and openness to different ways of working, we hope to contribute towards making the education sector better for all.

Growth to

112 Pupils

with High Placement Stability



49

New staff recruited

38%

Increase in staff numbers

<10%

Staff turnover

Most staff would recommend Coombe House as

“a great place to work”

And has been named a local

“Employer of Choice”

Placements cost

39% less than

typical alternative independent placements

The company’s budget outturn was

significantly surpassed



100%

of parents / carers who responded to a survey said they would ‘recommend the school to friends / family’

“Our daughter is thriving in respect of how happy she is. She is up and ready for the taxi every morning and a lot more confident.”

Parent



4 | Coombe House | Annual Performance Report 2024

Company Values and Branding



So every child can thrive

Our Fundamentals

"A culture of kindness"
"A sense of belonging"
"A belief in ambition"

Our Mission

Creating nurturing environments to enable each unique child and young person to overcome challenges, learn and live a healthy fulfilling life.

Our Strategic Priorities

Safety First – being safe, feeling safe
People and Culture – compassionate communities
Transforming Lives – life changing outcomes
The Ripple Effect – sharing what works with others

Work is underway to evolve the branding used so that it better reflects the above, and the beautiful environment and nurturing approaches taken by the team. Care has been taken to ensure that the new branding protocols will scale and adapt as the company grows and develops its offer.

Coombe House School

Coombe House Leisure

Coombe House Farm



Coombe House School



Academic Outcomes

Coombe House is delighted to have successfully registered with the JCQ to be an official exam centre. In our first examination window, two Year 11 pupils sat a total of five GCSE's in English Language, English Literature, and maths. They received exceptional results that have opened doors to their next stages of learning.

Destinations

We know that the real impact of our work is not how well pupils do when they are with us, but instead how they are able to apply what they have learned into their lives in the long term. For this reason, we track carefully those who leave us to make sure that they continue to thrive in their onwards destinations.

Still being a relatively new school, only a small number of pupils have 'graduated' so far but to have 100% of these thriving in their onward mainstream college placements, no longer needing specialist provision and managing far more independently, meaning 0% of our leavers are 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training) is an excellent start!

75% of pupils

who sat GCSE's gained a 'good' pass grade

75% of Y11 pupils

sitting maths and English qualifications early in Autumn 2024

Curriculum Improvements



Coombe House continues to improve its curriculum to ensure that we have a progressive offer which includes knowledge and skills, personal development and effective preparation for adulthood.

All learning areas have been reviewed to develop new pathways, learning maps and integrated schemes of learning. We have developed improved continuous provision from Year 2 to Year 9.

Our Outdoor Education provision has been increased, as we continue to develop our wonderful outside spaces.

The recruitment of a specialist English and Maths teacher has enabled us to provide a dedicated GCSE pathway for pupils, alongside our Functional Skills pathway.

2 new GCSE courses

launched in September 2024

75% of primary aged pupils

receiving literacy intervention

68% of secondary aged pupils

receiving literacy intervention

Relational Approach

Coombe House continues in its commitment to high quality relational approaches. We welcomed two eminent keynote speakers to our September training sessions, who helped us to further develop our practice.

Shahana Knight from Teaching Positive Connections (TPC), a mental health and wellbeing service, dedicated to embedding trauma informed, attachment aware approaches into schools, spoke to us about therapeutic approaches to behaviour, and taught us more about therapeutic response skills, whilst Dean Beadle, an experienced and sought after autistic speaker led us through a session on understanding our autistic pupils, which included a workshop on 'Executive Functioning and Autistic Inertia'

A further training commitment to the Dorset Council supported 'Therapeutic Thinking' programme has improved the framework used by the school to manage needs.



100 hours
per week

dedicated to therapeutic
support

75 hours
per week

of direct Therapist
engagement

50 hours
per year

of evidence-based staff
and parent training
delivered by Therapists



A focus on reading...



The past year has seen tremendous development of our reading and writing culture at Coombe House School.

Purpose

At Coombe House School, the development of a positive reading and writing culture is central to our curriculum, with a strong emphasis on fostering 'Reading for Life'. Our approach is driven by the belief that reading is a fundamental life skill essential for achieving personal fulfilment, academic success, and navigating the complexities of adulthood. We aim to provide our young people with the strategies and tools necessary to become confident, capable readers who can engage with various forms of written communication in everyday life.

Why 'Reading for Life'?

Reading at Coombe House School is not confined to traditional books; it spans multiple media and formats, including stories, books, visual literacy, audiobooks, technology, maps, recipes, instructions, magazines, news articles, emails, text messages, and more. The objective is to equip young people with the reading skills to access a wide variety of text types, ensuring they can understand and utilise written content in real-world situations, from navigating forms and reading instructions to enjoying literature and digital media.

Individualised Reading Support

To ensure that each young person's reading development is supported effectively, we employ a carefully planned assessment programme to assess a broad range of skills. This process allows teachers to identify specific needs and areas of development for each pupil, providing tailored reading interventions that align with individual needs and interests. These ensure that every pupil is given the opportunity to build their reading confidence and proficiency at a pace suited to them.

We use a combination of traditional books and our own Coombe House Classics, to put the right texts in the hands of the right child. This approach allows us to generate texts that are pitched at an appropriate reading age but feature content of a relevant interest level. Pupils who are still developing their phonic knowledge can access supplementary materials that maintain fidelity to our phonics scheme.

