

Methodist Schools Committee: Annual Report

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Dr Roger L Walton, Chair of the Committee
Resolutions	55/1.The Council receives the report. 55/2.The Council recommends to the Conference that the Methodist Schools Committee be directed to develop a schools' educational strategy for the Church, reporting to the Conference in 2020.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To provide an annual report to the Conference, through the Council, as directed by resolution 29/3 of the 2017 Conference [DR 6/8/2]
Main Points	Joint working and planned initiatives MAST MIST The Wesley Trust
Background Context and Relevant Documents	Reports 29 and 30 to the 2017 Conference

1. Introduction

The Methodist Schools Committee was established by Resolution 29/3 at the 2017 Methodist Conference. Its primary purposes are to ensure positive and constructive collaboration between the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST), the Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST), the Wesley Trust and their schools, to share resources, to encourage the development of the Methodist ethos in all our schools and to provide annually a co-ordinated report to the Conference through the Methodist Council on behalf of all Methodist Schools.

2. Joint Working and Planned Initiatives

2.1 Considerable work has been involved over many months in translating the 2012 Education Commission's call for ever closer working between Methodist Schools and the Trusts responsible for them. This culminated in the first joint report to the Conference in 2017 and has been continued since then in the following ways:

1. The Methodist Schools Committee has been established and the Council appointed the Revd Dr Roger Walton to be the Chair of the Committee.
2. The Methodist Schools office has been reviewed to better serve the administrative needs of the Trusts and identify opportunities for joint working for mutual benefit.
3. A new Methodist Schools website has been launched: www.methodistschools.org.uk. This website, for the first time, brings together information, teaching resources and governance guidance for people involved directly with or interested in finding out more about Methodist Schools across the country, across age groups and across maintained and independent sectors. Various resources have been added to the website since it was launched including: Reforming Christianity (a teaching resource developed in collaboration with the Free Churches' Group) and a presentation to help people interested in or working at our schools to understand the foundation of the schools and the influence of Methodism on school ethos and values.

4. The documentary film, 'Doing All the Good We Can' shown at the 2017 Conference, is on the website together with other edits of the filming undertaken in six schools last summer to capture the life of each school and especially the views of pupils, parents and staff.
5. An Ethos Development Group has been established and is working on a number of initiatives of cross-sector relevance. In due course, the Group intends to establish a working party looking specifically at Religious Education and meeting the ambition that our schools will be centres of excellence in this curriculum area.
6. MIST has seconded one of its Heads to be the inaugural CEO of the Wesley Trust and provided seed-corn funding to support the initial costs of getting the Wesley Trust off the ground.

2.2 Although the 2012 Education Commission report established a number of goals for the development of Methodist education, it was not asked to suggest an educational strategy for the Methodist Church for the development of its schools' work. The lack of such a strategy has hampered our ability to assess the activities of the three Trusts. Therefore, the Methodist Schools Committee is willing to use its position and opportunities to draw on expertise from its schools and wider networks to lead and co-ordinate a project to articulate the Methodist Church's educational strategy and policy. It considers that it would be able to report to the Conference in 2020.

3. MAST

3.1 Facts and Figures:

- There are currently 66 Methodist maintained schools under the Council's oversight, educating approximately 15,000 children.
- 26 of our schools are solely Methodist and the rest held in partnership trusts, most commonly with the Church of England. All are in the primary phase.
- About a half of our schools are in the North West of England (predominantly in the Districts of Lancashire and Bolton and Rochdale), with the rest scattered across England covering, in all, 40 different Local Authorities and 18 Dioceses.
- Currently 20% children are taught in schools which have become academies in non-Methodist groups; this requires a particular kind of MAST oversight to ensure that the academy chains are honouring the schools' Methodist Trust.
- In OFSTED terms, just over 93% of Methodist schools are currently judged good or outstanding
- In the Statutory Inspections of Anglican and Methodist Schools (known as SIAMS) 97% of our schools are good or better; 58% are outstanding. Amongst church schools across the country, this is a particularly good marker.

