

Methodist Schools Committee

MC/23/29

Date of meeting	25-27 March 2023
Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Roger L Walton, Chair of the Methodist Schools Committee
Action required	Approval
Resolutions	29/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject or aims	To provide an annual report to the Conference, through the Council, as directed by SO 343A(iii)
Main points	<p>The report updates the Council/Conference on the work of the Methodist Schools Committee and the three Trusts overseeing our schools work. In particular it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• indicates further work undertaken following the adoption of <i>Transforming Lives</i> by the 2021 Conference;• highlights the establishing of a second Methodist Multi Academy Trust;• draws attention to the new developments in RE teaching and materials;• celebrates the first ever international Methodist Schools Conference;• thanks Mr David Humphreys he steps down as General Secretary of MIST after 8 years.
Background documents (with function)	This report should be read alongside the ' <i>Transforming Lives</i> ' document which outlines the schools strategy adopted by the Methodist Conference in 2021.

HEADLINES

By the time the Conference meets, the first International Methodist Schools Conference, entitled 'Transforming Lives', will have been held in April 2023. This is a joint venture between the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities (IAMSCU) and the Methodist Schools Network to coincide with the 275th anniversary of the founding of Kingswood school. At the time of writing, over 250 people, some from every continent (except Antarctica!), are expected to be present in person, with others joining online. Our hope is that this will be the beginning of further cross continental support between Methodist Schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) has required the Methodist Church to form a second Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to support Methodist schools that become academies. This has created a large workload for Methodist Schools' staff but it is gratifying to report that they have more than risen to the occasion and made significant progress on this plan. The new MAT, to be known as **Inspiring Lives Education Trust (ILET)**, will be up and running in the early autumn with between two and four schools. Broadly, ILET will serve schools in the South of England, as Epworth Education Trust (EET) serves the North. Both MATs will be open to non-faith schools and able to sponsor new schools in new areas. ILET expects to include a secondary school in its founding group of schools.

Together with the additions to MIST schools and the establishing of ILET, the number of schools will increase for the first time in decades and, in line with *Transforming Lives*, this increase will continue, over the

next few years. The close working together of all our schools also continues to strengthen and our commitment to prioritise those in most need remains a key driver in our expanding work.

Following the ongoing success of the Anti-racist RE material, further changes in RE teaching are being accompanied by new resources developed through MAST, including new work focused on the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

The schools group has worked with members of the Connexional Team on initiatives to equip Methodist churches to develop positive working relationships with the community schools in their circuits, in line with the resolutions of the 2021 Transforming Lives report adopted by the Conference.

We thank David Humphreys for his eight years as General Secretary of MIST. He has been deeply committed to all our schools working together and had led the planning on the International Schools Conference. We wish him well in retirement. His successor will be Judith Fenn.

Further details of the above and other information is included in the rest of the report.

MAST

Facts and Figures:

- There are currently 66 Methodist maintained schools under the oversight of the Methodist Council, educating approximately 15,000 children.
- 26 of our schools are solely Methodist and the rest are held in partnership, 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
- Around 10% of our schools 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 tradition.
- In a development since last year, just under 10% of our schools are now in Methodist-based academy trusts
- In OFSTED terms, 89% of Methodist schools are currently judged good or outstanding
- In the Statutory Inspections of Anglican and Methodist Schools (known as SIAMS), all our schools are good or better. Amongst church schools across the country, this is a particularly good marker.

MAST is now into its fourth year of working as a fully established Methodist schools organisation. We have continued to develop along the pattern established during, and after, the pandemic – although we are a small team with limited resource this seems to be working well. At local level, relationships between MAST and our schools continue to strengthen, supported by the use of our leading headteachers as Regional Leaders in Education. Through regular contact, they are able to create good links with and between the Methodist schools in their areas and respond where particular needs or opportunities develop. Overlaying this is the national programme of webinar training for which MAST has developed a strong reputation. Originally conceived as a creative response to the limitations of Covid, the webinars have developed into a major plank of MAST's activity. Although 'live' attendance has dropped through the last year, as schools have returned to 'business as usual' there is continuing good take-up via the library of webinars built up on the Methodist Schools private YouTube channel. This means that the training is accessed when convenient or can be used as a stimulus in a full staff or governors meeting. A development to the webinar programme over the last year has been training for governors, which has drawn a large and appreciative attendance.