Individualised Writing Support

Pupils have opportunities to write for a range of purposes – to report, to inform, to persuade, to analyse and to create. Where pupils have experienced negativity around writing in previous educational settings, we have a graduated approach to developing their skills and confidence. In order to build their belief that reading and writing is for them, we take away the typical pressures of knowing what to write and focus instead on the reasons why we may need to write.

Pupils may initially develop their writing skills by speaking and listening, using Artificial Intelligence to generate their own stories, investigating techniques through watching films and listening to stories and developing comprehension skills orally.

Curriculum Integration

Reading is embedded across all areas of the curriculum, ensuring that pupils encounter and practise reading in diverse and meaningful ways throughout their daily learning experiences. This integrated approach helps pupils understand the value of reading beyond the classroom, making it a continuous and practical part of their lives.



Key Goals of the Reading & Writing Culture at Coombe House School:

- ✓ To cultivate a lifelong love of reading in all its forms.
- ✓ To prepare pupils with the skills necessary to read and understand various media types, including digital formats.
- ✓ To enable pupils to write for purpose, whether that is fiction or non-fiction and to understand why writing is a skill required in adult life.
- ✓ To embed reading and writing into everyday learning experiences, making it relevant and accessible.
- ✓ To provide personalised reading and writing interventions based on ongoing assessments of individual needs.

This comprehensive approach to reading and writing not only aims to improve literacy skills but also empowers pupils to lead successful, independent, and fulfilling lives. By embracing reading in all its forms, and developing functional writing skills, Coombe House School fosters a culture of lifelong learning and curiosity.

Our school community



Sports Day

Coombe House held its first ever sports day in July 2024. It was a great success and a testimony to the way in which pupils have approached their PE lessons.

The focus was primarily on building relationships and enabling some of the less confident pupils to see that they actually do have talents and skills and can enjoy being active and developing themselves and their abilities within Physical Education.

Our relationship-based approach helped to ensure that the whole school took part in the day, which was enjoyed by staff and pupils alike.

Some outstanding demonstrations of talent and enthusiasm were evident and the expectation for the day was exceeded in every way. Medals were awarded for all pupils in a presentation at the end.

We are all now really looking forward to our whole School Swimming Gala scheduled in before the Christmas break.



Longleat Trip

The school was invited by the Shaftesbury Rotary Club to take part in 'KIDS OUT LONGLEAT'. 31 pupils attended, travelling by coach to Longleat. We drove around the safari park, stopped for lunch in the park and then pupils moved around the grounds in groups exploring the animals and attractions. Coombe House pupils were praised at the end of the trip by the organisers, for their exemplary behaviour.



Parents and Carers Evening

A very successful summer open evening was held in July 2023 with over 40 families attending, who spent time touring the site, in classrooms looking at pupils' work and meeting specialist provision leads and members of the pastoral and therapy teams. Food was provided in the school canteen. Feedback from the evening was extremely positive. A Christmas Open Day for parents is planned for December 2024.





Coombe Fest!

“Coombe Fest” developed out of one of our classes brainstorming ideas on how to raise money in April 2024. They came up with so many ideas that it was hard to choose which one to do, so we decided to take a risk and put the best ideas together to have a ‘Coombe House Festival’ in June 2024.

The whole process meant that the class had to work as a team and listen to each other’s ideas and come to agreements together. They also had to agree on a playlist of music, again learning to respect different types of music that people wanted to include.

One of the more challenging parts of planning the event was deciding on how much money to charge for each activity, making sure that the stalls were affordable but would also cover any costs laid out and still make a profit. There was lots of planning, preparing and budgeting!

The event had to be promoted through advertising including making digital posters; items had to be collected or made for the stalls. We did this by asking the whole school to donate any old teddies or books, we had lots donated which meant more profit!

Equipment such as a sound system, tables to display our goods and buckets/sponges for the ‘Soak the Teacher’ had to be acquired. The boys learnt how much organisation and planning is required for putting on such an event. We also had to ensure that we had a backup plan if it was raining, but fortunately it was a glorious day and we didn’t have to relocate to the classroom or sports hall.

The class had to practise their maths skills making sure they charged the right amount for each stall and (even more challenging) giving out the right change. Overall, we raised £137.38 – much of this from ‘Soak the Teacher’ (mostly Darren and Andy!) and the cake stall. A fantastic achievement.



Duke of Edinburgh

We are proud of our pupils that took part in the school’s first Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award.

To achieve this, they had to complete volunteering, learn a new skill and take part in a new physical activity.

They learnt to map read, create a route card and also took part in practice hikes of up to seven miles carrying full kit. Their final challenge was the overnight expedition in July - a huge achievement!



Electric Car Project

We’ve enjoyed a fantastic partnership with ‘Wren Classics’ who after a class trip agreed to help us build our solar powered kit car/ go kart. The garage was asked if they would be interested in helping in any way and they delivered! They offered a mechanic every week until the job was done. They bought all of the tools that we would need to complete the job and donated them to the school. A big thank you to them for this.

Our new kit car can reach 20 miles an hour – luckily the garage team have given us a cut-off switch and speed limiter to use.

Benefits of the project have included learning new science, technology, engineering and maths skills, working with people from the local community, experiencing a job role, independence skills, working as part of a team and taking pride in our work/ achievements.



Innovation



Innovation is prioritised. We know that many features of the education system have been in place for many years, but the context and the needs of pupils has moved on.

We pride ourselves in carefully challenging the status quo to find new and better ways to meet need.

