

A Schools' Educational Strategy for the Methodist Church

Contact Name and details	The Revd Dr Roger L Walton Chair, Methodist Schools Committee
Action Required	For discussion

The draft Schools' Educational Strategy is currently out for consultation, and is brought to the Council to enable it to contribute to that consultation process. A focus group will consider it in detail and bring its comments to the full Council meeting.

Transforming Lives

A Schools' Educational Strategy for the Methodist Church

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Building on the work of the Education Commission, this report outlines a strategy for the Methodist Church for the next 10 years, encouraging us to grow our presence and extend our influence in children's education as an expression of the gospel.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Methodism has been involved in establishing and running schools since the 1740s. During the 19th century, significant numbers of primary schools were created by local Methodist Churches; and several larger (originally boarding) schools were founded. In total almost 1,000 schools were set up in the name of Methodism. During this period, the Church worked with the climate of establishing schooling for all and built a reputation for good education within a 'free church' ethos. It also founded two teacher-training colleges and contributed considerably to the teaching profession, in which many Methodists found a vocation.
- 2.2. During the 20th century, with the establishment of State-provided education, crystallised in the 1944 Education Act, Methodism transferred most of its schools to the State. Those that remained were a number of primary schools relating in some way to the Local Authority and a few independent schools. Methodism continued to contribute to education at all levels and in particular encouraged men and women to teach within the state system. Alongside this, churches and circuits engaged with schools in their communities in a variety of ways seeking to enhance the life of the school and to share something of the gospel.
- 2.3. The 21st Century has seen very radical change in the way schools are set up and run. In particular, the diminishing role of Local Authorities and the growth of Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts, recognised in the 2012 Education Commission Report, have continued. We now find ourselves in a very different landscape from previous centuries and our approach needs to take account of the challenges and opportunities facing school education today and act accordingly.

3. The Context

- 3.1. The context for schools in the UK continues to be challenging. The 'landscape' continues to evolve: by January 2019, the DfE annual census recorded that 32% of primary schools and 75% of secondary schools had converted to academies. Momentum for this move has come from a diminishing capacity of many Local Authorities to support their schools. A model which accesses appropriate expertise for particular needs and projects is emerging in preference to the pattern of retained local staff.

- 3.2. Schools of religious character make up about one third of all maintained schools and some 37% of maintained primary schools. These schools continue to make a distinctive contribution to the variety of educational settings which include voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools as well as schools which retain a faith ethos, although most schools do not have a religious affiliation and the National Secular Society and Humanist movement are gaining more prominence. The daily act of collective worship is still a requirement of all schools and Religious Education continues to be part of the National Curriculum for all schools. Both are positive features in schools of religious character, while in non-faith schools the daily act of worship has often become a weekly focus on the school's values, and the teaching of Religious Education may not be seen as a priority. Certainly, it is more difficult than it used to be to find teachers with a background in RE.
- 3.3. A changing inspection regime characterised by high levels of accountability with a focus on specific outcomes and data is set against curriculum specifications that are frequently revised to respond to political inclinations. Demographic waves mean that there are now more children than ever in secondary schools, and whilst overall funding has increased, schools are finding it difficult to manage with a real term reduction in per pupil funding, creating a sense of 'having to do more with less'. Teacher training institutions regularly fall short of recruitment targets, and retention of teachers is not as strong as it was, meaning that it is more difficult to attract good teachers to schools and leadership roles are often very difficult to fill.
- 3.4. Societal demands of what schools should cover have also grown, with concern for safeguarding and preventing radicalism as well as mental health and wellbeing. Continuing rapid developments in technology, and expectations of blended learning, present both challenges and opportunities for educational settings as schools seek to understand how to use exciting ways to engage learning whilst helping children to stay safe in a virtual world where misrepresentation and cyberbullying are present. Expectations from parents are high with what feels like a growing culture of complaint and grievance and likelihood of challenging the authority once protected by expertise.
- 3.5. In spite of this background, schools are making a positive contribution to encouraging tolerance and diversity and dealing with racism, homophobia and the changing nature of family units. Requirements for Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) were updated in 2020. The revised Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) framework guides Methodist schools to live out a Christian vision and deal with contradictory convictions. The importance of 'pupil voice' has grown in schools with a focus on causes such as sustainable living.

4. Theology

- 4.1. Previous Conference statements and reports have set out Methodism's commitment to education in theological terms. Below are reminders of the theological bases for our engagement with schools.
- 4.2. **Every human being made in the image of God.** The Education Commission affirmed the uniqueness of each person, loved by God and full of potential.

'We are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-7) and called to know God, to find full life in Jesus (John 10:10) and be part of God's mission (Matthew 28:19-20). As

individuals we have self-awareness, autonomy and possess certain rights and duties which through education can enable us to gain wisdom and insight, a sense of what is right and just and fair and a direction we can follow through our lives (Proverbs 1:3-4). Through the power of God's transforming love, instead of conforming to society, we are called as Jesus's disciples to seek in this world what is good and acceptable and perfect to God (Romans 12:2). This has historically led Methodism to be involved in education as a means of providing a practical social expression of our convictions about discipleship and the nature of the human society.' #7.1

For Methodists, the notion of **Christian Perfection** urges us to use all means of grace to grow to the fullness of our calling in Christ. In this process, education has a key part. It allows us to understand our failings and potential; appreciate the freedom and responsibility that comes from God; and to grasp the importance of a life dedicated to serving God and other people. Wesley sought to embody this in his school in Kingswood as well as in his societies. Whilst the purpose of our schools is not specifically to produce Christians (and we recognise the value of staff and children of other faiths, and none, in our schools) we do expect our schools will give pupils a basic exposure to Christian faith, help to develop a robust religious literacy, and to engage with ways of being and learning that contribute to each person reaching their full potential in God.