The distinctive ethos of MAST schools (which is a key focus for us as a Religious Provider) remains at the forefront of our work. Training in aspects of ethos is an important aspect of our webinar programme and our sessions on 'What is Methodism' and 'What does it mean to be a Methodist School?' are always popular. MAST is often asked to repeat these at school level, sometimes with a contextual slant such as developing work around John Fletcher and Mary Bosanquet in Telford. Inspection of the school's religious ethos is required under Law and delivered via a framework developed in conjunction with the Church of England under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS). Two particularly good examples of SIAMS over the last few months are Emmanuel (Sheffield District) and St Mark's (Bristol District) – these and all other SIAMS reports can be found here: <https://www.methodistschools.org.uk/about-us/siams-inspections>. A new SIAMS framework is being developed for introduction from September 2023 and this will

become a training priority. This year, ethos training has focused on maintaining quality in Religious Education – an aspect of the curriculum to which Initial Teacher Training for the Primary sector can give little time; likewise, future priorities include collective worship and children's spirituality.

The world of Religious Education is developing apace. The National Council for Religious Education is promoting a move away from what is termed the 'World Religions paradigm' to a 'Religion and Worldviews' approach with two main drivers – first, to teach about religion in ways that recognise that religions are not monolithic systems, shaped around a Western (largely Protestant) picture of religious believing and, second, to open non-religious standpoints on life to the same scrutiny as religious views. As classrooms become increasingly secular, this is helpful – children cannot simply claim, 'I am not religious' as an opt out from thinking about life's great mysteries. All views are open to probing, exploration and challenge and the slogan, 'Linger longer. Dig deeper' applies to all. With regard to diversity, Methodists will warm both to increasing de-colonisation and to a development which allows for the recognition of wider Christian perspectives, including those of the Free Churches. However, there are some broader philosophical questions to be considered and MAST is working with the National Society in thinking these through. The Methodist Schools 'anti-racist Religious Education' initiative, developed on our behalf by REToday in collaboration with the Free Church Education Committee, is now reaching into about 2000 schools across England and Wales. MAST and RE Today are now developing a joint project around social justice and the Tolpuddle Martyrs which will relate both to the RE and History curricula.

From the beginning of the new school year in 2021, national authorities made it clear that it was 'business as usual'. Ofsted re-launched the full programme of inspections with an adjusted focus including looking at post-Covid recovery. A number of Methodist Schools have been inspected since and our profile remains largely the same. However, MAST's experience bears out the pattern developing across the country: the number of schools being judged 'outstanding' is much reduced and it now appears the top judgement is almost impossible to attain in an urban area and/or areas experiencing deprivation. This is unfortunate for Methodist Schools, whose location and mission intend to 'those who need us most'. Within the group we have schools doing exceptional work in very challenging situations; Ofsted is using the language of 'exceptionality' but, on the ground, this seems to translate into the language of 'perfection'.

All of the above is consistent with MAST's usual work. However, this year has seen a new and important development: in March 2022, the Department for Education approached the Methodist Church (alongside all other Faith Providers) and asked to see the Church's academisation strategy for all Methodist Schools. This was in the context of the Education White Paper, which was dropped during its passage through Parliament in the Autumn. The White Paper originally required all schools to join a strong academy family by 2030 (in reality 2027) and the Department needed assurance that there was a route for this for all schools – particularly schools of a religious character where the DfE is not solely in control. Although this pressure is now removed, MAST is nevertheless in a better position for having done this very significant piece of work as, regardless of legislation, this is now firmly the direction of travel for the DfE. This means that, although MAST is not requiring its schools to academise, schools which wish to, or are required to by others, now have the security of a high-quality academy route which has the approval of the Regional Directors nationally. It also gives Methodists the capacity to make greater progress on aspects of *Transforming Lives* (Methodist Conference 2021) as it offers a framework for more schools to be established in, embraced by, and supported within, the Methodist ethos.