Therapeutic Classrooms

Our work with TPC has sought to reimagine what a modern therapeutically informed classroom should look and feel like. Conventional classrooms are often busy, uncomfortable and inflexible for all pupils, but particularly for those with additional needs. They are often outdated and do not meet the emotional and mental health needs of pupils. They are not inclusive, or trauma informed and can perpetuate feelings of dysregulation and stress.

Coombe House is now rethinking what classrooms should be, to ensure they include:

- ✓ Flexible seating to cater for different learning needs and styles
- ✓ A calm corner for regulation, learning and reading
- ✓ Calm lighting to create a sense of calm and safety
- ✓ Soft seating and furnishings for self-regulation



Dining Room

A similar approach has been taken to redesign our dining room. We believe that dining rooms should be welcoming, communal and connective. They should offer plenty of space to talk and socialise as well as eat.

Lunchtime is often the hardest time of the day for many pupils as it can feel overwhelming, loud and chaotic. Our new space allows for a different option to help remove as much stress as possible and for children to practise skills that mirror those of a safe and secure homelife and develop real life skills.

The old rows of seating were removed, and new flexible table options were added to support those who struggle in large groups.

Two social sofa areas were also included. The dining room now has lots of plants and soft lighting, with a plant wall and shelving soon to be features in the dining room.

The dining room is now a communal, safe and nurturing area that focuses on connection, gathering and socialising. The different seating and different eating options will reduce dysregulation, anxiety and even noise levels.



Artificial Intelligence

As part of our focus on developing reading and writing, we have been involved in the creation of an Artificial Intelligence writing platform called Story Scribbler.

This has been developed in response to our need for high interest texts with lower reading ages. Research showed that these texts are in short supply, so we looked for new ways to create them ourselves – and so Story Scribbler was born.

Early successes include engagement from pupils who have previously struggled to see themselves as 'readers' and 'writers' and a higher ability pupil who has, for the first time, been able to use Story Scribbler to develop her editing skills.

Some of the stories have been turned into paperback books, using Amazon KDP under our Coombe House School Classics publications. Next steps include rolling out the newest part of the platform, which includes script writing and visual novels.

Growing Together: The Progression of Our School Farm

Our school farm is evolving into a vibrant and enriching space that benefits pupils and staff with plans for community involvement soon too.

We started with the vision for hands-on, inclusive education, which is now becoming a flourishing reality, with each new development contributing to a deeper connection with nature and a broader educational experience. This looks at what we've achieved so far and how we plan to build upon this foundation in the future.

Progress So Far

'No-dig' Beds and Polytunnel Installation

We have already achieved the creation of over 25 'no-dig' beds and the installation of a polytunnel. The 'no-dig' beds allow us to grow vegetables and herbs in an eco-friendly manner, reducing soil disturbance and promoting a healthier growing environment. These beds are excellent for introducing pupils to gardening techniques that are sustainable, simple, and effective. The addition of a polytunnel has extended our growing season, enabling us to cultivate plants throughout the year, regardless of weather conditions. The polytunnel also provides a sheltered space for teaching lessons about plant care, germination, and the importance of protecting crops from the elements.



Building the Chicken Enclosure

One of the most exciting milestones in our journey has been the chicken enclosure. This area, will soon become the focal point of the farm, allowing pupils to engage in daily care routines like feeding, cleaning, and egg collecting. These tasks will foster responsibility, routine, and a sense of pride for many of our pupils, who will learn to care for and interact with the chickens in a safe and supportive environment.

The chicken enclosure is not just about learning animal care—it's a space for therapy, sensory development, and a source of companionship. Pupils who may struggle in a traditional classroom setting will thrive here, building confidence and skills that translate into other areas of their lives.

Expanding the Orchard with a Grant for More Trees

Thanks to a generous grant, our orchard will soon see substantial growth. With funding secured, we will be adding a variety of fruit trees that will not only enhance the aesthetic and ecological value of our farm but also offer numerous educational opportunities. As the trees mature, pupils will learn about plant life cycles, seasonal changes, and sustainable food production, turning the orchard into a living classroom. In the future, the fruits from our orchard will be harvested, giving pupils hands-on experience with farm-to-table processes.

How We're Making a Difference

The school farm is already making a significant difference in the lives of our pupils. It has become a space where education, therapy, and practical skills come together, empowering pupils with diverse needs. By involving them in the building and creation of the farm, we're creating a learning environment that values each child's strengths and interests, celebrating achievements that might not be recognised in traditional academic settings.



Future for Growth

While we're proud of what we've accomplished so far, our ambitions for the school farm go even further. Here's a look at our future:

1. Developing the Orchard and Sensory Garden

The orchard expansion is just beginning. In addition to planting more trees, we plan to introduce fruit bushes, herbs, and wildflowers to increase biodiversity and attract pollinators like bees and butterflies. We aim to create a sensory-rich environment where pupils can engage with different textures, colours, and scents, enhancing their connection with nature. Eventually, we hope to create a small market garden where pupils can sell produce, learning about business skills and sustainability.

2. Expanding Animal Care

Building on the success of the chicken enclosure, we're exploring options to introduce other small animals, and working on plans for the duck enclosure and Bee Apiary for spring. These animals would offer new opportunities for interaction and care. Any future animal additions will be carefully chosen based on the needs of our pupils, with safety and animal welfare as our top priorities.