- 4.3. **Creation endowed with divine wisdom and purpose.** The 1999 Report, *The Essence of Education*, points to the creation as made by a loving God with the 'astonishing promise that a fellowship of mutual love will be established between itself and its creator'. The creation in and through Jesus Christ is imbued with the presence and purpose of God and through the spirit of God dwelling within all God has made, creation is guided and guarded on its journey towards its intentional fulfilment. (#2.1) Made in the image and likeness of God, all human beings are called to participate in the transforming work of God and to be themselves transfigured within this divine purpose to experience abundant life. The Church, as a witness to all humankind, is called to be a school of discipleship, fostering the conditions in which all things are redeemed in the light of God's gracious gospel of Love. Schools and other educational institutions can play a part in this purpose by exploring what it means to be human; by investigating truth in all forms and through all means; and by allowing learners to consider what it might mean to develop spiritual life.
- 4.4. Creation's divine purpose, links to another theology of education, namely **God as Teacher**. Clement of Alexandria named one of his three major writings 'The Paedagogus'. The word means tutor or teacher but was also the name given to those slaves or other persons of the household who accompanied children to and from school. The work is the middle part of what appears to be a curriculum of Christian education¹, but what is of significance is that Clement identifies God as the Paedagogus. His conviction is that God is the teacher or, perhaps more accurately, the one who accompanies the learner in his or her journey of growth to the fulfilment of their human and spiritual calling. The underlying theology implicit in Clement's writing embraces both a view of God (a proper theology) and of human beings (an anthropology) which is fruitful 1800 years later. Within an understanding of the universe as expanding and human beings as the product of evolution, learning takes on a different meaning. Learning is deeply embedded in the evolutionary process, which in turn arises out of an evolving universe and thus is central to any contemporary understanding of life. We are not the only animals who learn, but we are, as far as we can tell, the most adapt

¹ *Exhortation to the Greeks* and *Miscellanies* are the other two.

species at learning and learning has been central to the success of humans in populating the earth (and perhaps, in the future, populating space). It would appear, consistent with Clement's view, that learning is essential to us, in the sense of 'at the core of our being', within our DNA, and that God not only intends this as part of the order of creation but also accompanies us and actively works with us in our learning.

- 4.5. **Mission.** Christians are commissioned, sent (John 20.21) and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses (Acts 1.8); to 'proclaim the gospel in all the world' (Mark 16.15); and 'to make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28.19). 'One can hardly imagine a Christian missionary strategy that does not involve a stress upon education'. So says the 2002 Conference report, *School with a Religious Character* (#16). It is certainly true that thousands, perhaps millions of schools across the world were established by Christian churches alongside hospitals and churches to express concern for the whole person and as a witness to the call to service implicit in the gospel. Sometimes building and running a school has enabled the Church to establish a base for its worship, witness and service. Sometimes, in situations where Christianity has met with suspicion or hostility, denominational schools by their commitment to nurturing the best from its pupils of whatever faith and background, have been the single most effective witness to the gospel in that location. In our context, sponsoring schools, especially in new areas of housing and/or challenging locations, is a way of Methodism having both a presence and bearing witness. Practically, a school may provide a meeting and worship space for a Christian community and thus be a springboard for other forms of mission in the area. But even where there are no other forms or patterns of witness, a school may itself be an expression of the gospel in its way of being and learning, exposing children to the good news of Jesus Christ, which may in turn contribute well beyond its walls. Testimony from such figures as Nelson Mandela and Kofi Annan indicate the significance of Methodist schools in shaping not only individuals but also the wider world.
- 4.6. **Arminian theology** does not, of itself, provide a theological rationale for involvement in schools but it does shape the nature of how we should go about the business of setting up and running an educational establishment. The ethos we bring to our work is a Wesleyan form of Arminianism, which stressed both inclusion and participation. For the Wesleys, and contrary to the prevailing theology of the 18th century, no one was predestined to be saved or lost. Rather, God's love is for all, Christ's death was for all, and all are invited to the salvation feast. It is not difficult to carry that conviction into an approach to schooling. As the Education Commission (2012) puts it: "salvation for all" naturally leads to "education for all" as everyone matters to God and therefore none should be deprived of the opportunity to develop to their full potential'. Arminian inclusion, as it was worked out by the John Wesley, went further, intentionally communicating the good news with those often marginalised or excluded, so that all might discover that they were loved by God and that their persons and talents were significance to God and in God's mission. This too needs to inform our approach.
- 4.7. Alongside inclusion, Wesleyan Arminianism places a strong emphasis on participation, which involved the exercise of human will. It is not surprising that the Wesleys were accused of being (semi) Pelagian because they expected believers to choose to travel the Christian journey, doing good wherever and whenever they could. This practical expression of holiness (and means to holiness) moved the theology of the period from passive reception of grace to active participation in grace. Participation is a key plank in our understanding of education. Good education requires active involvement, and good educators do not impose

understandings on their pupils but rather evoke curiosity and nurture the hunger for wisdom, so the natural desire for learning grows into a life-long passion.

- 4.8. It is surprising that the notion of **prevenient grace** is not emphasised in any of the reports to Conference noted above, for this key emphasis of Methodist theology supplies Christians with the confidence to enter any and all spheres of life. God's grace, prior to any action on our part, means we can engage with institutions, communities and individuals believing that what we bring will connect with and build on what has already been given in divine love. Moreover, it allows us to be open, expectant recipients of the grace that will meet us. Prevenient grace can be seen in the admissions policies of Methodist schools, which are open to people of all faiths and none, and in the care with which we attend to each individual, seeking their fulfilment and flourishing.

Whilst the preceding paragraphs do not constitute a systematic theology of Education, they provide a clear theological grounding, which gives shape to our involvement in schools. We do not believe that further theological work is needed to build an educational strategy for schools.

Strategy

The strategy has two major parts to it: 1) a continued engagement of churches and circuits with schools of all types; 2) a specific strategy for Methodist Schools.

5. Strategy Part 1: Engagement with local schools

- 5.1. It is impossible to set out all the work done by Methodist churches, ministers, youth and children's workers, and volunteers in neighbourhood schools. There is a vast army of Methodist people who engage tirelessly, with great creativity and selfless service in their local schools.
- 5.2. Many go into schools to lead or help with school assemblies, others to support RE as guest speakers or panel members and some to participate in Sixth Form or GCSE conferences. Some churches have provided chaplaincy teams for schools. Across the country, Methodists choose to be school governors, seeing that as a good place for Christians to be involved. Then there are those who hear reading, provide expertise or help with gardening clubs, art projects and accompany classes on school trips. One church, with an eye to supporting staff, takes a cake into the staff room each Friday.
- 5.3. *Open the Book* is to be found in lots of primary schools, with volunteers telling Bible stories in imaginative ways. Godly Play is also widely used and there are many locally developed programmes for festivals, such as *The Hope Journey*, in Ellesmere Port and the *Rewind* in Yorkshire and elsewhere.
- 5.4. As well as going *into* schools, churches often act as hosts for a variety of school visitors. Some churches have created a Godly Play Room for classes from local schools to visit, with volunteers trained to run sessions. Churches have discovered that they often have the right space for pupils' A Level Arts exhibitions. Others host school class visits to explore architecture and church design, which provide a wonderful opportunity to share the meaning of Christian symbols, stain glass windows and historical artefacts, as well as giving people an experience of a worship space (sometimes for the first time).

