



Highfields School  
BE THE BEST YOU CAN

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## September 2026 starters



BE THE BEST YOU CAN



## It is not long since I was looking for a secondary school for my children...

I noticed that all schools used very similar language in their publicity materials. I suppose this is because we all want similar things for our students. However, I wanted to offer you a personal insight as you make this crucial decision for your child.

Firstly, I want to point out that research has shown that there is more variance in quality between *classrooms* than there is between *schools*. This means that your child's education will depend, not so much on the school they attend, but on the classrooms they spend time in. For this reason my senior team and I tour all classrooms every day on your behalf. We visit classrooms because we love education and learning. We want to support teachers, to ensure that students are working well with them. We want to sample the wonderful educational diet that children receive. Most of all I, personally, love to see students going about the business of learning about the world around them. This habit caught on with other staff and last year we completed over 900 documented learning walks into classrooms. It's great that Highfields has a strong reputation as a school, but our real interest is in the quality of the daily learning that students undertake in our lessons.

Secondly, I want to explain how we feel about 'inclusion'. Highfields has a well-deserved reputation as an 'inclusive' school. Too often this term is used to describe a place where the bar is lowered so that all students can clear it. At Highfields we believe that being an inclusive school is about sharing a belief that every single student, irrespective of the barriers they face, can achieve great things and be the best they can. Before I took up the headship at Highfields I came to see one of their musical productions. The performance featured a huge range of students including those with significant additional needs. The show was excellent on every level. It was dynamic, well-rehearsed, faultlessly executed. Expectations for ALL students were sky high. At no point did I sense the patronising 'at least they're included' approach which pervades in some settings. The pride that these students felt at being challenged and trusted was palpable and powerful. In order for these students to achieve these standards, very significant scaffolding and preparation had been put in place during the rehearsal process. THIS is inclusion in its truest sense.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that, whilst our applications for Y7 over recent years have been high, we remain a humble and grounded staff who are looking to learn from the best educational thinking available. We study emerging practice earnestly and are always searching for ways to make our practice more effective. In 2025-26 we will be focusing as much on student experience *outside* of our classrooms (clubs, sport, performance, student leadership, wider interests) as *in*, because we feel that this is crucial if students are to become well rounded, kind, considerate, healthy and happy individuals.

I hope that these thoughts have given you an insight into the kind of school we are. It makes no difference to us whether your child is an academic high-flier destined for Oxford or a less confident soul whose real potential is yet to be discovered: we relish the opportunity of working with them and with you at Highfields School.

Andrew Marsh, Headteacher



## Highfields School

Highfields School, Matlock, is a thriving and growing school of around 1,315 students. We are a co-educational, day comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 18 years. The school is situated on two sites, 1.8 miles apart, Starkholmes (years 7 - 8) and Lumsdale (years 9 - 13).

Previously maintained by Derbyshire local authority, Highfields governing board took the decision for the school to join East Midlands Education Trust (EMET) on 1 October 2021 following formal consultation.

Since 2021 EMET has sponsored around £2.5M of improvements for students and staff. EMET prides itself on promoting autonomy and so any changes made are as a result of school-based decisions. Highfields remains a school led by its headteacher and governors.

### **Our core purpose**

To be an inclusive, happy community that values every individual and inspires them to achieve their full potential.

### **Our values**

Inclusion, fairness and equality  
Respect and tolerance  
Celebration of achievement  
Personal reflection, honesty and mutual trust  
Care for our environment

## Transition to secondary school

At Highfields we know that the move from primary school to secondary school can be daunting as well as exciting. Our split site school enables a smooth and positive transition from primary to secondary education with years 7 and 8 being taught in the smaller environment of our lower school site at (Starkholmes).

Key members of staff work hard to operate a carefully planned transition process. This involves regular and extensive liaison with primary schools and a programme of activities within Highfields during year 6 and earlier. We have a great track record of ensuring a happy and positive start to secondary education.



## High quality pastoral care for every single child

Highfields is recognised for the quality of the pastoral care and guidance (both academic and emotional) which the school offers and the care of all our students is our highest priority. Our focus is the safety, happiness and achievement of all students through individual care and guidance, a stimulating learning environment, a relevant and accessible curriculum and high-quality educational experiences.