3. Enhancing Educational Programs

We are working to expand the farm's role as an educational resource. This includes developing more structured programs focused on farming, biology, and caring for the environment including the ASDAN Animal Care course. This course will give pupils practical skills in caring for animals while earning a recognised qualification. We also plan to integrate the farm into our curriculum through themed projects that allow pupils to study various subjects—maths, science, art, and more—in a hands-on, engaging way.

4. Involving the Community

Our school farm is not just a school project but a community one. We hope to strengthen ties with local organisations, gardening clubs, and environmental groups, seeking guidance and support to ensure that our farm thrives. We're also planning to open the farm to the community, hosting events to strengthen our local connections and enhance that community spirit.

Continuing to Grow: The Next Steps

As we look to the future, our focus is on maintaining the momentum and ensuring that the farm continues to grow as a space for all pupils to learn and thrive. Each new addition, from an orchard tree to a new animal friend, is a step toward a farm that nurtures curiosity, responsibility, and a love for the natural world.

Conclusion

The school farm is more than just an educational tool; it's a growing community and a space of hope and opportunity. With the support we've received so far, and with plans to expand and innovate, the future looks bright. We are grateful for the support that has brought us this far, and we look forward to continuing our journey, nurturing both the farm and the incredible pupils who call it their own.



Growth

Coombe House has experienced a very positive period of growth. It has been a pleasure to offer safe and effective school spaces to more local families who need them.

A careful approach of detailed pre-admission assessment, bespoke transition planning and a personalised induction experience mean that pupils who have joined the school have experienced early success and reported positively about their new school.

Due to the increased leadership capacity and developing expertise within the school, it has been able to offer a small number of places to pupils who have more complex needs. Dorset Council had not otherwise been able to secure a suitable placement for these pupils, meaning our offer has been especially impactful.

There are ongoing exciting plans to ensure that the school can continue to grow through the development of the facilities that will provide current and future pupils an exceptional experience.

A new model of employability

Coombe House is excited to be modelling a new innovative provision designed to provide young people with high quality support to allow them to progress to employment and / or further education and training.

Too often, children and young people with additional needs find there is not the support they need to help them to make the step from full time education to the challenges of early adulthood. The model being proposed will provide the right support, at the right time, to allow them to develop the skills they need to progress.

With first class teaching, job coaching, and internal work experience opportunities, complemented by 'real-life' community-based work experience, and planned transitions into secure employment, the provision has the potential to transform the local offer.



Additional Learning Spaces

The school has enjoyed collaborating with Dorset Council to design 'Willow', its brand new four-classroom block to facilitate its next phase of growth.

The building has been designed specifically to meet the needs of the pupils who attend and has been adapted to ensure it is fully inclusive of those with physical, sensory, medical, communication and other learning needs; all the while adopting our therapeutic, non-institutional classroom design concept.

Having additional breakout spaces, small group rooms, cookery spaces and a direct link to the schools' outside spaces has meant it has been an instant hit with the pupils who have been lucky enough to be the first to move in.

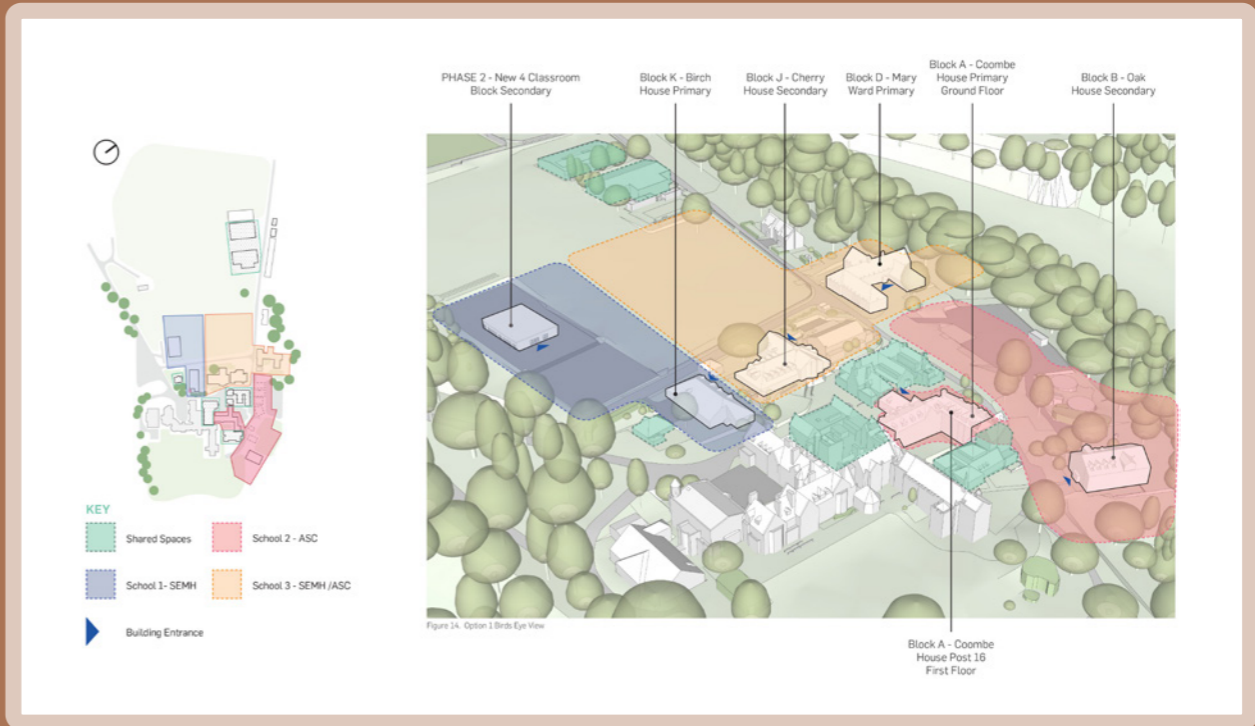


A school within a school

The company continues to work with its shareholder Dorset Council to support the Council's placement sufficiency duty: the next and final stage of school development will provide more places for Dorset children and allow the company to fulfil its business plan. The company and the Council together will ensure the new development will be of equal quality with what has already been completed.

