



Your questions answered: families

Answers to parent/carers questions sent subsequent to the letter from the chair of governors of 28 September 2020.

Q. What guarantee can you give that Highfields will remain with EMET in the future? What will happen if EMET splits or is taken over by another trust?

A. EMET is very secure in terms of standards and finances so it remains highly unlikely that Highfields would be re-brokered into another trust. But it should be noted that if we stay as a maintained school and our standards slip then we would be forced into an academy trust without any say.

Q. How will staff pay and conditions be improved by joining EMET?

A. EMET follow the national pay agreements for teachers and associate staff, therefore they stay the same.

Q. What will be the implications for the sixth form of joining EMET?

A. Sixth forms remain unaffected by joining EMET.

Q. How will you ensure the existing ethos of the school is maintained going forward and its identity remain "individual" ?

A. EMET is a MAT whose 'mission statement' refers to them as a 'a partnership of willing, proud and autonomous schools'. Our investigations into their practice in schools has revealed that they make no attempt to change the ethos or identity of schools.

Q. How will you improve outcomes for pupils going forward? How will you ensure the school does not start to fail like a number of other good/outstanding schools in Derbyshire when they became academies? Why are you a better MAT for Highfields to join than others, what are the benefits to the pupils and staff? What improvements will you make to the fabric of the school? Will you allow the existing headteacher and governing body to continue with their improvements without undue interference ie how much input will you have day to day?

A. EMET will offer us access to improved facilities, better training and professional development for staff, access to a more curriculum support and increased capacity around teaching and leadership.

EMET schools are amongst the highest achieving in the East Midlands.

The headteacher and governors remain accountable for the school. EMET do NOT make day to day operational decisions.

EMET feel that Highfields matches the profile of many of their schools and will contribute to corporate development over time.

Q. Will the support for my autistic child stay the same, and is the change likely to affect him?

A. Joining EMET will not mean any changes for learning support.

Q. What performance indicators from other schools who have joined EMET will assure parents that joining EMET is likely to be adding value? What has been the trend for schools in MAT since joining in added value scores on student attainment? What are teacher retention levels? how much investment has there been in staff development? How does the student demographic of other schools in the MAT



compare to Highfields? How does the profile of the curriculum differ to other secondary schools in MAT - % time by subject?

A. This will be covered in EMET's presentation.

In the presentation to staff the evidence presented suggested that:

- Schools in EMET perform better now than when they joined
- Schools in EMET are financially more secure than when they joined
- Teacher retention levels are high
- Student demographics in EMET schools are similar to Highfields (see presentation)
- The curriculum remains entirely the responsibility of the headteacher/governors NOT EMET

Q. Our son is autistic and is supported at Highfields by an EHCP which currently requires TA support much of the time and use of an inclusion base. He has ongoing support from Derbyshire County Council's autism outreach and behaviour support officers who have known him since he was small and have been an important part of his transfer from primary.

Neither the EMET website nor the chair of governors' letter make any mention of SEND or inclusion. I am aware of other schools where academisation has meant a drastic reduction in SEND provision. We would therefore be interested to know 1) how EMET approaches SEND in terms of principles, funding and support services and 2) whether our son's experience is likely to be any different/better/worse were Highfields to become an EMET school. Would TA numbers be maintained? Would there be continuity with the external agencies who know him so well?

A. Joining EMET will not mean any changes for learning support.

We can and will continue to buy in Derbyshire services.

SEND strategy remains entirely the responsibility of the headteacher/governors NOT EMET.

Q. What will your policy be for out of age group admissions? For example children starting reception at compulsory school age. Will they be forced to miss a year to 'catch up' or will they stay with their cohort.

A. Our approach to admissions will not change because of our joining EMET.

Q. Your organisation has to run at a profit. How do you intend to profit from Highfields students and staff?

A. Trusts do not make profits – they are **charitable** companies and the trustees are company directors and must comply with company law requirements. Any surplus is invested back into schools.

Q. How does the Trust make decisions on the allocation of funding between its various schools?

What is the Trust's 5 year objective for Highfields if it decides to join the Trust?

A. Each school is given a General Annual Grant from the ESFA and this is passed directly to the school for the headteacher and governors to decide how to spend. There is a headteacher's group which agrees where school improvement spending should be allocated.

Q. Will the allocation of school places remain with the Education Authority or will the school be able to pick and choose its students?

Will governors become superfluous or will they take up a paid position?

Will Highfields be able to request children move to another school within the "family" of schools if they feel the school they are at isn't suitable for them?