3.2 In September 2017, Alan Davies succeeded the Revd Dr David Deeks as Chair of MAST. With the creation of the Wesley Trust as a separate vehicle for the academies developments, MAST has been able to refocus its work and concentrate on its primary responsibilities, as delegated to it by the Methodist Council, of securing standards and ethos across all the Methodist schools in the maintained sector. Within this, priority has been given to ensuring that the schools are visited, their health is monitored and that they are supported when they encounter periods of difficulty or transition. MAST schools have high standards of performance as a group overall, which is testimony to the quality of their work; where they have gone through periods of vulnerability, MAST can demonstrate a creditable track record of being able to support schools to improve. This is particularly important as, in most parts of the country, Local Authorities no longer support school performance.

- 3.3 A particular project for MAST this year has been the development of SIAMS, in partnership with the Church of England. This is the primary means by which the Council's responsibilities for the Christian character of its schools is secured. Although both churches have shared a strong inspection regime for a number of years, cumulative changes in education and wider society have led to the development of a deeper schedule with questions structured around wisdom, vision, hope, community and dignity. The Methodist appendix has been reworked to give schools and inspectors a richer language with which to talk about our distinctive perspective. Although schools are busy and change is always challenging, initial consultation suggests that the more reflective approach has been welcomed.
- 3.4 The issue for MAST is fundamentally one of capacity as the infrastructure is very small; giving high quality support to a small number of schools sometimes means that the range of other schools do not experience the same level of relationship with the organisation centrally - although links with the local Methodist communities are generally helpful. Since September 2017, 80% of the schools have been visited either by the Chair of MAST, the Executive Officers or the Connexional Director of Education and a number of new Headteacher appointments supported, while a handful of schools have received more in-depth support and challenge. There has also been local governor training. MAST has offered two major events to help schools prepare for the new SIAMS framework and two national MAST conferences will be taking place in July.

4. MIST

4.1 Facts and Figures:

- There are currently 22 independent schools linked in some way to MIST: Trust Schools (9), Acquired Schools (6), Associated Schools (3), Affiliated Schools (4) – a full list and details can be found on the website: www.methodistschools.org.uk
 - MIST is directly responsible as Trustees for the 9 Trust Schools and as Sole Member of the Trusts of the 6 acquired schools; the General Secretary of MIST is a Governor at the Associated Schools and one of the Affiliated Schools.
 - There are over 10,000 pupils on roll in Methodist Independent Schools
 - Sixteen of the schools have boarders as well as day pupils
 - Four of the schools are for children of nursery and primary age only, two have pupils from 11-18 only and the rest offer continuity of education from 3 to 18.
 - All of the schools are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspection Service (ISI) which reports to OFSTED; all such inspections in the past academic year have confirmed high standards in all the schools. Copies of independent school inspection reports are published on each school's website and at www.isi.net
 - Chairs of District are ex-officio Governors of any Methodist Independent Schools in their District
- 4.2 The Revd Dr John Barrett succeeded the Revd Dr David Deeks as Chair of the Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST) in September 2017. The Annual Schools Conference in April each year and the annual strategy day in September, which includes a Service of Dedication, provide opportunities for school leaders, governors and Trustees to enjoy fellowship, worship together and discuss actions required to help schools meet their challenges and rise to opportunities. Such joint events include the nine Trust Schools which are part of MIST under the new legal structure, the Acquired Schools that have joined MIST recently in order to benefit from collaboration opportunities and shared best practice, the Associated Schools, whose land and buildings are held by the same Trust deed, and the Affiliated Schools. In addition to these events, MIST has organised training and sharing days in the past year for Co-ordinators of G2L AIMS (Global to Local Action in Methodist Schools), Designated

Safeguarding Leads and Governors, HR Managers and Heads of MIST junior/prep schools; at the latter we were pleased to be able to welcome a number of Heads from MAST schools.

