

Methodist Schools Committee: Annual Report 2020/21

MC/22/40

Date of meeting	2-4 April 2022
Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Roger L Walton, Chair of the Committee Roger.l.walton@gmail.com
Resolution	40/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	To provide an annual report to the Conference, through the Council, as required 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 the work undertaken following the adoption of <i>Transforming Lives</i> by the 2021 Conference;• highlights some of the outstanding and continuing work undertaken by Methodist schools during the pandemic;• draws attention to the wide use of Anti-racist RE materials, now in over 1400 schools; <p>outlines the growth of the Epworth Education Trust and its developing work in special education provision.</p>
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	<p>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 Epworth Education 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</p> <p>This report should be read alongside the '<i>Transforming Lives</i>' document which outlines a schools strategy for the Methodist Church: Transforming Lives.</p>

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Introduction

- 1 The adoption of ***Transforming Lives*** by the 2021 Conference provided affirmation, impetus and strategy for Methodist Schools. Much of the agenda of the Methodist Schools Committee since the Conference has been attending to the implementation of this 10-year plan and each of the Trusts has set its sights on achieving the ambitious vision of the report. This is being carried through in a context of the pandemic and its effects on children, staff and the communities served by our schools and with attention the initiatives of the Methodist Church as it seeks to share in God's mission. Our Calling and a Methodist Way of Life continue to be central to framing and enacting the work of Methodist Schools and we have paid particular attention to the Presidential theme, 'A Place at the Table for All', and to the developments of Church at the Margins, New Places for New People and the Walking with Micah project. All of these have deep resonance with ***Transforming Lives*** and are engaging Methodist schools in a variety of ways.
- 2 We are particularly excited to report that the plans for the first international Methodist Schools' Conference to be held in April 2023 are taking shape. 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. Our hope is that representatives, in person and online, from the thousands of Methodist Schools across the world will participate together in conversation, workshops and resource sharing to strengthen the work of all Methodist schools.

Joint Working and Initiatives

- 3 The Trusts have worked together in the following ways:
 - a. Actively engaging with the Methodist Schools Committee (MSC).
 - b. Undertaking, through the MSC, the necessary processes of discussion and identification of key areas of work required that enabled MSC to submit to Conference 2021 a Schools' educational strategy for the Church (Transforming Lives)
 - c. Through the Ethos Development Group, chaired by Revd Peter Whittaker, sharing experience and needs across the Trusts.
 - d. The website, www.methodistschools.org.uk launched in September 2017 has been added to with new resources for school worship, assemblies, governance and leadership, it is due for full review during the coming year.
 - e. MAST webinars have been available to appropriate members of MIST schools to attend.
 - f. MIST's safeguarding consultant has provided on-line training to appropriate members of MAST schools.
 - g. MIST, MAST, EET, both severally and through MSC, continue to enjoy closer connection to the Connexional Team (especially through the Revd Dr Jonathan Dean, Director of Learning for Ministry).
 - h. The MSC is developing an emerging map of where our Trusts interface with public policy and with other Methodist-founded organisations.
 - i. Sharing expertise with Southlands and Roehampton: for example, the schools group contributing to teacher training sessions on diversity within Christianity, and Roehampton contributing specialist training for the webinars.
 - j. Contributing their experience of green initiatives, from their different perspectives, to the Church's preparation for setting emissions targets to combat climate change.
 - k. By sharing experience in the Trusts and the schools on adjusting to the pandemic crisis.

- I. MIST, MAST and EET have worked together to plan a major Conference in April 2023 for school leaders and trustees across the UK Methodist Schools network and together with the International Association of Methodist Colleges, Schools & Universities (IAMSCU). The main sponsors for the event are IAMSCU, MIST, Kingswood School and the Farmington Institute; it is being held in Bristol and Bath to mark the 275th anniversary of the founding of Kingswood School by John Wesley.
- m. MIST, MAST and EET have started a conversation with Action for Children to identify ways in which our respective work can be mutually supportive, especially in the arena of special educational needs.