Expectations of behaviour are very high and students are required to be kind and considerate both to each other and to fellow members of the Highfields community. We will ALWAYS deal with behaviour which could undermine the educational or emotional wellbeing of students but will make every effort to use effective techniques, including restorative practice, to restore relationships when they break down.

Tutors meet with their forms on a daily basis during registration and are involved with maintaining high standards of attendance, punctuality, behaviour and uniform. Student progress is monitored carefully during each term with regular progress reports and parent consultation evenings.

Each year group also have their own dedicated year manager and head of year who can be contacted to discuss any concerns.

## A curriculum to inspire

The curriculum is everything – it is the sum of the whole student experience. It is not solely about examinations, qualifications and courses, though these play a vital role at its heart. Our curriculum is broad and bold, ambitious and rich, in order to meet our core aim of inspiring every individual to be the best they can be.



The Highfields curriculum is designed to engage and challenge all students to achieve their fabulous potential. We aim to inspire confident, considerate, knowledgeable and creative young people, who enjoy and appreciate the value of learning. We seek to develop young people who are equipped to live happy and fulfilling lives in a dynamic and rapidly changing world. Highfields students should be ready to make positive contributions as responsible citizens within our vibrant and diverse society.



Our curriculum seeks to deliver and develop:

- opportunities to learn, to lead, to create, to participate, to contribute, to be enterprising, to enable all students to find something that they enjoy are good at
- excellent experiences – inside and outside the classroom
- strong, embedded knowledge and understanding across a spectrum of areas
- high levels of literacy and numeracy – so that all students able to communicate fluently and apply key skills across all areas of learning
- confident, independent learners – who value learning and who are:
  - resilient - seeking challenge and able to deal with set-backs, seeing them as opportunities
  - responsible - able to manage their own learning, whether working alone or in a team
  - reflective - responsive to feedback, continually seeking ways to improve
  - resourceful - creative, able to approach problems in different ways
  - reasoning - able to think things through and reach well supported conclusions
- sensitive awareness of current issues, and ability to contribute to them through thoughtful discussion and well-judged action
- young people who model values of respect and tolerance, who value democracy and rule of law
- strong, sophisticated understanding of, and engagement with, equality and diversity in modern society
- an appreciation of beauty, a sense of awe and wonder, intelligent engagement with spiritual and moral discourse.

All students in years 7 to 11 follow the **national curriculum** which is divided into core and foundation subjects:

- **Core subjects** - English, mathematics and science.
- **Foundation subjects** - art, computing, dance, drama, geography, history, modern foreign languages (Spanish, French, German), music, physical education, philosophy and religious studies, technology (including design) and personal, social and health education which includes citizenship.

### Key Stage 3 curriculum (years 7, 8 and 9)

Students in years 7, 8 and 9 follow a broadly-based curriculum which includes all the core and foundation subjects. Students are assessed on a regular basis throughout the key stage.

All subjects except mathematics are taught initially in mixed ability groups in year 7 but we gradually introduce setting by ability in several other subjects. In years 7 and 8 all students study dance and have the option of further dance lessons in year 9. In year 9 students have an opportunity to study a second foreign language.

To find out more please view our KS3 curriculum guide on our website.



### Key Stage 4 curriculum (years 10 and 11)

Within the national curriculum students continue to study a broad range of subjects until the end of year 11. All students study English (language and literature), mathematics and science at GCSE level.

Additional subjects are offered within an option system and during year 9 the school helps students to make the best possible subject choices for their Key Stage 4 studies. This is done in conjunction with parents, careers advisors and subject staff.

Students have access to a broad range of GCSE subjects and a number of BTEC courses.

### Key Stage 5 curriculum (sixth form)

In the sixth form, a range of qualifications and new subjects are open to students. There is also an opportunity for sixth form students to undertake an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). Further information on the sixth form can be obtained by contacting the sixth form team or is available on our sixth form page of the school website.