After extensive negotiation, the Department for Education has given approval to a Methodist strategy which will have two trusts. The first remains The Epworth Educational Trust, already well established and highly regarded in the North West of England. The DfE now expects Epworth to expand to cover a wider geographical area by means of a lively hub structure; they are also encouraging Epworth to become a Mixed MAT – a multi-academy trust that can take in faith and community schools (as well as mixing Primary, Secondary and Special). However, the new, and exciting, development is the establishment of a second trust to work in a similar hub model across the southern part of the country. The first schools working to set this up are an exceptional Methodist/Anglican infant school and a remarkable multi-ethnic community comprehensive boys' school, so this will be a mixed MAT from the beginning. It is hoped that, so long as rapid progress can be made, the second trust will be fully open for business from September 2023. Although community schools that join our MAT do not become faith schools, we are finding that our trusts are attractive to schools outside the faith sector because of the longevity and dependability of our values. The second trust will be called 'Inspiring Lives Education Trust', which MAST feels reflects well the title and ambitions of the Conference paper of 2021.

Epworth Education Trust

Facts and Figures:

- There are currently six schools within the Epworth Education Trust (EET) all of which are primary schools.
- Four schools have nursery provision, two of which provide education for 2 year olds alongside provision for 3 year olds and 4 year olds.
- The schools are all solely Methodist Schools and based in the North West of England.
- There are approximately 1500 pupils on roll in the schools.
- There are 230 staff across the Trust.
- EET is commissioned to lead the Westleigh Start Well Family Centre in Wigan. Managing the support for the most vulnerable families and providing some of the safeguarding offer for approximately 25% of the 0-5s in Wigan.
- One school has a resourced provision for up to 15 pupils to provide an education for SEND pupils that are unable to access mainstream provision.
- Within the Trust, with the exception of the sponsored school, all schools are at least good.
- All schools are subject to a SIAMS and they are all judged good or better. Five of the schools have the highest grading of Outstanding/ Excellent.

The culture and ethos of the trust is strong and firmly embedded since the merger of Acorn Trust and Wesley Trust to establish Epworth Education Trust over 2 years ago. There is strong collaboration across our family of schools with staff in a range of roles sharing best practise and supporting each other both informally and formally through the established forums and networks. Within the trust we firmly believe that 'Every child is everybody's responsibility'. As a result, the Headteachers do all they can to not just ensure their own school and pupils flourish, but all schools and pupils across the trust.

The trust invests heavily in continued professional development (CPD) of all staff and this is recognised as a strength in the trust. A highlight of the CPD offered this year has been the Aspiring Senior Leaders course, a year-long leadership programme developed by the trust. During the course, staff explored the key aspects of school leadership, undertook a project and completed various tasks. The course was so successful that a number of the participants have already secured a promotion. We continue to explore the ways in which ensure we have the best possible staff teaching the children in our care. The trust conference in September 2022 was a huge success, as staff across the trust were able to come together for the first time. We plan to hold another conference in the autumn.

This year we have launched the Epworth Specialist Leaders (ESLs) initiative. Staff that excel in a particular subject or area of school life are able to utilise that strength to support all schools. The trust has established a rigorous recruitment and training program and are delighted to have 9 ESLs across the trust. This initiative has ensured that schools have access to highly skilled practitioners as they identify an area which could be strengthened; it has also enabled the trust to retain staff who may have sought additional promotion outside of the trust.