A. The school will not be able to pick and choose its students since the school will be bound by the admissions code of practice and governance will remain the same but rather than being accountable to the local authority they will be accountable to the trust.

No. Highfields staff will never try to move students to another school.



- Q. What is your philosophy and your approach to inclusion - for children with SEND, children in care and other vulnerable children?**
- A. This is not a matter for EMET. There will be no change to current inclusion/SEND approach and policy.
- Q. What is EMET's track record on exclusions in its group of schools? From the point they joined the Trust.**
- A. EMET delegate responsibility for excluding students to schools and are not involved unless governance reveals a long term issue at the school.
- Q. What is EMET's track record in helping schools to close attainment gaps for vulnerable/disadvantaged children?**
- A. Most of EMET's school either mirror the national attainment gap or have improved on it. All of the secondary schools are rated Ofsted good or better.
- Q. How can EMET evidence that it is adding value to children's education, in order to justify the funding which goes to support the salaries of Trust executives?**
- A. All EMET schools have improved educational outcomes and have greater financial security since joining (this is covered in EMET's presentation).



Frequently asked questions (previously issued)

Q. Why now? Surely the focus should be on recovering from this pandemic?

A. The forming or joining of a multi academy trust was first raised in 2017 by the co-heads and governors at the time. We came back to this discussion in September 2019 and paused it in March 2020. We feel that delaying this discussion until Covid-19 is resolved is not an option. Governors have noted that successive headteachers over the last four years have reached the same conclusion: that Highfields needs to consider belonging to a medium sized collective of academies. Governors feel that this debate cannot be delayed further until the Covid-19 crisis is over, as there is no indication as to when this might be.

We are keen to explore involvement only with trusts, like EMET, whose ethos ('a willing partnership of proud, autonomous schools') reflects our preferences.

Governors have recently learnt that the Peak 11 (a longstanding consortium) is slowly disbanding and this is partly due to Peak 11 schools joining MATs.

We believe that EMET not expand beyond a certain number of schools and we do not want to delay to the point where this option is no longer open to us.

The consultation and possible conversion will NOT require significant amounts of staff time and will NOT be allowed to undermine staff wellbeing or work/life balance.

Q. But surely Highfields is good and improving further - why does it need to consider this type of change?

Yes, Highfields is good and improving further, mainly as a result of the exhaustive and (possibly) unsustainable efforts of its staff team. However, the headteacher and governing board believe that there is a ceiling to this improvement if we remain with our local authority. The school and its staff need significant investment of money and support. This is why we are entering formal consultation with a MAT.

Schools in MATs can access resources that local authority schools cannot. This has been made so by the government because they wish all schools to become academies. Whilst some educationalists have political reservations about this, the fact remains that our staff and students are being potentially disadvantaged as long as we do not belong to a MAT.

Q. Which evidence suggests that EMET, in particular, might be considered as a positive alternative to the LA?

A. The evidence can be summarised thus:

1. EMET has a track record of respecting schools' individual identities and offering a high level of autonomy; we would not lose the autonomy we have under the LA. The MAT also has a good reputation amongst teaching unions.
2. In recent times (2017-2020) EMET has invested an average of £1.3million per school into EMET schools which are most similar to Highfields. DCC is not offering anything like this level of investment.
3. EMET has a track record of moving forward building projects quickly. This is not the case for LA where much needed projects (e.g renovation of unhygienic Y11 toilets) can take many months or years to complete
4. EMET has a track record in its schools of offering bespoke school to school CPD / development / support which far outweighs anything offered by the LA. Because EMET has similar schools, Highfields is also well placed to provide our own expertise to other schools which is usually beneficial for both parties.
5. EMET schools are high performing as a group (lead school P8= +0.79) and so we can assume that some EMET leaders have experience in solving some problems that Highfields may still be facing.
6. EMET offers some excellent career development possibilities for staff looking for progression (Highfields staff turnover is low and so promotion opportunities can be limited).



7. Membership of EMET will exonerate us from inspections for three years. This will give us the space and time to focus on being the school we want to be without distraction.
8. All available evidence suggests that EMET consultancy, marketing and recruitment is more effective than that which we are currently offered. Highfields needs to attract and retain the best staff and be the first choice for families of Y7 children in our area and Y12 students more widely.