The concept of operating a 'school within a school' model will ensure that all pupils who attend shall experience the personalised approach that is right for their specific needs.

The specialist learning spaces that are being designed to complement the more typical classrooms will allow our pupils to thrive in a wide variety of areas such as animal care, horticulture, science, art and design, design and technology, motor mechanics, construction and hair and beauty. Rather than expecting our pupils to fit into the sometimes narrow traditional educational model, we offer them chances to explore their special interests and talents might be within a safe well-resourced environment.



Commercial / Financial Position

The company has had a successful year. It has continued to deliver against the 5-year Business Plan (as updated and approved by the Shareholder, the Council, in March 2024).

The Shareholder made a loan facility available to the company in June 2023 to support working capital whilst the pupil roll increased at a measured and manageable pace to numbers sufficient to reach a secure financial position.

The strong financial performance against budget during the 2023/24 financial year, combined with careful and considered cost control and cash management has meant that no further drawdown has been necessary.

The Shareholder's expectation of the company is to provide high quality places at a significantly lower cost than other independent special schools in order to reduce the overspend on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, rather than to make a financial return on their investment. Equally it is the Shareholder's expectation that as the school grows the need for the loan facility to provide working capital will cease.

The financial year ending 31 March 2024 saw Coombe House successfully outperform its budget. This was achieved through some overperformance on pupil roll, additional contribution generated through commercial and community use of the swimming pool, and non-trading income from the solar panels on site and non-domestic renewable heat incentive payments for the biomass boilers.

Despite inflationary cost pressures, the teachers' pay award in September 2023 being higher than anticipated, and the site being re-instated to the non-domestic rates register by the Valuation Office Agency, the outturn is considered a significant success.

As per the Business Plan, during this financial year, pupil numbers have reached a level at which the company can report a surplus for the first time; Coombe House is currently forecasting a year-end surplus which is twice the budgeted figure. This surplus will mitigate the risk of further drawdowns against the loan facility.



Value for Money

A significant intended outcome of the Coombe House project was and continues to be for pupil placements at Coombe House School to offer Dorset Council a cost efficiency compared to placements at alternative independent special schools *without compromising on the quality of provision.*

The Company estimates that upon opening in summer 2022, the Coombe House School fee represented an average saving per placement of circa 29%.

Whilst inflation has significantly impacted both pay and non-pay costs year-on-year, the school fee has remained unchanged, increasing the estimated saving per placement for the current academic year 2024/25 to 39%, which has been achieved without compromise on the quality of provision that Coombe House provides.



Green Credentials

Coombe House has focussed significantly on improving its environmental impact in the past year and is ambitious to continue with this focus.

Improvements have included:

- ✓ A move to the local sourcing of consumables such as fuel and food supplies.
- ✓ Increasing the reliance and our use of clean energy and storage through optimising and extending our solar and biomass plant.
- ✓ Using local contractors to support the site in repair and maintenance as opposed to national companies.
- ✓ Using grant funding to increase the biodiversity of our woodland.
- ✓ Reducing and recycling more waste than had previously been achieved.
- ✓ Initiatives to reduce food miles for ingredients used in cookery lessons.
- ✓ Improvements to efficiency of lighting to lower carbon options.



Solar

A great deal of focus has gone into optimising the benefits of our solar panels. The site has 892 solar panels which have received significant attention to ensure they are working, efficient and reliable.

Our new classroom block has been designed with its environmental impact in mind and has added to our solar capacity.

Biomass

Coombe House benefits from two biomass boilers installed by the previous owners. They provide heating and hot water to large areas of the school and other buildings, including the (typically expensive) swimming pool. The use of local fuel from the New Forest, the installation of new control units, monthly checks and careful servicing under an SLA (Service Level Agreement) have all increased reliability, efficiency and reduced the use of the oil boilers that are maintained as a backup to prevent potential critical failure.



Water

Although there are plans to connect the site to the mains water supply to ensure there is sufficient capacity, Coombe House continues to utilise its spring fed water system, which greatly reduces the typically very significant environmental impact of running a site of its size, not least the impact of operating a swimming pool facility.

Environmental Development

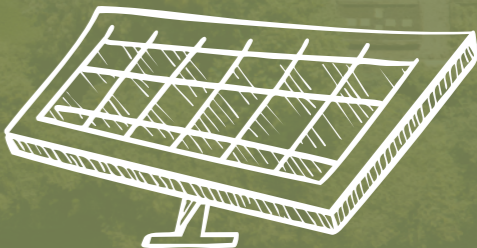
As the ongoing work takes place to modernise and improve our buildings, and specifically the work to deliver our new classroom block, great care has been taken to work with Dorset Council to ensure that this is done with consideration of the environmental impact.

The new block has exceptional environmental credentials including use of ground source heat pumps and solar and has been designed to have exceptional levels of efficient heat insulation.

Biodiversity

There has been a focus on improving the biodiversity of the wildlife that share our site with us.

