



# Highfields School

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Dear Highfields Staff and Families

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Governors met recently to review and consider your responses as part of the informal consultation regarding our proposal to undertake formal consultation over joining the East Midlands Educational Trust (EMET). We would like to thank everyone who contributed. Three stakeholders responded after the survey closed and these were taken into account. A range of staff responded including some who filled out paper forms which we provided as an alternative to email.

A majority of staff and families supported the proposal. Families offered strong support with 160 responses received: 111 supporting the proposal and 49 not. The staff views were broadly positive but more mixed: 93 of around 160 staff emailed responded with 42 staff not supporting the proposal and 51 supporting.

Views which supported the proposal tended to reflect the evidence provided by governors. Typical responses included those below.

- “Better prospects, new resources, more opportunities and a chance to move forward” Staff member
- “I strongly feel facilities need more investment and hope for more access to training and networking events. Being part of a small department, I hope that the trust allows me to learn and develop through sharing good practice with subject specialist in other schools.” Staff member
- “Times are changing and I think being part of EMET can provide new opportunities and a better working environment for staff and students. My main concerns surrounding pay/pensions and security of teaching positions have been answered.” Staff member
- “I feel that ventures which can enhance the school learning environment should be embraced. I also believe that collaboration with other schools is a positive thing.” Family member

Governors also evaluated views which did not support the proposal. Although each view was individual, governors noted that there were common themes.

- Some stakeholders raised concerns or questions which information has already been provided on, or which would be explored as part of the formal consultation.
- Some stakeholders questioned the timing of this matter. Governors believe that, having started this discussion in September 2019, to wait for post Covid normality to return will delay, to an unacceptable level, improvements which could be made to our children’s education. The impact of Covid will be felt within education long after any return to ‘normal’. Furthermore, it is felt by governors that we will be better placed to face significant challenges within a strong partnership of schools than as we are currently.

*This is a good school. Ofsted, May 2017*  
*A good school with an outstanding Sixth Form. Ofsted, October 2012*





- A number of stakeholders suggested that Highfields was an 'independent' school and this would be 'lost'. Highfields is accountable to the local authority and is not independent. Also, despite much investigation we have found no evidence from EMET schools that their independence is removed. EMET will provide 'base' policies in the same way the local authority now does. Our 'signature' policies (behaviour, teaching and learning, uniform etc) will remain the domain of governors and staff.
- Finally, a number of stakeholders oppose the academies programme itself and raised concerns about this educational policy which has been supported by successive governments. Many of these arguments suggested incorrectly that joining a MAT is 'privatisation': an academy is a state funded, non-profit charitable trust and is not private industry. Although governors differed in their views on the academies programme, they agreed that the education of Highfields children should come first and that a decision such as this should be made against the educational landscape as it is (with some 78% of schools now being academies).

As the meeting closed, we reflected on the functions of governance which are:

1. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent
2. Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils
3. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

It remains the strong view of governors that available evidence strongly suggests that the educational and financial performance of the school will be limited if it remains within the local authority and that we should therefore progress to formal consultation regarding EMET. This will involve a range of stakeholders, including unions and the local authority and will explore in more detail the financial and legal implications of this change. This formal consultation will take place over a period of 6 to 8 weeks, and all stakeholders will again have the opportunity to submit their views.

Governors feel that they must take the added burdens of the current situation into account. Therefore, having considered the feedback received and views put forward by union representatives and members of senior leadership present at the meeting, rather than move straight to the formal consultation process we will pause until the New Year. This pause will be applied even though we have been given in principle agreement to proceed. We will then consider the timetable for formal consultation which will offer a longer window for stakeholders to share their views.

As this is a governor initiative we would appreciate any feedback about this strategic decision being addressed to governors and not to the headteacher who we have agreed should continue to prioritise the safety of students and staff as long as Covid-19 remains a concern.

Although we understand that change always comes with an element of the unknown, governors feel confident about the opportunities, security and capacity that this move could provide for staff and students. It remains our belief that Highfields will be stronger and more secure in a partnership of willing, proud and autonomous schools.

Yours sincerely

Angeline Ellson  
Chair of Governors  
On behalf of the Full Governing Board