- 5.5. Some of the most creative work happens in partnerships between churches and schools. In one school, the local Methodists help facilitate a 'sleep out under the stars' night for Year 6 pupils in the local primary school. This involves collecting sleeping bags for children who do not have them and cooking the morning after breakfast. Another church works with a school towards a crib festival. Children receive worksheet to take home about the Nativity and children are asked to make cribs. These are all displayed at the local church and there are prizes for the best cribs.
- 5.6. In addition to this are those Methodists employed in schools who find their vocation in education. This includes teachers and teaching assistants but also secretaries, administrators, cooks, caretakers, cleaning and other support staff. Many are fulfilled in these roles, believing they are helping the school do its work and children to flourish.
- 5.7. Following the Education Commission, some Districts have successfully appointed District Education Officers or Committees to support those in education and to engage in issues facing schools and other educational establishments. Running local training days for those who lead worship in schools and holding a special commissioning service on Education Sunday for those involved in schools not only encourages them but it is also an opportunity to invite local school heads and governors to share in the celebration. We believe more could be done by District, and perhaps Circuit, Education Officers, with greater support.
- 5.8. Actions for Methodists to engage wherever possible with schools in their locality:
- a. The Conference affirms all those who work in schools and those who voluntarily give time and talents to support education.
 - b. Circuits are encouraged to undertake a regular audit of their schools' work in their area to review how they are engaging with the schools as part of their mission.
 - c. Districts are encouraged to appoint District Education Officers, if not in place, and to plan appropriate events for those who go into schools to lead worship or communicate the Christian story. This to be supported by the Learning Network, the Youth and Children section of the Connexional team and the Methodist Schools Network², under the direction of the Connexional Education Officer.
 - d. Circuits and Districts are urged to be alert to the possibility and, where appropriate, be active in sponsoring Methodist schools in their area, with the support of the Methodist Schools Network.
 - e. Churches to encourage teaching as a vocation and to support its people to explore teacher as a valued area of Christian ministry.
 - f. Churches to encourage the recruitment of Governors for schools in their communities

² The Methodist Schools Network is a term which refers to all schools, whether state or independent, which carry the Methodist name and the Trusts that support them.

6. Strategy Part 2: A Methodist Schools Strategy

The strategy for Methodist schools can be summarised in a strapline:

Growing schools, offering excellent education with a confident Methodist ethos, working together, and prioritising areas of need.

This breaks neatly in into five sections.

Growing Schools

- 6.1 Methodist schools have a small but significant place in the school system of England. We currently have 88 schools, of which 66 are maintained and 22 are independent schools. Twenty-six schools are in the North West of England, but we have schools in 40 different Local Authorities scattered across the country. Through these schools we are in touch with 25,000 children and a community of 100,000 people each school day. These schools are recognised as successful through a variety of measures including Ofsted and SIAMS, demonstrating performance higher than those seen nationally in all schools. This strength is seen through their organisational culture demonstrated in an ethos that continually strives to serve the needs of the pupils, staff, parents and the wider community.
- 6.2 The current landscape of schools' education combined with a highly regarded reputation for quality education in Methodist Schools suggest that this is the time to extend our presence in schools' education to reach more children, to benefit more lives. This is in continuity with the Methodist Conference resolutions of 2012, which, having received the report of the Education Commission, affirmed "its commitment to the provision of schools of a religious character" and aspired "to increase the number of Methodist schools". There are good reasons for such growth.
- Believing in the importance of education, we will want to encourage high educational standards, and, where possible, to share in its provision, believing that we have something distinctive to offer. Where there are opportunities to increase this provision, Methodism should take them.
 - There are characteristics of a Methodist school we would like to see as a feature of all schools. Wesley established Kingswood School as a model school, which, in many ways, he hoped would challenge the educational practices of his time. Methodists will continue to see the establishing of schools as an important strand of their mission to society as a whole, as well as for the individuals who attend them.
 - The provision of even a comparatively small number of schools, enables the Methodist Church to participate in the national debate about education in a way that other Free Churches do not. A larger number of schools would increase our right to expect 'a place at the table'.
 - As suggested above, schools, especially in new areas of housing and/or challenging locations, are a way of Methodism having both a presence and a witness. Practically, they may provide a meeting and worship space for a Christian community and thus be a springboard for other forms of mission in the area.
- 6.3 Of course, growth is not just the provision of more schools. It means extending the size and influence of good schools and connecting schools for working together for school

improvement, efficiency and effectiveness. It is also about developing the quality of all staff, governors, school leaders, through support and research and deeper engagement with church communities. That is why the proposal here is not to expand rapidly but at an appropriate pace ensuring that the infrastructure is securely in place to support quality. The Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST), Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST) and the Epworth Education Trust (EET) established by the Methodist Church, each have a part to play in the growth of our schools.

- 6.4 The Wesley Trust was established in 2017 as a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to support any schools that wished to transfer to academy status. In 2020, it merged with Acorn Trust to establish the Epworth Education Trust (EET). There are now five schools in the Trust with plans for another school to join in December 2020. The EET has been recognised by the Department for Education (DFE) as a place for vulnerable schools to be supported and has been granted sponsorship capacity for primary, secondary and special schools. The Trust aims to grow at an appropriate pace with an initial focus in the NW of England, where the current schools are. We aim to grow by at least five schools in the next 5 years.
- 6.5 MAST continues to support all schools in the state sector which reference Methodism in their trust deed, either as solely Methodist or shared, ecumenical schools. This includes schools which have become academies with various local trusts, and voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools. MAST fulfils the responsibilities of the Methodist Council under S.O. 342 with regard to the schools' standards and distinctive Methodist ethos. Grants from Southlands Methodist Trust and Westminster College Oxford Trust help to finance a staffing infrastructure so that schools can be supported within a group context. MAST works with the Church of England in the development and implementation of the SIAMS, which helps to ensure the character of the group.
- 6.6 MIST has expanded its number of schools over the last few years, works closely with Associated and Affiliated independent schools and with MAST and EET. MIST has also actively sought opportunities to work with other schools of Methodist foundation not only in the UK but also overseas.
- 6.7 Our schools currently have 25,000 children enrolled, which means we have contact with 100,000 people each school day in one form or another. Our ambition is to extend this number to enable more children to benefit from a distinctive Methodist educational provision. Over the next 10 years, we aim to extend our influence by 25%.
- 6.8 Actions for maintaining and extending our engagement with schools:
- a. The EET aspires to expand its number of schools through adoption, merger, and sponsoring new schools.
 - b. As the EET adds more schools, these will add to the number of schools engaged with MAST.
 - c. MIST will seek to acquire (and be attractive to) schools that add financial strength and facilitate expansion of the MIST footprint in the UK and overseas.
 - d. MAST and MIST will also continue to be open to affiliation and partnership with other schools.
 - e. Churches and circuits to seek creative partnerships with any Methodist school within their circuit, or, if already established, to continue to develop this partnership.
 - f. Existing schools are encouraged to play a role in bringing new schools to the Methodist Schools Network.