Fig.2: Comparison of track record of funding for capital projects (surplus to DFC) since 2017

EMET: Examples of capital spending projects include sixth form centre at Kimberley and Sports/Performance Block at Ripley. The average total spend on capital projects since 2017 for EMET schools of similar size to Highfields: £1.3m

School Information					School Condition Allocation				
School	Phase	GAG (19/20)	Pupil Nos	SCA as % of GAG	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21 (Proposed)	Total
JFC	Secondary	3,410,608	741	27%	292,478	229,784	134,547	249,547	906,356
TKS	Secondary	6,267,509	1301	24%	629,139	641,573	146,849	117,349	1,534,910
TRA	Secondary	3,467,953	690	15%	166,804	185,435	145,751	35,751	533,741
SWA	Secondary	3,844,944	834	28%	231,534	176,019	407,833	278,833	1,094,219
WBS	Secondary	7,741,431	1700	15%	388,172	220,704	172,553	412,553	1,193,982
JWS	Secondary	6,162,605	1308	20%	318,282	305,037	456,427	176,427	1,256,172

DCC: Examples of capital spending projects

Although there have been no projects on the scale of a sixth form block or sports centre it would be true to say that DCC funding has allowed a number of projects. These include:

- 2017/18 Student Access Initiative (this money ensures DDA compliance for individual disabled students): projects worth £65,000 for toilets and £22,500 for lifts.
- 2019 Catering upgrade (£129,512) as part of DCC catering renewing contract (all fixtures and equipment belong to DCC catering).
- 2020 Insurance maintenance premium: Door upgrade to meet fire regulations £45,000, start date unknown. Agreed expenditure
- 2020 Fire alarm c.£120K start date pending. Agreed expenditure
- 2020? Insurance maintenance premium: Sports corridor roof repair £42,000: bid pending.
- 2020? Joint match funded (Highfields pays half of cost): security fencing/gates £35,000. Start date unknown.

Estimated total spent by DCC on capital projects or similar at Highfields School 2017-2020= **£382,012**

Q. What's in it for students?

A. Students in EMET schools have better facilities. Their working environment is smart and well maintained. Renovation take place frequently and worn or damaged surfaces are replaced. At least two schools have had major new builds in the last three years. Teaching is supported by a wider team of professionals within EMET who collaborate professionally over resources and



practice. Achievement at EMET's lead school West Bridgford is truly outstanding (P8= +0.79) and other schools in the trust are approaching this level. Students in these schools wider/better options for post 16 and 18 study.

Q. I have a year 6 child. How will potentially joining EMET affect admissions?

A. It won't.

Q. What are staff likely to gain?

A. EMETs resources are pooled so that all leaders can choose to work as a collaborative unit. The senior teams regularly meet and combine their resources to solve common problems. Subject teams support and develop each other. Where individuals or departments find themselves with difficult to solve problems (perhaps there is a ceiling in GCSE subject) there is a pool of support to draw on - someone somewhere within EMET is likely to have solved that problem before. Excellent staff may look to develop their careers through progression routes offered by EMET (this would only be done where there was a net benefit to Highfields). Unlike Highfields under the local authority, EMET schools are regularly upgraded and repairs and renovations kept up to date creating a reasonable professional environment for its staff and students.

Q. But surely the budget is looking more healthy at Highfields - we don't need extra resources any more do we...?

A. All school budgets are looking more encouraging in 2020-21. The fact remains that local authority schools cannot bid into funds (including the condition improvement fund) in the same way as academies and therefore cannot expect the improvements to student and staff facilities that could be expected as part of EMET.

Q. What will EMET expect from us?

A. The MAT has a track record of autonomy. They are light touch if their schools are within budget and graded Ofsted good. Where schools meet these broad criteria the school the MAT expects that schools will oversee their own governance, uniform, ethos, teaching approach etc. Where schools struggle our investigations have revealed they have a strong record of offering bespoke support to support the school staff in improving things for students (for example at Ripley). Over time EMET schools are expected to offer to help other schools in the MAT. This is agreed between schools.

Q. What will change as a result of being part of EMET?

Staff at schools joining EMET have told us that many stakeholders notice no change as signage/uniform/name of school etc is unaffected. Changes will be made to roles involving finance and HR but this may be technical rather than substantial (finance and HR are centralised in most MATs). EMET schools are not expected to adopt new data systems, uniform, QA arrangements etc. EMET invited Highfields to join the MAT because they like what the school is doing and feel it is reflective of best practice.

Q. Surely terms and conditions will change?

A. Derbyshire Schools who have joined EMET have noted only small changes. One of these changes is time scales on some HR policies. This will be explored in the consultation.