Projects by the pupils have identified many different species and work with various charities and other organisations are aiding us in improving the health of our woodlands, transitioning them from a predominantly single species woodland to a more natural and diverse environment.



Our People



Our people strategy sets out to create a positive workplace to identify, attract, develop, and retain high quality and experienced professionals focused on high performance and building a sustainable pipeline of knowledge and skills for current and future growth.

Recruitment and Retention

People Strategy Goals:

- ✓ Become an employer of choice.
- ✓ Engaging and retaining our people.

A key priority is to offer the best for our people, recognising them as our greatest asset and promoting a culture of excellence. We are an inclusive organisation in culture and ethos and have continued in the last twelve months to nurture a working environment in which our people thrive and are inspired to give the best every day.

We have improved our brand reputation and competitive advantage for being an employer of choice with rewarding job opportunities, job security and a supportive, learning culture. Staff motivation, retention and engagement has been a key focus to reduce staff turnover and ensure the company is well-resourced.

The HR department has focused on a positive recruitment experience, attracting high quality professionals to support our growth in staff numbers.

New staff have benefited from an effective onboarding and a robust induction programme and excellent management support.

We have developed our employment offer to ensure it is competitive within the market (see Employee Engagement, Recognition and Reward).

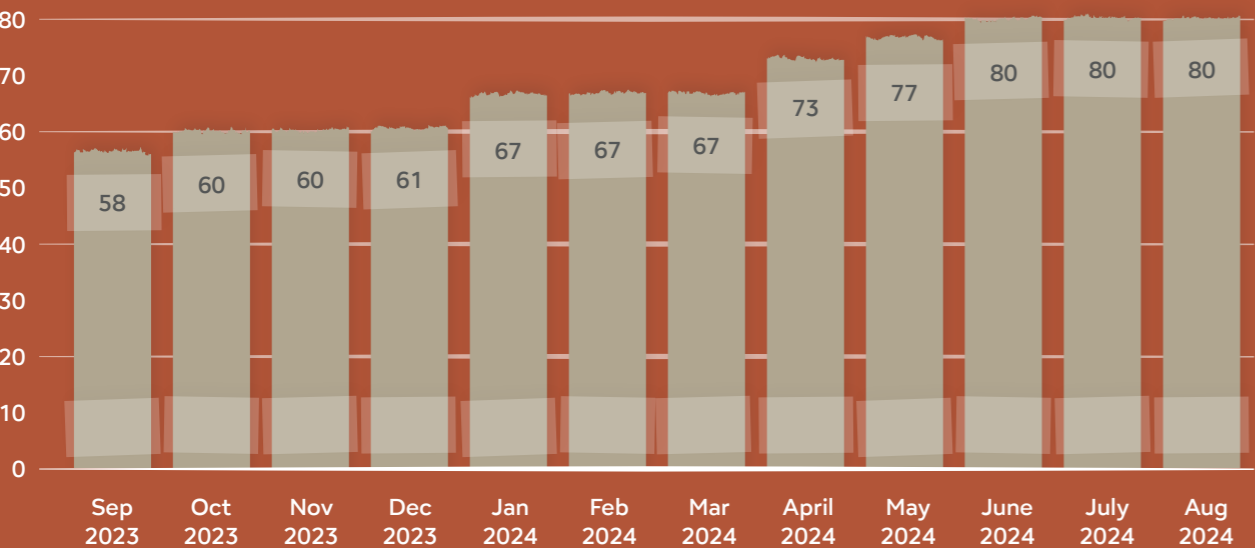
This has impacted our ability to support pupil growth during the reporting period through:

- » an increase in quality applications, acceptance of employment offers, and a 97.56% vacancy fill rate¹ at the end of August 2024.
- » a significant reduction in previous recruitment and advertising costs.
- » all hires being directly recruited, with zero recruitment agency support / resource to detract from our own recruitment efforts.
- » our ability to operate with no operational / responsive recruitment agency use.
- » improving our online presence through social media and launching our own promotional recruitment video.

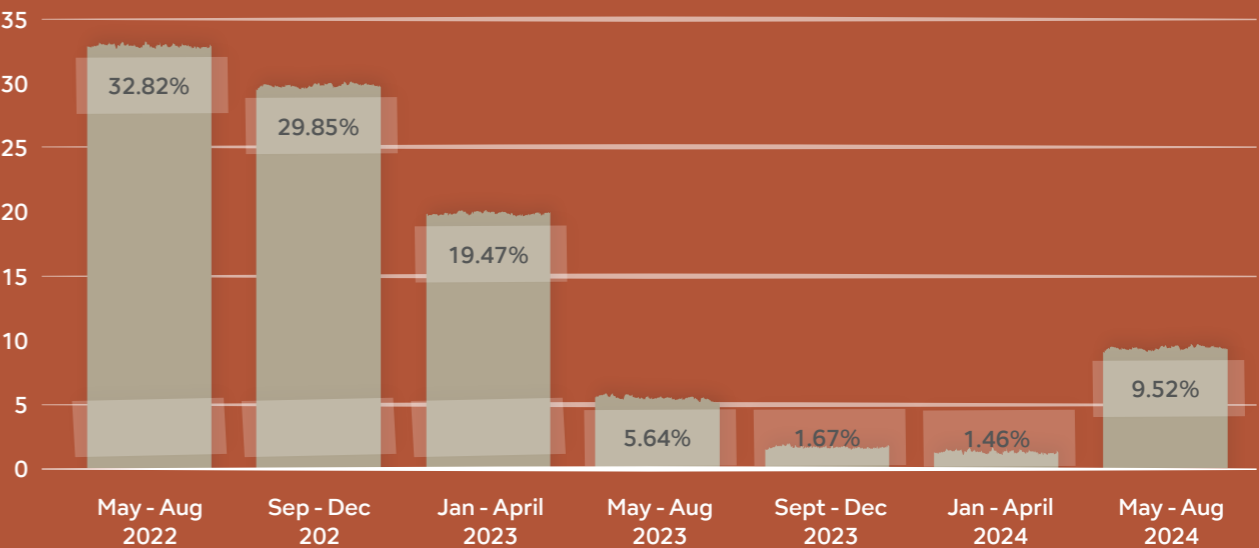
"It was the best induction that I have experienced in a school environment."
Teacher