- g. The Connexional Property Office to include in its strategy the possibility of schools in Connexional churches and buildings.

Offering excellent education

- 6.9 Excellence in education is considerably more than high academic achievement. It means firstly, an all-round education for all human flourishing. As the *Essence of Education* puts it

‘Academic learning is important; it is not possible to imagine a good education system which scorns high standards and sound scholarship. Such learning must not be undervalued; but education is much more than this: it can never be exclusively concerned with the life of the intellect which feeds on academic learning. It is also concerned with the effective domain - the refinement of the emotions through art, music, literature, dance and drama. And it must affirm the practical and creative faculties which find outlets through making things and the application of knowledge to design and technology.’
(#3.12)

In addition, excellence in education includes recognising and addressing the individual needs of all children, not only those who require specific education support but also those who are particularly gifted. Excellence in education also entails enabling a growth in empathy, respect for diversity, ability to challenge injustice, the enjoyment of sport and outdoor education, creativity and the discovery and development of the spiritual dimension to human beings.

- 6.10 Secondly, excellence in education means young people are equipped to tackle a changing world and to change the world. Change is always on the agenda and often in ways that we cannot predict or anticipate. Technological advances, global pandemics and climate change require agility and adaptability in schools to respond to the ever-shifting world, this must be matched by an education that enables young people to navigate practical, ethical and moral dimensions of the emerging world. More than that, it must nurture in people the skills and confidence to play a part in the creation of a better, fairer, more just world.
- 6.11 Finally, it is important to commit to excellence in developing school leaders, governors, volunteers, teaching and support staff and all connected to the school. The benchmarks of this excellence are a deep commitment to improvement, a healthy school community, positive relationships with partners and local community. In other words, an excellent environment for learning and achievement, rooted in our Methodist ethos.
- 6.12 Actions for developing and maintaining excellent education
- Methodist Schools will continue to develop improvement plans designed to ensure best possible education reflective of intake, meeting needs and ambitious targets.
 - The Methodist Schools Network will engage in an ongoing critical conversation on ‘What does excellent look like?’
 - Resources in all three Trusts will be geared to monitoring, strengthening and supporting performance and outcomes. Methodist schools will also celebrate achievements believing that success breeds success; innovation generates innovation; positive PR can spark higher aspiration.
 - The Methodist Schools Committee (MSC) will monitor that the Trusts are fulfilling their responsibilities and seek to nurture a climate of belonging and partnership with the wider Church
 - More support for governors in all our schools will be provided.

With a confident Methodist Ethos

- 6.13 If we are to be active in sponsoring schools, our schools must carry a distinctive Methodist ethos, regardless of their status, as maintained, independent or academy.
- 6.14 For this purpose, an Ethos Development Group (EDG) was established in 2017. The EDG works with all three Trusts to nourish, strengthen and resource Methodist ethos throughout all Methodist schools, reporting regularly to the MSC. It has already facilitated conversation on worship, chaplaincy, RE and leadership. Through SIAMS³ and SERVE⁴, all schools articulate and evaluate their ethos development in theological, as well as values terms.
- 6.15 Currently every school associated with the Methodist Schools Network works to a mission statement.
- 6.16 Mission Statement:

The Methodist Church is engaged in education as part of its Christian mission in the world. Its schools will seek to extend the Methodist ethos and character and contribute to diversity in education.

The schools aim:

- *to be caring Christian family communities committed to the development of the full potential of each individual, having regard for their personal attributes in addition to their academic aspirations;*
 - *to maintain high educational standards in all their academic, cultural and sporting activities, stimulating excitement in learning and requiring discipline in study whatever the ability of the child;*
 - *to work with and in the communities they serve;*
 - *to worship as Christians in the Methodist tradition; to uphold Christian values in practice as well as in theory and to make religious education a strong feature of the curriculum, whilst welcoming members of other faiths (and none) in a spirit of openness and tolerance;*
 - *to encourage pupils in a critical examination of the standards and values current in society and to discover and develop a personal faith to guide them throughout their lives.*
- 6.17 Research has shown that RE has been under threat, undervalued and under resourced in national education policies over many years, leading to a shortage of qualified teachers. In an age when religious literacy has never been more important for heritage, cultural and multi-faith reasons, Methodist schools are committed to RE teaching and aim to be beacon institutions, outstanding in the RE provision and in the support of specialist staff development.

³ SIAMS stands for the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools

⁴ MIST schools are not subject to SIAMS but MIST is developing a framework, SERVE, as a tool to help schools evaluate their spiritual life and impact. SERVE is acronym for Spirituality, Ethos, Relationships and Values Evaluation. Although the work of this working party has been paused by Covid-19, it will get going again in early 2021 and has a draft self-evaluation framework ready for schools to pilot. The framework draws heavily on SIAMS (and the Methodist Appendix). The development of governance support materials for this process is also happening, leaning heavily on established guidance from SIAMS.

- 6.18 Actions for developing and maintaining a confident Methodist ethos:
- a. The EDG will give strategic support to the development of a confident Methodist ethos for the Trusts and schools.
 - b. The Trusts will use SIAMS and SERVE to further develop the Methodist ethos in all schools.
 - c. Schools and local circuits will engage with each other in exploring a Methodist ethos, what it means and how it impacts life in the local community.
 - d. MIST will commission research on the impact of values/ethos in our schools on wellbeing.
 - e. The Trusts will work together to develop training in Methodist understanding for Chaplains, District School Officers and Methodist School Governors.
 - f. The Trusts will work together with Methodist founded Teacher Training institutions, the Connexion and alongside ecumenical colleagues to promote teaching as a Christian vocation.
 - g. All Methodist schools to cultivate excellence in RE and share resources developed both locally and centrally.