As a Trust, we have seen some changes in leadership across the Trust. There has been a new Headteacher at Rosehill (Gemma Yapp) following the retirement of the previous Headteacher and the acting Headteacher at Westleigh (Karen Chadwick) took up a substantive Headteacher post elsewhere as the Headteacher returned from maternity leave.

During the last twelve months we have seen a further increase in pupils known to have Special Educational Needs (SEND) across the Trust and we continue to be recognised as a place of strength for SEND provision. The resourced provision at Rosehill has increased its pupil numbers by 50%. Another school has been awarded the Inclusion Award as a result of the high quality provision in the school. They are now also considering a request to open a resourced provision at the school.

We believe that our inclusive ethos reflects our Methodist ethos and a commitment to go where we are needed most.

Since joining the Trust Summerseat has made significant progress and is now providing a good quality of education to all pupils. The trust is immensely proud to celebrate the Headteacher, Julie Whittaker, who was awarded the Headteacher of the Year at the Manchester Evening News Awards, standing out against a large number of applicants from schools across Greater Manchester. This award reflects not just the improvements she has made in the school, but the strong ethos of the school she has created along with strong development of staff. We congratulate Julie on this incredible recognition but also reflect upon the

outstanding impact our staff make across our schools, as they continue to relentlessly and passionately 'do all they can' for our pupils and for each other.

The pupils in the trust have benefited from the collaborative work with Edukids, in which schools sponsor children in Uganda to support their education. The schools have embraced the project and the staff in all schools have also committed to sponsoring an additional child. The project has enabled the pupils to embrace the notion of the world as their parish. EET was delighted that a member of staff, Sarah Taylor, was able to participate in a trip and visit the children sponsored across the trust. Sarah taught the children games and provided books and gifts given by the schools. The visit has strengthened the children's commitment to the project, as Sarah was able to share with them all the hands-on experience.

As a trust, we place a strong focus on our Christian ethos and supporting schools in the living out of their own Christian ethos, the schools are the church in action in the pastoral care and support they offer. Collective worship has continued to play a central role in the life of our schools and the school family recognise the importance of this time together. Pupils find worship acts as a guide in managing many of the situations they experience; the opportunity to explore the Christian faith helps them in grounding their own belief systems. Chaplains continue to play a pivotal role in this work providing a strong link and joined up working between our schools and the church.

In Spring 2022, in the run up to the release of the Schools White Paper, the Department of Education (DfE) sought MAST to produce a plan for all Methodist schools to fulfil their aspirations of a fully trust led sector. Whilst this plan was being developed the growth of EET was paused and this was only released late autumn. The MAST plan has led to EET being the trust for the North of England. Since September there has been considerable interest in the trust from both Methodist schools and community schools. We envisage a time of growth will now take place.

MIST

Facts and Figures:

- Most Methodist Independent Schools were established by groups of local Methodist communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century following Wesley's pioneering opening of Kingswood School in 1748 followed by Wesley's successors opening the Wesleyan Academy at Woodhouse Grove in 1812.
- In 1903 most of the schools were brought together by a common Trust Deed and under the ultimate control of the Board of Management for Methodist Schools (BOM). BOM was superseded by the Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST) in 2011.
- There are currently 18 independent schools linked in some way to MIST: Trust Schools (10), Associated Schools (3), Affiliated Schools (5) – two of the affiliated schools are overseas and linked to a Trust school (Kent College Dubai and Kent College West Cairo). A full list and details can be found on the website: www.methodistschools.org.uk
- MIST is directly responsible as Trustees for the ten Trust Schools and the General Secretary (CEO) 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.
- Twelve of the schools have boarders as well as day pupils.
- Two 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 year have confirmed very high standards in all the schools. Copies of independent school inspection reports are published on each school's website and at www.isi.net
- In academic year 2021/22, MIST Trust and Acquired schools provided over £5,150,000 in means-tested bursaries to help hundreds of children to attend the schools whose family circumstances would otherwise restrict access; these bursaries are funded by a mixture of funds raised from using school facilities out of term or school time and from diverting a proportion of the fees paid by all to support the costs of others. In addition, the Methodist Bursary Fund and associated funds made awards for Methodist families attending Methodist Independent Schools of over £150,000.