Coombe House aimed to reduce staff turnover to below 10% and so increase staff retention, which has been successfully achieved.

Staff Numbers



Average Staff Turnover (%) - May 2022 to August 2024



¹ Vacancy fill rate calculation: dividing the total jobs filled by the total jobs open during the period, and then multiplying by 100 for a percentage = vacancy fill rate (40 divided by 41 x 100)

Employee Engagement, Recognition and Reward



People Strategy Goals:

- ✓ Engaging and retaining our people.
- ✓ Rewarding, acknowledging, and recognising good performance.
- ✓ Creating a positive, inclusive workplace culture with committed staff who have a strong sense of individual and organisational pride.

As part of its Recruitment and Retention Strategy, the company has reviewed staff benefits to give each employee a more comprehensive total rewards package in addition to pay, leave entitlement and pension provision.

This has enhanced the company's value proposition and gives it a competitive advantage over other comparable organisations. The decision to prioritise the health and well-being of employees also led to the expanded benefits package.

All staff now have Death in Service cover, and a Healthcare Plan was introduced on September 1, 2024, for all employees who have completed their probationary period and wish to opt in.

We have provided genuine opportunities for flexible and hybrid working where possible and developed family friendly policies to support those with caring responsibilities.

There has been a focus on opportunities to bring staff together. This included a Christmas social event, staff bake-off (raising money for Stand Up To Cancer), fundraising for Movember, Mental Health Awareness week and a succession of other gestures and

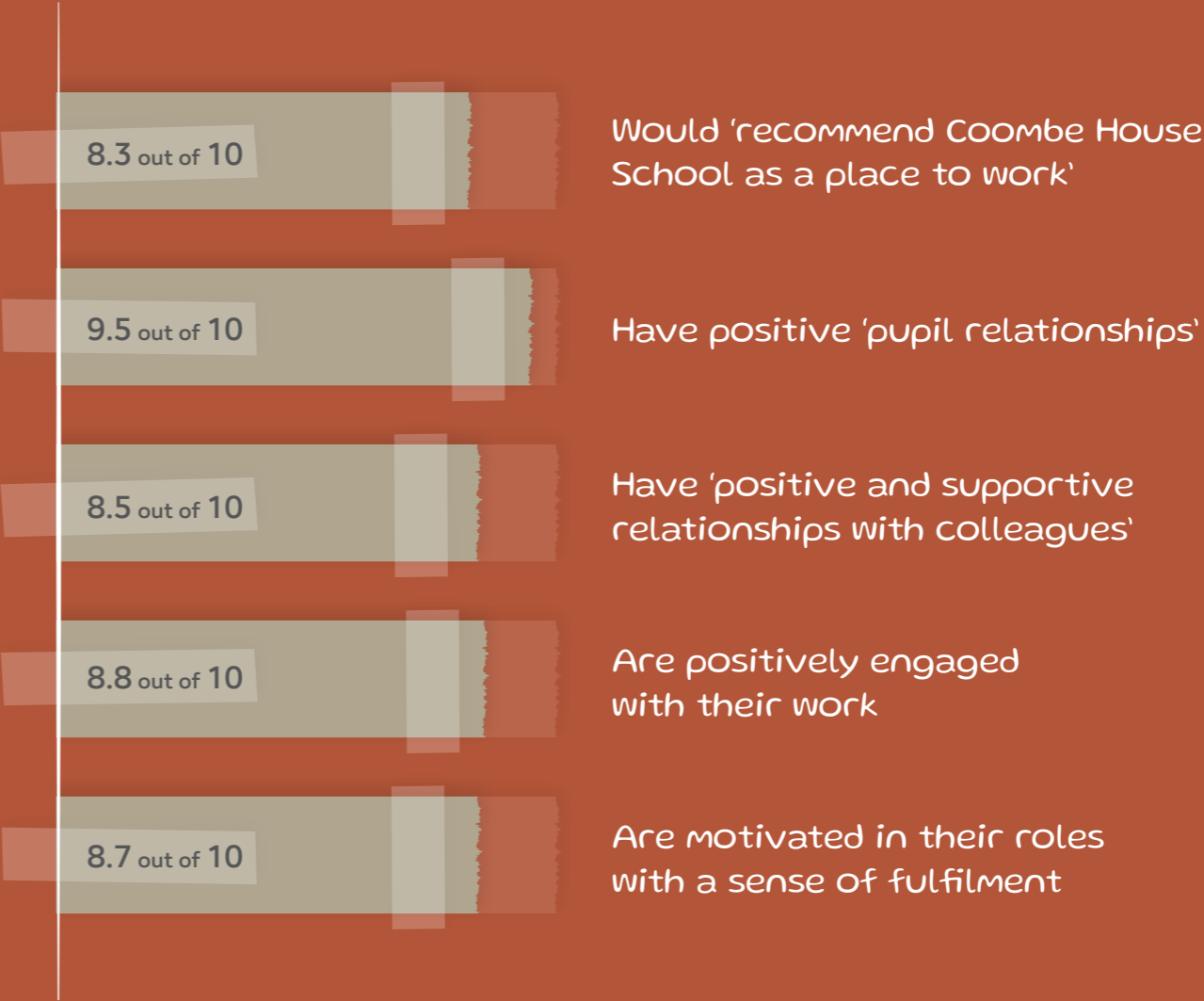
activities.