Working Together

- 6.19 Following the recommendations of the Education Commission (2012), close working and mutual support has developed between the Independent schools and those within the state system. This is an exciting model in our current landscape, which enables the sharing of resources, staff development and innovation. The intention is to continue to extend this partnership and further develop the strategic alignment of the Trusts. We are ambitious to grow this nationally wherever we have a Methodist school in the region.
- 6.20 A key part of the strategy is to continue to network schools for mutual support, resource sharing and close working together.
- 6.21 Also important is the schools working in partnership with the local circuits and church. This requires churches and circuits to embrace the schools as part of their mission and entails schools in identifying what they can contribute to the Methodist community.
- 6.22 In recent years, opportunities for working together with new partners on the international scene have arisen. The establishment of Kent College Dubai came about as part of a plan to increase access; a management fee and a share of revenue from the enterprise is used in bursary provision in Canterbury. A similar school is planned in Cairo, where the needs of all the Coptic Christians has been a factor in deciding on the enterprise; and another Methodist school has been welcomed by the Methodist Church in Hong Kong. Several MIST schools have partnerships with Methodist Schools overseas; the Trusts and the schools are developing closer association with the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities (IAMSCU)⁵. Across the Methodist Schools network there are examples of working with schools that serve challenging areas of the world and new opportunities are being explored, through the Global Relationships office and Edukid. These

⁵ Methodist Schools in collaboration with IAMSCU plans to host an international conference in the UK in 2023. This event will bring together school leaders and governors from schools with a Methodist foundation in the UK and all over the world. It is hoped to extend an invitation to Methodists engaged with community schools too. The Conference will both celebrate Methodist Education and provide a Call to Action for the future.

are far from colonial enterprises. They represent Methodists in mutual partnership working now on a world map to provide the best education possible.

- 6.23 As the mission statement indicates, a key part of the schools' mission is to work with and in the communities they serve. This takes many forms. e.g. working closely with food banks by collecting food for them and utilising them for families in need, supporting local 'clean-up' events in the locality by litter picking or the sharing of facilities by the independent schools with local schools, churches and community groups
- 6.24 Methodist schools will continue to work ecumenically wherever possible.
- 6.25 Actions to strengthen working together:
- a. Trusts to encourage their schools to engage more frequently/deeply with local Circuits and Districts e.g. in hosting synod, leading circuit devotions, hosting special services, concerts and debates; sharing school facilities for church/youth group camps; schools making use of Church spaces and, for example, using the Methodist Art Collection.
 - b. MIST schools to build on their strong commitment to local partnerships and the use of their facilities by local community groups.
 - c. The Methodist Schools Network to continue to work together in more and more areas, reporting to the MSC on new opportunities and actions.
 - d. A strengthening of the partnership between Methodist Schools Network and Southlands College (University of Roehampton) and Westminster Institute of Education (Oxford Brookes University):
 - to encourage young people to explore teaching as a vocation, and to pursue those vocations in Methodist-related HE contexts;
 - to explore new and meaningful ways of collaborating across the primary, secondary and higher education sectors for their mutual flourishing;
 - to pursue appropriate research and development.
 - e. The Methodist Schools Network is committed to bring practitioners, governors, Trustees together to develop positive relationships, share good practice, learn from each other's successes and mistakes through regular organisation of group-wide and inter-group events/conferences etc. 2023 International Conference in UK to celebrate Methodist Education and Call to Action for the future.
 - f. The Trusts and the Schools to work with the Methodist Global Relationships office.

Prioritising areas of need

- 6.26 Methodism cherishes its commitment to go to those 'who needs us most'. Whilst Wesley's text has the word 'want' rather than 'need', we have recognised that those who most in want are often those in most need and our social action has carried a concern for the deprived and vulnerable. Currently Methodist schools span the range of children from those with some privilege to those with significant challenges. Methodism should remain committed to serve all children but where choices are to be made, its Trusts prioritise the needy.
- 6.27 Need takes many forms. Methodist schools are committed to supporting children with **Special Educational Need**. All our schools, independent and state funded, have good track- records in providing significant support to pupils with a range of learning needs/disabilities e.g. visually impaired, aurally impaired, dyslexic, dyscalculic, children on the autistic spectrum and with ADHD etc. We ensure pupils who need them have special access

arrangements for public examinations and provide support for children for whom English is not their first language. The EET aims to add special schools to its portfolio both to support the specialist work of such schools and to share the expertise across all its establishments.

- 6.28 **Emotional needs** are equally important. All schools witness the impact of family breakdown, serious illness, bereavement, peer pressure; they affect rich and poor alike. Indeed, there are some types of emotional need that can be seen more in so-called “privileged” families than those with fewer material possessions. Methodist schools are primarily pastoral communities committed to care and compassion. As witnessed in the recent Covid-19 Pandemic, they act as an extended family, recognising and tending to the emotionally vulnerable.
- 6.29 **Spiritual needs** are a key concern of faith schools. Those deprived of opportunities to hear the gospel are invited into its grace; those with no language to articulate their spiritual experiences are given words, images and music; those with many material advantages but ignorant of the good news are to receive its gift and to engage with its challenge. From the New Testament onwards the rich as well as poor have been called to enter the kingdom and to create a new world of justice and peace. Young people in Methodist schools are often awakened to a new perspective of the world and new possibilities of service.
- 6.30 **Material and social challenges** remain central to our broad understanding and all Methodist schools seek to address these needs in a variety of ways.
- 6.31 MIST schools are committed to extending their means tested bursary provision to 10% of income, so that some without the means will be awarded part or full bursaries. MIST administers a small bursary fund to enable Methodist families to access their schools. It is hoped that, in due course, thought can be given to how this can be extended. In addition, MIST schools have given free places to unaccompanied minors who have come to Britain seeking asylum and vulnerable children placed on the recommendation of the Local Authority and supported by children’s charities.
- 6.32 Many of our primary schools serve areas of great social need and serve to address these needs through both the curriculum and the pastoral care they offer. For example, we have a number of schools within Wigan Local Authority, which has a domestic violence rate significantly higher than the National Average; these schools address these needs through teaching what healthy relationships look like in PHSE lessons. Alongside this, they have offered practical care for families fleeing domestic violence including sourcing furniture for them.
- 6.33 In terms of sponsoring schools, the Church is not always able to openly choose which schools it will take on. Methodism is committed to bid for the opportunity to provide schools in deprived areas and will continue to pursue this aim. However, the situation is often one where we may be offered certain schools and need to decide whether these fit with our ethos and whether we can adequately resource and support the (new) school. This depends on the close presence of other Methodist schools, the support of the local circuit and several other factors. Where presented with a choice of options we will choose to go to those who are in most need.
- 6.34 Actions to prioritise areas of need:
- a. Wherever possible to work in areas of challenge and when opening a new school to keep in view those who need us most.