MAST

4 Facts and Figures:

- The Methodist Church is a school provider in the state sector. The Council's responsibilities for the standards and ethos of its schools are delegated to MAST under SO342.
 - The Council currently has responsibility for 66 Methodist maintained schools, educating approximately 15,000 children; for these schools, the Council, working through MAST, is registered with the Department for Education as a Religious Authority
 - 26 of our schools are solely Methodist and the rest held in ecumenical partnership trust, most commonly (though not exclusively) with the Church of England. All are in the Primary phase.
 - About a half of the Methodist state 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 18% 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.
 - There have been few inspections and no verified published data since 2019. It is therefore not practicable to give statistical data on school performance although some commentary is included in the text.
- 5 The second phase of pandemic living brought mixed experiences for our schools, balancing the expectations of 'everything back to normal' with the realities of pandemic disruption. School communities returned to a more usual pattern of classroom learning with delight; maintaining this pattern has taken a considerable degree of determination. Staff and pupil illness and staff self-isolation have proved difficult to manage, with schools reporting, for example, 27 staff off in one day and pupil absence sometimes running at 20% (when a more usual average might be 5%). Even though our schools have (almost always) remained open, and are in many ways just as they were before the pandemic, not every pupil's learning journey has gone smoothly. Some activities, visits and visitors, have taken a long time to resume.
 - 6 A lot of focus in the pandemic has been on the difficulties for older pupils, particularly in regard to termly examinations and assessments. Methodist state schools are effectively all in the Primary phase where the impacts have received less publicity but are very significant. In September 2021, for example, infant schools did not have a single year group that had experienced a year of 'proper' schooling – it was like having three year groups all starting school at the same time! Schools note the variable impacts of lockdown and home learning across the Primary phase on children's skills, socialisation and stamina for learning. Staff have been working to rebuild youngsters' fine motor skills, working on wrist strengthening and tri-partite grip. There has been increased demand for speech and language support, as well as the anticipated need for greater mental health and social and emotional provision.
 - 7 Against this backdrop, the world of education has looked more towards 'business as usual'. There has been more movement in MAST school staffing as leaders who had delayed their retirement in 2020 took up their plans again. MAST continues to support schools with appropriate recruitment and offers induction to the group for all new heads. With some interruptions, OfSTED resumed

inspections; MAST has been pleased that schools that have been inspected have been retained their grading, and some have improved. One school, the most vulnerable in the group with over 70% Free School Meals eligibility has moved to 'Good' after years of being at 'Requires Improvement'; this can be credited to a dynamic young headteacher and his staff, but also to support received from local MAST partners. The government's 'business as usual' agenda includes increased opportunities for schools if they become academies; this makes the close relationships within the Methodist family of schools particularly important.

- 8 As an organisation, MAST has continued the successful pattern of work established since 2019. During lockdown, a recognised strength was developed in the provision of training through webinars, in chaplaincy fellowship and strong pastoral relationships with schools. As education returned to more normal patterns, MAST took the opportunity to build on this success. The webinars have remained very popular, with one hitting our Zoom limit(!). Post return, lower live numbers are combined with high 'watch again' numbers, which might involve a whole school team in a staff meeting. The webinar programme intentionally focuses on training associated with having a Methodist trust deed; other topics are woven in according to demand. A session on protecting children online, for example, drew a lot of interest.
- 9 As the Head of Service moved to a part-time role, trustees took the opportunity to re-work the staffing structure using support from the Epworth Trust. This has allowed particularly for additional capacity in supporting school improvement through the work of a stronger and broader team. The more highly-developed work of the RLEs (Regional Leaders in Education – local school leaders taking on a supportive role for neighbouring Methodist Schools), has built on the strong MAST relationships established in covid time and remains the central platform for all our other work. MAST is now more known, more accessible and even more able to support – and the new chair has asserted a firm hold on the reins.
- 10 The Methodist Council has a particular responsibility for the ethos of its Methodist Schools; this is safeguarded through their inspection under Section 48 of the Education Act (2005). To deliver a robust and credible inspection schedule (SIAMS, the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) the Methodist Church works with the Education Office of the Church of England. In 2020 a decision was made to bring the coordination of all SIAMS inspections under a central team in order to improve management and reduce variability. To make change of this order is not an easy task and considerable time was spent over the year in constructing systems and recruiting staff. Inspections were suspended for 18 months over the height of the pandemic and have had occasional interruptions since. Arrangements to deal with the backlog have been negotiated with the Department for Education but there is a considerable inspection mountain to climb and a significant minority of experienced inspectors have decided that they do not wish to return, post-pandemic. Notwithstanding this, and the anticipated hiccoughs of the new systems, SIAMS has made a strong return. MAST is picking up the increased need for training in SIAMS amongst our schools.
- 11 Our partnership working continues to yield rich results. The anti-racist resources for religious education, initiated by MAST and developed by REToday are now in use in at least 1400 schools. https://www.google.com/search?q=anti+racist+RE+resources+FCEC&rlz=1C1DIMC_enGB865GB866&oq=anti+racist+re+&aqs=chrome.69j59j0j69j57j69i60.6754j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 REToday have also picked up Gordon Brown's Walking with Micah lecture and frequently reference the Methodist Art Collection – with the result that 'Methodism' is a more recognised presence amongst the nation's very diverse RE teachers. There is something of a revolution going on in the world of RE as the focus shifts to 'world views' and non-faith perspectives; this makes it additionally important that Methodism retains its credibility at the RE table. MAST has also developed a prominence within the national schools chaplaincy organisation, the Centre for Chaplaincy in Education (CCfE), and receives strong support from CCfE in return.
- 12 MAST has not experienced a typical full financial year of activity since its set up. The first year was not a complete twelve months and the two subsequent years have been impacted by the pandemic although we have found new ways of building our contact with schools and stakeholders. As a result, it is possible to finance an overall six years of activity from our planned income. Our future spend is closely aligned to clear priorities of need and continued strengthening of our support to and development within the state-funded Methodist schools community.