Last academic year and this, the schools have gradually returned to normal after the upheaval of the pandemic. School rolls have risen, full extra-curricular programmes have operated, and a wide range of local community activities and partnerships have recovered. That said, there are some lingering effects of Covid.

Some of these are positive such as the improved use of technology in teaching and learning but others are much more challenging, notably the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and staff. Many schools are addressing these challenges with staff and pupil support groups, specific pastoral support programmes and use of counsellors; the role of chaplains in this process is useful too.

Since the last annual report, a new Head has taken up his post at Shebbear College (Charlie Jenkins) and new chaplains have started their positions at Woodhouse Grove (Revd Rob Drost), Kent College Canterbury (Revd Alison Walker), and Ashville College (Ms Catherine Frieze). Revd Aubin de Gruchy (currently Chaplain at Truro School) has succeeded Revd Dr Paul Glass as Pastoral Visitor following Paul's return to Circuit Ministry in September 2022.

Moorlands School (Leeds) and Lorenden School (near Faversham) both merged fully with MIST in the past year; so the Trust is growing and welcoming schools not of specifically Methodist foundation in keeping with one of the objectives of the Transforming Lives strategy. The ethos and values of these schools are closely aligned with those of MIST and for several years these schools had been governed by existing MIST schools, namely Woodhouse Grove (Moorlands) and Kent College Canterbury (Lorenden); they now have their own governing bodies reporting directly to MIST.

Another beneficial impact of the end of the pandemic has been the chance to meet together in person in again (strikes permitting). As well as routine meetings of Trustees, Chairs, Heads and Chaplains we have held our Annual Away Days at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine's. A major focus of one of these days was Equality, Diversity and Inclusion where we were joined by Bevan Powell from the Connexion as well as EDI specialists from Farrer & Co. The following day we were delighted to welcome the President of Conference to preach at our annual service of dedication and later in the day, as well as hearing updates from MAST and the Epworth Education Trust, we discussed our Group Plan target to further increase means-tested bursary support for our schools. Meetings in person are supplemented by meetings over Zoom for Heads, Junior School Heads, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Chairs and Trustees; such meetings keep us connected without the need to travel but are no substitute for meeting together in person.

A significant change this year has been the move of the Methodist Schools office from Methodist Church House to offices in a building shared with the Free Church Federal Council in Tavistock Square. Thus, the office team can keep an eye on progress with the conversion of the new Methodist Church House nearby and look forward to being able to move to accommodation there in due course.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, MIST continues to make progress with elements of its Group Plan for 2020-25 in which we are committed to ***developing a culture that encourages and enables collaboration, communication and co-operation between the schools and MIST***. The plan ***seeks to deliver a financially sustainable, inclusive education that is focused strongly on both the individual and the community experience, shaped by Christian values***. Specifically, progress continues to be made with collaboration opportunities between MIST, MAST and the Epworth Trust; the Methodist Schools International Conference will be held in April 2023; "SIAMS for MIST schools" is being piloted, known as SERVE¹; and ongoing consideration of ways in which MIST and the schools can support the objectives of the Transforming Lives report.

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. Methodist Independent Schools 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. Financial support provides life-changing opportunities for a number of pupils as schools partner with the Royal Springboard Foundation (www.royalspringboard.org.uk) and in schools with specific programmes such as The Leys' "Gift of Education" and Woodhouse Grove's commitment to the One In A Million Academy in Bradford. The likelihood of business rates relief being withdrawn, and the possibility of VAT being applied to school fees threatens to make them less, rather than more, affordable. In the meantime, MIST uses resources carefully to support schools in need of specific help and others that now feel confident to plan essential investment.

***RESOLUTION

29/1. The Council receives the report.

¹ SERVE stands for: Spiritual, Ethos, Relationships & Values Education