- b. MIST's 2020-25 plan has an ambitious target to increase access to means-tested bursary provision to 10% of fee income; MIST schools in many places have already planned for their own fund-raising campaigns or have identified opportunities for overseas schools to generate income for the award of more bursaries.
- c. Programmes will be enhanced, developed, celebrated and thus trigger aspiration to make people courageous advocates and agents of change.
- d. To extend the Methodist Schools Network to include special educational needs schools.

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

Appendices

- A. Membership of the Methodist schools Committee
- B. Summary of Actions
- C. Article from the Methodist Recorder describing the actions of Methodist Schools during lockdown.
- D. List of Methodist Schools and map
- E. IAMSCU map of schools/college of Methodist foundation around the world.

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

Appendix A

Membership of the Methodist Schools Committee

- Revd Dr Roger Walton (Chair, MSC)
- Revd Dr Calvin Samuel (Chair, MIST)
- Keith Norman (Deputy Chair, MIST)
- Steven Colledge (Chair, MAST)
- Revd Paul Martin (Deputy Chair, MAST)
- Barbara Easton (Head of Service, MAST)
- Revd Sally Ratcliffe (Trustee, MAST)
- Dr David Kershaw (Chair, Epworth Education Trust)
- Julie-Ann Hewitt (CEO, Epworth Education Trust)
- Dr Christopher Stephens (Head of Southlands College)
- Revd Dr Jonathan Dean (Director of Learning for Ministry in the Connexional Team)
- David Humphreys (General Secretary, MIST)
- Barbara Easton (Head of Service, MAST)
- Dr David Lamper (Executive Head, Kent College)⁶

⁶ David was seconded by MIST to be the founding CEO of the Wesley Trust. He handed over to Julie-Ann Hewitt in October 2019. He remained part of the strategy working group until the work was complete.

Appendix B

Summary of Actions

Strategy Part 1: Engagement with local schools

- a. The Conference affirms all those who work in schools and those who voluntarily give time and talents to support education.
- b. Circuits are encouraged to undertake a regular audit of their schools' work in their area to review how they are engaging with the schools as part of their mission.
- c. Districts are encouraged to appoint District Education Officers, if not in place, and to plan appropriate events for those who go into schools to lead worship or communicate the Christian story. This to be supported by the Learning Network, the Youth and Children section of the Connexional team and the Methodist Schools Network⁷, under the direction of the Connexional Education Officer.
- d. Circuits and Districts are urged to be alert to the possibility and, where appropriate, be active in sponsoring Methodist schools in their area, with the support of the Methodist Schools Network.
- e. Churches to encourage teaching as a vocation and to support its people to explore teacher as a valued area of Christian ministry.
- f. Churches to encourage the recruitment of Governors for schools in their communities

Strategy Part 2: Growing schools, offering excellent education with a confident Methodist ethos, working together, and prioritising areas of need.

(i) Growing schools

- a. The EET aspires to expand its number of schools through adoption, merger, and sponsoring new schools.
- b. As the EET adds more schools, these will add to the number of schools engaged with MAST.
- c. MIST will seek to acquire (and be attractive to) schools that add financial strength and facilitate expansion of the MIST footprint in the UK and overseas.
- d. MAST and MIST will also continue to be open to affiliation and partnership with other schools.
- e. Churches and circuits to seek creative partnerships with any Methodist school within their circuit, or, if already established, to continue to develop this partnership.
- f. Existing schools are encouraged to play a role in bringing new schools to the Methodist Schools Network.
- g. The Connexional Property Office to include in its strategy the possibility of schools in Connexional churches and buildings.

(ii) Offering excellent education

⁷ The Methodist Schools Network is a term which refers to all schools, whether state or independent, which carry the Methodist name and the Trusts that support them.

Actions for developing and maintaining excellent education:

- a. Methodist Schools will continue to develop improvement plans designed to ensure best possible education reflective of intake, meeting needs and ambitious targets.
- b. The Methodist Schools Network will engage in an ongoing critical conversation on 'What does excellent look like?'
- c. Resources in all three Trusts will be geared to monitoring, strengthening and supporting performance and outcomes. Methodist schools will also celebrate achievements believing that success breeds success; innovation generates innovation; positive PR can spark higher aspiration.
- d. The Methodist Schools Committee (MSC) will monitor that the Trusts are fulfilling their responsibilities and seek to nurture a climate of belonging and partnership with the wider Church
- e. More support for governors in all our schools will be provided.

(iii) With a confident Methodist Ethos**Actions for developing and maintaining a confident Methodist ethos:**

- a. The EDG will give strategic support to the development of a confident Methodist ethos for the Trusts and schools.
- b. The Trusts will use SIAMS and SERVE to further develop the Methodist ethos in all schools.
- c. Schools and local circuits will engage with each other in exploring a Methodist ethos, what it means and how it impacts life in the local community.
- d. MIST will commission research on the impact of values/ethos in our schools on wellbeing.
- e. The Trusts will work together to develop training in Methodist understanding for Chaplains, District School Officers and Methodist School Governors.
- f. The Trusts will work together with Methodist founded Teacher Training institutions, the Connexion and alongside ecumenical colleagues to promote teaching as a Christian vocation.
- g. All Methodist schools to cultivate excellence in RE and share resources developed both locally and centrally.

(iv) Working Together**Actions to strengthen working together:**

- a. Trusts to encourage their schools to engage more frequently/deeply with local Circuits and Districts e.g. in hosting synod, leading circuit devotions, hosting special services, concerts and debates; sharing school facilities for church/youth group camps; schools making use of Church spaces and, for example, using the Methodist Art Collection.
- b. MIST schools to build on their strong commitment to local partnerships and the use of their facilities by local community groups.
- c. The Methodist Schools Network to continue to work together in more and more areas, reporting to the MSC on new opportunities and actions.
- d. A strengthening of the partnership between Methodist Schools Network and Southlands College (University of Roehampton) and Westminster Institute of Education (Oxford Brookes University):
 - to encourage young people to explore teaching as a vocation, and to pursue those vocations in Methodist-related HE contexts;

- to explore new and meaningful ways of collaborating across the primary, secondary and higher education sectors for their mutual flourishing;
 - to pursue appropriate research and development.
- e. The Methodist Schools Network is committed to bring practitioners, governors, Trustees together to develop positive relationships, share good practice, learn from each other's successes and mistakes through regular organisation of group-wide and inter-group events/conferences etc. 2023 International Conference in UK to celebrate Methodist Education and Call to Action for the future.
 - f. The Trusts and the Schools to work with the Methodist Global Relationships office.