### Leadership opportunities for all

Our ambassador programme gives an opportunity for all students to lead their peers in community groups dedicated to charity and volunteering, events, community and environment and school sports. Our aim is to send Highfielders into the world of work with the confidence, conviction and communication skills needed to make a difference. It is well known that it is a simply a matter of time before a Highfields graduate becomes Prime Minister!

### A wider curriculum that fosters new interests

Students are required to participate in a number of extra-curricular activities that take place either at lunch time or after school across both sites. The list of clubs is regularly updated and students are given the details during tutor time. Current clubs include choirs, bands, musical theatre, drama, Minecraft, astronomy, Dungeons and Dragons, Warhammer, chess, dance, table tennis, football and a host of others!





## Success through sport

Our passion for sport is reflected in our resources which include a high-quality all-weather pitch and renovated multi use hi-spec courts. We see this as hugely beneficial, not only for generations of Highfields students, but also for the community of Matlock and its surrounding areas.



Highfields was awarded the gold standard for the School Games Quality Mark in June 2024 and this builds on the re-award in 2022 of the coveted *Association for Physical Education Quality Mark* which we have held since 2017. The citation from Sue Wilkinson MBE celebrated our “commitment to improvement in physical education, school sport and physical activity”.

Whilst we are keenly competitive in our approach, our overarching aim is to educate ALL students in the enjoyment that sport and PE have to offer, the health benefits an active lifestyle brings, and the personal and life skills that sport and PE develop, such as leadership, teamwork and collaboration.

When students show skill and ability in any area of sport we aim to support and guide them through curriculum, extra-curricular clubs and teams to nurture that talent with the aim of future success or at least lifelong participation.



Our students take a lot of pride when representing Highfields and are committed to becoming the best they can. We are competitive and have enjoyed growing success in a range of disciplines. Over the past few years, we have developed a growing success in a range of activities within sport. Recent successes include Derbyshire Dales champions in several athletic disciplines including 100m, hurdles, shot put and long jump to name a few.

Highfields' many elite alumni include Isla Wolf who has represented East Midlands in British Championships, Ellie Belbin who represented England in international gymnastics and Lucy Newberry who represented East Midlands in Hockey and is on the England Development Career pathway.

Our students participate in a wide variety of sports and activities in educational, recreational and competitive situations. Our aim is to help guide our students to find a 'sport for life' by offering them a wide variety to choose from across a broad spectrum of pathways. We encourage them to participate in new activities that they wouldn't otherwise get the opportunity to try.



## Success through the performing arts

In addition to the range of foundation subjects at Key Stage 3 prescribed by the national curriculum, which includes music, students at Highfields also have one period per week of drama in years 7, 8 and 9. This encourages personal self-confidence, creativity and the capacity to work co-operatively to produce high quality presentations, evaluating their own and others' work. Dance is also an important subject within the curriculum, with lessons for all students in years 7 and 8, and a high take-up as an option in year 9. In music there is a great deal of use of technology in the delivery of the subject, using the most up-to-date software packages to reinforce core skills and provide scope for composition and recording using Highfields' purpose-built recording studio and *Wildgoose Media Suite*.

At Key Stage 4 music, dance and drama recruit strongly to optional courses, and this provides a firm foundation for advanced level study where Highfields offers courses in music, music technology, dance and drama and theatre studies. A modern drama studio with sprung floor and well-equipped recording studio at Lumsdale offer students good facilities to refine their skills. Starkholmes site also has an excellent drama/dance space with a sprung floor.

Teaching in all the arts subjects is undertaken by well-qualified specialists, supported by visiting professionals who deliver workshops and master classes. Peripatetic staff offer musical tuition covering a wide range of instruments, and the school has a strong tradition in folk music as well as offering jazz band, rock bands, woodwind groups and the school orchestra. There are numerous performance opportunities during the year including school concerts, dance evenings, junior showcase events, school play and musical. Students are also taken to see arts events, and benefit from visiting artists performing at the school.