- 4.3 MIST has reviewed its governance arrangements as part of the legal structure project and has implemented a comprehensive Governance Manual setting out the delegation of responsibilities between MIST and its schools and providing definitive guidance to the schools in respect of key legislation. MIST has also extensively reviewed the Financial Procedures Manual to which all schools operate. These documents are available on the new Methodist Schools website. Responsibility is delegated to the schools in line with the Governance Manual. Each school establishes its policies, monitors compliance and takes direct responsibility for the day to day operation of the school.
- 4.4 Following the Church's publication of *Courage, Cost and Hope*, a Schools Safeguarding Review and Audit (SSRA) was undertaken by MIST in the 2016/17 academic year by independent experts. This review led to the development of group policies which inform operational policies and procedures at school level. There is a Designated Safeguarding Trustee at MIST and there are Designated Safeguarding Leads at each school. There is very close scrutiny by School Governors and formal reporting to the Trustees via the Annual School Reports (ASR). The Trust has a safeguarding adviser available to all schools. This year, she is undertaking visits to all schools to follow up progress since the SSRA audits of 2016/17. The Trust now runs an annual training day for Designated Safeguarding Leads and Designated Safeguarding Governors. All such initiatives have the objective of not just ensuring compliance but also of encouraging and celebrating a culture that keeps children safe and encourages their personal development in a caring and positive school community.
- 4.5 Methodist Independent Schools are determined to continue to provide an all-round education infused with a strong Christian ethos informed by their Methodist foundation in an era of political, economic and social scepticism, uncertainty and change. They are committed to doing everything within their power to increase the number of bursaries available to enable the offer of places to as wide a cross section of the community as possible, though several schools are currently working within the constraints of deficit budgets. Moreover, the possibilities of business rates relief being withdrawn from independent schools and VAT being applied to school fees threaten to make them less, rather than more, affordable.

5. The Wesley Trust

- 5.1 The Wesley Trust was created in 2017 to provide a home for maintained Methodist schools to become academies: to provide support and services where Local Authorities no longer have the capacity, whilst being more closely associated with the Methodist Church. It is unusual in being accepted by the DfE as a new Multi Academy Trust with aspirations to cover the whole of the UK while encouraging its schools to maintain and develop flexible local relationships as they choose. Since its establishment it has brought together an impressive Board of Trustees with an appropriate range of skills including eminent educationalists and those with expertise in law, HR and finance both from within and independent from the Methodist Church. Its inaugural Chair is Alan Davies, who provides a useful overlap (along with a number of other Trustees) in also chairing MAST (Methodist Academies and Schools Trust).
- 5.2 A small but dynamic Executive Team has been established with expertise in the running of schools and school improvement as well as the financial and legal aspects required in establishing academies and Multi Academy Trusts.
- 5.3 The Wesley Trust was approved in principle by the National Schools Commissioner, but acquiring formal approval initially in the North West region, has taken a lot of effort and diplomacy and patience. A great deal of work has been undertaken to resolve various issues

but following applications first submitted in the summer 2017, The Wesley Trust and its first two schools were finally approved by the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office (North West) in March 2018. The first two academies are Nutgrove School (St Helen's) and Rosehill Methodist School (Oldham).

- 5.4 A number of other discussions are continuing with schools in the North West who have approached us about potential academisation in the next year. A particular area of work is being undertaken with local Dioceses to find a way forward for jointly founded Anglican / Methodist Schools. Work has also progressed in other areas of the Connexion for The Wesley Trust. Meetings with governing bodies of schools have been undertaken in the South East region, particularly around Canterbury and Ashford, and in Telford, Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire.
- 5.5 Another potential opportunity for The Wesley Trust is in the creation of new schools in line with the Education Commission's recommendations to the Conference in 2012; initial discussions have taken place with Districts and Circuits in Northamptonshire and Cornwall. The Wesley Trust continues to work closely alongside MAST in order to support all the Methodist maintained schools and to provide them with the opportunity to academise if they wish.