(v) Prioritising areas of need

Actions to prioritise areas of need:

- a. Wherever possible to work in areas of challenge and when opening a new school to keep in view those who need us most.
- b. MIST's 2020-25 plan has an ambitious target to increase access to means-tested bursary provision to 10% of fee income; MIST schools in many places have already planned for their own fund-raising campaigns or have identified opportunities for overseas schools to generate income for the award of more bursaries.
- c. Programmes will be enhanced, developed, celebrated and thus trigger aspiration to make people courageous advocates and agents of change.
- d. To extend the Methodist schools Network to include special educational needs schools.

Appendix C

Article from the Methodist Recorder, 18 September 2020/issue 8491 describing the actions of Methodist Schools during lockdown.

Methodist Schools: Responding to the Pandemic in Our Communities

On the twentieth of March, this year, all schools were asked to close their gates; not knowing when they would open again. Prior to this, Methodist Schools around the country had been monitoring the Covid-19 situation, both at home and overseas, carefully. The understandable concern within the school communities, was centred on the health of students, staff, and their families and for independent schools in the group, practical issues for overseas boarders and responding to financial uncertainty ahead.

In fact the schools remained partially open, even for some international boarders who had not been able to get home, but otherwise mainly for vulnerable children and children with keyworker parents; providing care and education to children whose parents were an integral part in the nation's response to Covid-19. Teachers in many schools turned, almost overnight, into creative providers of digital learning. Safeguarding issues were looked at afresh and opportunities developed to serve local community needs in ways hardly imagined a few weeks before. This article brings together some of the examples in which Methodist Schools stood up to the challenges of school closures and community needs.

Community Support

At the start of the lockdown there was a concern about the general availability of food - particularly for shielding individuals. Senior schools within the Group decided that – with their kitchens no longer deployed to feed their whole school community – they could feed the wider locality, offering their facilities and employees to this cause. For example, Truro School in Cornwall partnered up with charity *The Hive* to produce up to 4000 meals per week for people suffering from food insecurity. The teams used donated surplus foods from national suppliers and prepared and cooked a range of meals for children who normally qualify for free school meals, many of whose own schools were now closed, as well as providing victuals for elderly people. The batch cooked meals were being produced for families of up to five members, then handed to charities in the area for distribution.

Truro High School also turned over two car parks, from April onwards, to NHS staff employed at the nearby *Health Park* to accommodate their longer shift patterns. As many schools within the area closed completely due to staff and facility constraints, the school also extended their half term provision to include children of keyworkers and vulnerable children not within their immediate school family but within their local communities; supporting those keyworkers who would not otherwise be able to perform their duties without childcare. During May, Truro High School also opened their school to provide fun activities for children within the area, with staff sacrificing their time to ensure adequate social distancing was observed. Students also volunteered to pack food boxes for distribution by Cornwall Council to shielding families. The parcels contained a week's food supply to sustain some of the most vulnerable people in the community. Whilst the school modestly calls these actions 'small', we think that 'small' actions have deep impacts on the wellbeing of our communities and their offerings were very well received.

With the lockdown came waves of loneliness, our elderly relatives being unable to receive visitors in care homes feeling it particularly sharply. In response to this, Kent College Canterbury students made cards for residents at Bradbury Grange MHA. Though already reported in an earlier edition of the Methodist Recorder these cards are worth another look. Kent College Pembury students and staff have continued to be active participants in their *#heartsformyhospice* campaign. The local hospice in the Weald contacted the school in May to thank the school personally for their support. Meanwhile, back at Truro High School, students and staff offered a chat service to its elderly alumnae to support them through their isolation. Students also took part in *Silver Stories* – an initiative that sees students read books over the telephone to elderly members of the community who might otherwise have no-one to talk to.

Methodist Schools recognise that we are families within a wider community of families, and all schools give of themselves and their time. Another example of this is Ashville College in Harrogate who reported that in support of their wider community, members of staff at Ashville, very much acting as volunteers and private citizens, formed a 'Busy Bees' team dedicated to making and distributing protective materials to local care homes. They have now delivered scrubs, headbands, masks and scrub bags to *Berwick Grange* and *Heath Lodge*, two local care homes. They have also made and delivered story-time activities and materials to the children's ward at *Harrogate Hospital*.

Queen's College Taunton has been providing community support in a variety of ways during the Covid-19 lockdown. The school teamed up with the Somerset County Gazette to subsidise hundreds of newspapers which were delivered each week to care homes across the county.

Dr Lorraine Earps, Headteacher at Queen's, said: *"At times like these, community is everything and we are extremely proud of the community spirit shown by Queen's students and their families, the staff, former students and everyone else associated with the college. To quote a phrase we are currently using a great deal at present, we truly are stronger together."*

Producing PPE

Kent College Canterbury received, in April, a request from a parent – a keyworker in a local GP surgery – to produce PPE as the practice was running low on supplies. The college responded by producing components for face shields using their 3D printer. Woodhouse Grove School also responded to a request from a parent, with the Head of Design & Technology coming into school to produce 73 visors for the *Bingley Bubble GP Practices*. Their care network includes practices in Bingley, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Eldwick and Baildon. Additionally, all of the school's own protective goggles, usually used in Science and Design & Technology classes – some 300 pairs – were donated to *Leeds General Infirmary* and a GP practice in Wetherby that cares for the local prisons at the beginning of April. In the meantime, schools gathered surplus materials to produce more PPE to donate to their local communities and organisations in need. Truro High School formed their own 'THS Textiles Army' to supply face masks and scrub caps to staff at the *Cathedral View Care Home*. Staff were struggling to access affordable PPE and were incredibly grateful for the school's support and parcels throughout the crisis.

Truro School also produced much needed protective face shields for those in the local community on the frontline fighting Covid-19. Truro School also received requests via social media for their help in producing PPE.