## Admissions

Governors review periodically the number of places that will be made available, based upon accommodation and staffing resources. Our pupil admission number is currently 210 but we have accepted many more students in recent years. Under current legislation on school admissions, there is no automatic right to a place at a particular school. Admission to Highfields therefore depends on parents/carers showing the school as their preference, on the form received via primary schools. Children will then be allocated a place at Highfields in the following order of priority:

1. Looked-after children.
2. Children living in the normal area served by the school at the time of application and admission (including those living in another local education authority's area). For a definition of "living in the normal area" see note below.
3. Children not living in the normal area served by the school but who have brothers or sisters attending the school at the time of their admission.
4. Other children whose parents/carers have requested a place.

Where, in the case of 3 or 4 above, choices have to be made between children satisfying the same criteria, those children living nearest to the school (measured by the nearest available route) will be given preference.

Students who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) who have learning difficulties and/or a physical or sensory impairment and whose special educational needs can best be met in the school will be given priority where so determined by the Local Authority in consultation with the governing board, and where the school is named on their EHCP.

If parents/cares are unsuccessful in applying for a place, appeal can be made to an independent committee (full details are available on the school website).

**Note:** "Living in the normal area", in (2) above is defined as the child having full-time residence in a property which is the child's only or main residence. Documentary evidence including proof of actual permanent residency at the property concerned may be required. Please note that where the authority has reasonable grounds for believing the home address is not the child's only or main residence it reserves the right to carry out investigations which may include visits to the property.

If you have any questions you can contact us on the main school number or via email on [admissions@highfields.derbyshire.sch.uk](mailto:admissions@highfields.derbyshire.sch.uk)

Admissions into Y7 at Highfields School is co-ordinated through Derbyshire County Council. Full details of how to apply for a place can be found on the council website:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/school-places/secondary-admissions/secondary-school-admissions.aspx>



## East Midlands Education Trust (EMET)

Highfields School's governing board decided to join the EMET family of schools in October 2021 and since this time the benefits we have seen include the following:



- The much sought-after investment in our facilities and resources is well under way with several major projects including the upgrading of student bases, enhancements to site security and the refurbishment of some toilets, science facilities and sports pitches. We see this as the beginning of a journey to ensure that Highfields students live and learn in the very best school environment we can provide. Since 2020 Highfields has seen some £2.5M invested, much of which is from EMET.
- Staff are collaborating with other high performing schools within our trust including the prestigious West Bridgford School.
- Leaders within the secondary schools collaborate closely and this means that little time is wasted grappling with problems alone. We face challenges as a collective and seek solutions together. A team of consultants within the trust are allocated to schools and provide a high level of support when and where it is needed.

## Getting your child to Highfields

You can contact the Admissions and Transport team via email at [admissions.transport@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:admissions.transport@derbyshire.gov.uk) or by telephoning 01629 537479.

A number of school buses and service buses serve Highfields School. Current full timetables are available on our website. They are subject to change by Derbyshire County Council or the operator.

### School Bus Coverage:

Linburg operate the 254 and the 472 covering Rowsley and Darley Dale.

Slacks operate the following:

440 covering Matlock Bath, Cromford, Whatstandwell, Crich and South Wingfield.

453 covering Farley, Two Dlaes, Darley Dale, Hackney and Laburnam PH.

463 covering Tansley, Lea Moor, Lea and Holloway.

Stagecoach operate the 169 and 470 covering Darley Dale, Wensley, Winster and Elton.



### Public Bus Coverage

Stagecoach operate the following:

63 covering Wingerworth, Clay Cross, Littlemoor, Woolley Moor, Milltown, Ashover and Kelstedge.

141 AM Only covering Tansley, Lea, Holloway, Crich, Heage, Bull Bridge, Ripley, Swanwick and Alfreton.

143 covering Wessington, South Wingfield and Crich AM then Tansley, Crich, Wessington, Woth Wingfield, Oakerthorpe and Alfreton PM.

Andrew's of Tideswell operates the 172 covering Darley Dale, Wensley, Winster, Elton, Birchover, Stanton in the Peak, Youlgreave, Middleton and Bakewell.

Please visit our website ([www.highfields.derbyshire.sch.uk](http://www.highfields.derbyshire.sch.uk)) to find out more about our school. In addition to our weekly podcasts, the school website holds a wealth of information for parents/carers and students, in particular we have a dedicated admissions page where you will find key information and answers to a number of questions.

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