Q. Will EMET take our teachers?

A. No. If teachers want to explore leadership or developmental roles across the MAT they would only be allowed to apply if it were clear that the net impact on Highfields students and staff was positive. Staff can, of course, choose to apply for jobs in other schools within EMET and Highfields will benefit from this 'pool' approach.



Q. Why would we be exempt from Ofsted and is this a benefit?

A. Any school who joins a trust is allowed this time for transition of a minimum of two years and a maximum of three years. Staff may feel that this is beneficial because it allows us to focus 100% on children rather than being unduly distracted by Ofsted schedules.

Q. How would safeguarding/ early help of children be affected?

A. Safeguarding arrangements will not be affected and neither would the early help offer to primary schools.

Q. What are potential downsides of joining EMET?

A. It's a one way process. If governors commit after formal consultation it is a binding arrangement. Staff morale may, in the short term, be affected by change. The 'top slice' is more than we give to LA (see below), however our expectation is that we would be a net beneficiary financially. Another downside is that it is often the case that headteachers within MATs can often be more quickly removed following dips in performance than their peers in local authority schools. A small number of roles around HR and finance will change over time in line with MAT policy. The people in these roles will be briefed throughout the process (and have been thus far) in order that they are able to make informed professional decisions. If the school dips below the performance criteria outlined above then EMET will intervene more. We have looked at a case study of how this was handled within EMET and feel satisfied that the response was supportive and positive.

Q. The 'up front' top slice is about 2% (£100,000) per year. How can it be expected that 'Highfields' net financial position over time will be enhanced through membership of EMET?

A. Discussions with schools, including former Derbyshire local authority schools, have revealed that joining EMET has been financially positive despite the top slice. This is partly because the capital monies that EMET has put into, for example, a sports block at Ripley or a sixth form block at Kimberley have far outweighed the top slice. But it is also because EMET, like most MATs, reduce costs by centralising (over time) services like HR and finance, by applying for funds only available to academies, by buying products and services in bulk thus reducing the overall cost and by sharing resources (for example TES advertising) across the trust.

Q. Will this affect our membership of Peak 11?

A. No...but as stated above, Peak 11 and other soft federations are being disbanded as schools become part of multi academy trusts.

Q. Will staff be shunted between EMET schools?

A. Absolutely NOT under any circumstances.

Q. Is this a move to pre-empt forced academisation?

A. In short, not really. We do not know how the Johnson government will move forward on this but it is widely accepted that academisation is here to stay and that the government would like to phase out local authority schools. However, this has not been our primary motivation for seeking to join a MAT. We are primarily interested in educational improvement and investment in our school buildings.

Q. Other secondary schools in Derbyshire are staying with DCC and they are doing fine...why can't we?

A. In fact Derbyshire, like most local authorities, has more and more schools joining MATs (Brookfield, Newbold, Tupton Hall) or planning to join (Hasland and others) for exactly the same reasons as Highfields is looking to join EMET: increased levels of support for students and staff.



Q. Why bother consulting? Isn't this a done deal?

A. It's true that we are seriously committed to exploring this option because we think it is likely to benefit students and staff. As we have explained in our letter, if formal consultation reveals that EMET cannot meet to our satisfactions the expectations we have outlined, we will pull out. EMET have made it clear for their part that they have only ever welcomed schools into the trust who are willing members. Should it become clear that there is significant and sustained union opposition to the joining of EMET then EMET itself will withdraw their invitation to join.

Q. Does the headteacher or senior team have anything to gain if this conversion goes ahead?

A. No; not beyond the advantages with regards to enhanced CPD, progression options and working environment on offer to other staff members. The status of the headteacher will remain the same and will not assume any 'executive' role as part of this conversion.

Q. Some educationalists feel academy programme is flawed and educationally divisive: why are we supporting this strategy by considering the joining of EMET?

A. Governors have a range of political views and these have been aired in discussions. Ultimately governors agree that Highfields students deserve the increased resource and support enjoyed by schools in EMET and this underpins our formal consultation regarding this matter.

Q. What happens now?

A. Families, students and staff will be consulted in various ways on their views. Staff will be given the opportunity through a range of socially distanced and online meetings to ask questions of Rob McDonough (chief executive officer) and other key members of the trust. These surveys and meetings will take place in September and early October. Depending on when this application reaches the regional headteacher board, the formal consultation with unions etc should last around two months. At its earliest, if the outcome of consultation were positive, the school would join the MAT in January 2021, latest September 2021.