There have also been all-staff breakfasts cooked by the Headteacher and HR Manager, Brew Monday (linked to the Samaritans campaign), Random Acts of Kindness Week, National Employee Appreciation Day, and various efforts to thank and recognise the significant efforts of our team.

We have welcomed people who are motivated and enthused about their work and workplace, which is evidenced through our regular staff surveys.

Ten 'pulse' surveys were sent to all staff² through the TES education platform, during this period. The average results out of ten are summarised below (of areas directly linked to their roles). All scores and comments are anonymous, allowing staff to share how they are honestly feeling.

Average Results of Staff Survey



Staff Training & Development

The company has developed a skilled and confident workforce who are well trained, supported and enabled to take decisions and operate effectively within a clear accountability structure.

There is a comprehensive, established training offer in place to meet the needs of individuals and our organisational priorities, as well as the children, young people and families we work with as part of our workforce development.

We identify opportunities through our appraisal and CPD programme and ensure that our staff have an opportunity to develop their careers, whether in terms of gaining useful skills and capabilities and/or to obtain promotion.

The company and School remain compliant with mandatory training requirements, and a significant training offer was completed throughout the year.



"I have super teachers and peers who welcome me really well"

"I want to come to school every day because it's not boring"

"You can suggest things to the school and your teacher and they happen. I'm surprised the school actually listens and it happens"

Health and Safety

Coombe House continues to develop its Health and Safety practices. In a year where there has been significant growth and a wide variety of projects that have required careful planning and implementation, risks have been carefully controlled and the site has remained safe.

Risk assessments and emergency procedures continue to be developed, which has aided Coombe House in its push to offer its pupils engaging and 'real-life' learning experiences.

Our work to ensure compliance in the estate continues, with investment into systems and processes continuing, and responses to emerging matters becoming more efficient.

Training and partnership continue to be prioritised, and input from visiting experts, including the Service Level Agreement with Dorset Council, gives reassurance of our compliance.

Incident monitoring continues to improve, with careful analysis and 'lessons learned' processes feeding into a culture of continuous improvement.



Leisure

The swimming pool was made available to members of the public from September 2023 with the launch of an online membership scheme. It was initiated with two swimming sessions per week and a limit of 36 members.

A year later we now have 136 members and offer six swimming sessions per week. Our booking system records over 2,700 individual swims in the last year.

The company has been pleased to make our pool available to a local primary school once a week to enable them to teach their pupils to swim. Hire commenced in October 2023 and several classes have been able to benefit from our facilities.

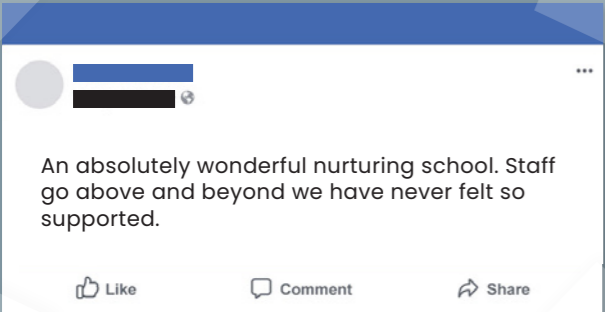
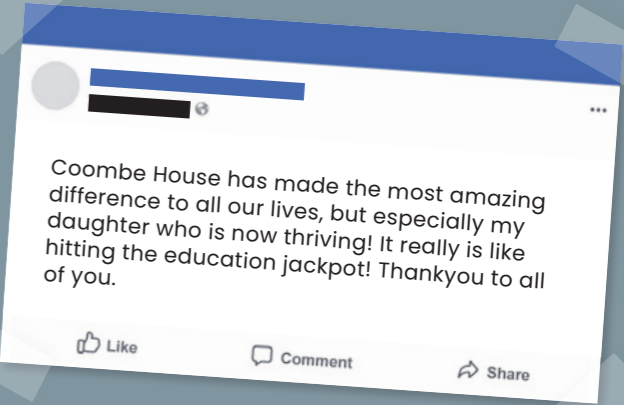


PR / Reputation

The company continues to see its reputation improve as a result of its good work and has regularly received positive coverage in the press and online. Its improved presence on social media has allowed the local community and the pupils' parents and carers to share their views about developments and successes.

As the company continues to develop its branding and its work to seek a wider positive impact within the education space it is anticipated that the quantity and quality of content seen online will further increase.

As has been detailed above, we are keen to share what we learn with others. Conversations with other local authorities and multi-academy trusts who are inspired by our innovative model have meant more provision may open nationally, to help the many children and young people who need more help than current schools are able to offer. We're showing that the effort that it takes to 'think differently' and to 'try new things' is most definitely worth it.



Coombe House
coombehouseschool.org.uk