In Wales, Rydal Penrhos School, following their own production efforts, received the following thank you note from a local organisation:

"Dear Sirs,

We were very grateful to receive the delivery of the Visors for our staff to use during this awful time dealing with Covid 19... Attached is a photograph of some of our grateful staff, wearing your visors.

We and our 115 staff at Coed Isaf and Bryn Marl thank you for your generosity."

Queen's College Taunton, donated safety glasses to the Maternity Unit of the local hospital. A parent who works on the ward said at the time:

"Our staff are delighted with the goggles which will be invaluable PPE we are now required to wear at all births.

People have been so generous and kind and we are so grateful."

PPE was also delivered to *Somerset Neuro-Rehab Centre (SNRC)* and to *Bridgwater's East Quay Medical Centre*. This was then also redistributed for other GP practices in the area. Finally, a member of the ITU team at *Musgrove Park Hospital* collected more than 100 water bottles from Queen's during lockdown. They were used for staff struggling to stay hydrated with the vagaries of wearing full PPE.

Stronger Together

This article is being written in August, for publication in September, so by the time of publication, schools might have re-opened Or some new spike might affect such plans. Certainly schools will seem quite different for a while: class and year group "bubbles", "socially distanced" teaching, no whole schools assemblies, no contact sports and possible delays in getting all international boarders back into our schools. But there will be much of what has been learned in lockdown that can add value to our previous provision: the acceleration of "blended learning" making the most of digital experiences during lockdown, for example, and continuing community service opportunities. Our schools are community hubs, we serve our communities to the best of our abilities and we will continue to act as agents of Christian service. Some things may have changed for the better – what 'our generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace' are wise and prescient words indeed. Some things are challenging and difficult to overcome – we will meet and overcome them together and we will be stronger for it. As we move now to a new academic year, we are ready to embrace the "new normal" but focused on ensuring the best possible opportunities for our children and mindful of the potential impact of the last 6 months on their development.

Please keep praying for our schools and our school communities, as we continue to respond to the impact and threat of the pandemic.

Nutgrove Methodist Primary School, St Helens, has been praised by their community for the support they have offered to families during lockdown.

Underpinned by their Methodist ethos and Christian values, the school, which is part of the Wesley Trust, has had to not only deliver online learning but also meet the health and wellbeing needs of many of their children.

Mrs Rachel Bottell, Headteacher, said: "It is no exaggeration to say that for some pupils school is their sanctuary. Under the magnifying glass of Covid-19, which has amplified the financial and

emotional struggles that some families face, we have had to make sure our children are well physically and emotionally.

“This has included real practical support. We have partnered with a foodbank to ensure that children are getting the nutrients they need. We spoke to some of our children numerous times each week. Sometimes this was just for a chat to see how they were doing, and other times we offered more comprehensive emotional and educational guidance. For those children we simply could not get in touch with, we undertook socially distanced home visits just to make sure they were OK.

“When it comes to education, some of our families don’t have internet connection. Alternatively, the only means they have to go online is via a mobile phone – which may need to be shared with other family members and/or is not in the home during the typical school day. For these children we have hand-delivered work packs and had to explain some topics over the phone to them if they needed it. Our School Business Manager even had to act out *Jelly on a Plate* standing in the middle of a road for one family. It just goes to demonstrate that there is no one size fits all when it comes to support. Every initiative and project has had to be adapted for the individual child and their family.”

Julie-Ann Hewitt, the CEO of the Wesley Trust, added: “Nutgrove Primary is a school strong in faith and rich in heart.

“The school has also been proactive in offering regular pastoral care for staff. Putting aside the pressures of work, everyone in the country has faced uncertainty and worries in their personal lives. They laugh a lot at this school, and what I really love is that they didn’t want to lose that during lockdown. It got to the point where staff were making outtake videos of all the Zoom calls - which included those amusing and impromptu visits by dogs and children.

“Nutgrove really lives out what it means to be a Methodist school. It is a shining example of the way all our schools in the Trust serve their individual communities.”

Q&A with Mrs Jean Hopegood – Methodist Schools Regional Leader and Head of Selwood Academy

How have school families kept in contact during the closures?

The schools within the MAST Regional Network rapidly established the use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams to provide professional support and contact across school communities. For most, but not all pupils, online teaching was provided, which of course proved challenging. Our South West schools also produced inventive ways to promote learning e.g. weekly video challenges, online WoW Wall to display excellent home learning outcomes etc.

Induction for the new September intake provided the challenge of anxious parents and children. School support has been inspirational - online video tours of schools, online 1-1 consultations with parents, videos to introduce new teachers etc. For some, using Microsoft Teams improved communication significantly; for others a socially distanced face-to-face conversation was possible outside.

You mention supporting children and parents; would you please tell us a bit more about the schools’ pastoral care?

Schools have gone to great lengths to provide pastoral care. School websites signposted to a wealth of support groups. Weekly phone calls supported families, not just with physical needs, but also with

mental health support. Some schools had door to door socially distanced checks and local churches, social care and community police worked collectively to ensure highly vulnerable children were known to be safe.

We know schools provided facilities for children of keyworker parents together with vulnerable children. Would you please tell us a bit more about the good work done there?

All the Methodist Schools in the South West opened throughout for keyworker and vulnerable pupils and remained open across holidays. Whilst initially the numbers were small, they grew into much more robust provision from April onwards. For families not attending, schools had weekly contact to ensure families' needs were supported. For those not able to access online learning face-to-face or work provided on the school websites, learning packs were posted and updated as requested. In my area of Frome, Selwood worked very closely with the local charities accessing *Fair Frome* for support with groceries and sourcing financial advice through *Citizens Advice*. Additionally, we have been able to access food parcels and charitable funding from *Frome Lions*.

Schools have been planning for the start of the 2020/21 academic year, would you be able to give us an idea of all the preparations underway?

The Government guidelines sent to schools in July gave us much to consider and thankfully enabled us all to prepare ahead. The greatest physical challenge lies in movement around the schools and several different strategies will be in place - staggered starts, zoning areas, separate bubbles, welfare zones for staff for breaks and lunchtimes etc. Academic and pastoral welfare is paramount. Schemes of work and acts of worship have been prepared to ensure that children can access learning again and assist them in understanding the emotional effect the pandemic has created.

What are you looking forward to as the school gates open?

It is so exciting to be opening our doors to all the children and see all our colleagues return. Whilst the schools remained open and remote communication has been strong, seeing the children in the playground being able to interact with each other again is going to be the best feeling for all teachers - the background noise of excited happy chatter is such a simple expression of JOY!