6. ***Our Calling* is lived out and reflected in the life and work of the Trusts and the Schools:**

- 6.1 Each of the schools' groups gives serious thought to its Christian character and the living out of what it means to be a Methodist school operating in each particular context. The joint Ethos Group oversees this, giving an opportunity for each sector to grow together: reflecting on practice, sharing, challenging and being challenged.
- 6.2 Our schools offer frequent, moving and creative opportunities for children to **worship** in formal and informal settings. For example, at Kent College (Canterbury), youngsters have this year experienced both the majesty of their candlelit Cathedral carol service and the creativity of Prayer Spaces in Schools workshops - enriching the schools' spiritual life at both corporate and personal level. At Rosehill (Ashton-under-Lyne) children regularly take part in their own version of the Love Feast; the service concludes as each child receives their piece of pitta bread and a grape to think about the love of God for the world. Worship is very often described as 'the beating heart' of the life of our schools.
- 6.3 The fellowship of community, and the possibility of being a Christian community, is an important hallmark. This provides the context for our **learning and caring**. All our schools offer a liberal broad and balanced curriculum and all pride themselves on the extent to which they emphasise opportunities for rounded human development by expanding children's horizons through co-curricular experiences. Religious Education is in a challenged state in many English schools but we aim for Methodist Schools to be beacons of good practice and this is an identified area for future development. The new Methodist Schools website hosts the Reforming Christianity resource as well as the digitised and updated version of the Methodist teaching resources, first published in 2012 but now available to download free of charge. There are additional resources for world citizenship education, particular links with *All We Can*, and opportunities for teachers to share ideas across the full curriculum. The website is also home to a range of bespoke worship resources and helpful links. Both MIST and MAST offer a fellowship for all those involved in the leadership of Methodist Schools; in MAST this is an area under greater development but is an established part of belonging to the MIST family. MIST's April conference this year shared this fellowship with several leaders of Methodist schools from across the world and the annual MIST Chaplains' Conference is a further annual opportunity to reflect with colleagues within and beyond the group.

- 6.4 **Service** is a strength of all our schools and one which is widely valued, regardless of individual faith conviction. Our schools have strong relationships with local charities as well as creating a global perspective through links with *All We Can*, *Edukid*, *JPIT* and *Christian Aid* particularly. Within MIST, G2L AIMS ('Global to Local' Action in Methodist Schools) is now building on the work of World AIMS and giving schools opportunity to maximise local contacts and staff special interests as a recognised part of their service and outreach. The new SIAMS inspection schedule requires that schools do not just collect money for charity but that they also challenge children to 'courageous advocacy' through opposing injustice. We are making new links with the work of *Action for Children* and at least two of our MIST schools have given places to refugee children from Syria, in both cases through links with the activities of local Methodist churches and/or charities.
- 6.5 Our schools do not proselytise and are non-confessional. Nevertheless, they are chosen by families often because of their Christian foundation and their deliberate focus on values and rounded human development. With around 25,000 children and 5,000 staff and through them, a relationship with families and the wider school community, it is reasonable to assume a reach of our schools of about 100,000 people, week in, week out. Some people say, 'For us, this is our church'; through international boarding, the influence of this 'church' spreads more widely than might be imagined. Although our schools are not the setting for **Evangelism** in its narrow sense, they are informed by the Christian narrative which is supported by the increasing emphasis on ethos in both MAST and MIST. The schools create almost 90 Methodist communities through which Christian human values and an awareness of the gospel perspective infuse the lives of children and adults and reaches out, through them, into local communities.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

55/1. The Council receives the report.

55/2. The Council recommends to the Conference that the Methodist Schools Committee be directed to develop a schools' educational strategy for the Church, reporting to the Conference in 2020.