MIST

13 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 (8), Acquired Schools (3), 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 8 Trust Schools and as Sole Member of the Trusts of the 3 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.
 - Fourteen 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 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 Districts.
 - In academic year 2020/21, MIST Trust and Acquired schools provided £5,440,000 in means-tested bursaries to help hundreds of children whose family circumstances would otherwise restrict access to attend the schools; 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 made awards for Methodist families attending Methodist Independent Schools of almost £100,000.
- 14** All the schools have had to adapt to new ways of working during the pandemic and adjusted to changes in advice as variants have come and gone. They have generally weathered the loss of income (especially from boarding and lettings income) as well as could have been expected but done so mainly due to support available from the furlough scheme and by cutting back severely on as many costs as possible, including capital expenditure. One small school, however, has been unable survive these latest challenges; St Petroc's School in Bude was sold to a local independent special needs school in November 2021.
- 15** Since the last annual report, new Heads have been appointed at Ashville College (Rhiannon Wilkinson), Kent College Canterbury (Mark Turnbull), Kent College Pembury (Katrina Handford), Lorenden School (Richard McIntosh) and Queens College Taunton (Julian Noad). There are new Chairs at Lorenden School (Philip Harland) and Rydal Penrhos (Deborah McKinnel). New Chaplains have taken up their positions at Kingswood School (Revd Katy Thomas) and Rydal Penrhos School (Revd Bob Beamish). All such changes bring fresh vision and opportunity but also an element of instability which MIST works hard to minimise; the turnover in Heads has been especially marked in the last two years.
- 16** Many MIST meetings since late March 2020 have had to be held electronically but we were able to assemble for very enjoyable and informative Away Days in September 2021 at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine's; meeting one day with Chairs of Governors and Trustees with the second day being joined by Heads, Chaplains, leaders of MAST and EET and enjoyed a joint

service of dedication with the President of Conference. The opportunity for electronic meetings has ensured regular group meetings by Zoom for Heads, Junior School Heads, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Chairs and Trustees.

- 17 Despite the impact of the pandemic, MIST is making progress with elements of its new 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; a “SIAMS for MIST schools” is being developed, known as SERVE¹; a review of bursary and scholarship policies; and identifying ways in which MIST and the schools can support the objectives of the Transforming Lives report.
- 18 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.royalsprinboard.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 threaten 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.

Epworth Education Trust

19 Facts and Figures:

- There are currently six schools within the Epworth Education Trust (EET) all of which are primary schools.
- Three schools have nursery provision, two of which provide education for 2 year olds alongside provision for 3 year olds and 4 year olds. An additional school has submitted an application to open a nursery.
- The schools are all solely Methodist Schools 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.
- Within the Trust, with the exception of the sponsored school, all schools are at least good. Two have the highest grading of outstanding.
- All schools are subject to a SIAMS and they are all judged good or better. Four of the schools have the highest grading of Outstanding/ Excellent.

- 20 The pandemic has continued to place challenge within our schools and this reflects the national picture. The challenges have evolved and changed during the year but has included supporting our most vulnerable pupils during lockdown, academic performance challenges created through lost learning and staff absences. School leaders have found this period particularly difficult and exhausting as they did not have a full break for almost 20 months whilst providing track and trace within each school holiday and also managing the day to day challenges they were experiencing

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

during the term time. Our Methodist ethos continues to shape our work in this area as we have endeavoured to overcome any barriers pupils and families faced during this time including the provision of food parcels, additional pastoral support, or access to technology and showing care and compassion in all that we do. Parents continue to recognise our strength in this area. We are aware that for many of our school community the only experience of the Christian faith and the Methodist church is through the life of school. As such, the schools continue to be the church in action through bringing hope into these situations.

- 21 We have been determined that the pandemic will not limit our pupils' opportunities in the future and have provided significant resource to close any academic gaps that may have emerged during this period, this has been alongside enhanced pastoral support. There is still much to do but we continue to move forward.
- 22 Staff well-being has remained a priority and focus throughout the pandemic. At the start of the new academic year an enhanced well-being offer has been provided for all staff to support good mental and physical well-being. We recognise that flourishing staff create flourishing children which is a key driver for the Trust. The well-being offer has been well received by all.
- 23 The last year has witnessed the strengthening collaboration across our family of schools as we have developed closer working relationships with each other. Whilst working within the limitations that the pandemic has created, we have still met regularly to disseminate best practise and share ideas and resource. A new Director of Education (DoE) role was established in September which has further enabled the Trust to support schools. The DoE has provided practical support and training opportunities including a bespoke aspiring leaders course which has been a huge success.
- 24 As a Trust we have seen some changes in leadership across the Trust. There has been a new Headteacher at Wesley (Rhys Jones) and a new Head of School at Bedford Hall (Lisa Whittaker), and there is an acting Headteacher at Westleigh leave (Karen Chadwick), whilst the Headteacher is on maternity leave. As a Trust we continue to ensure new leaders are mentored and supported to lead our schools well.
- 25 During the last twelve months we have seen an increase in pupils known to have Special Educational Needs (SEND) across the Trust and this has been a significant increase in some schools. Rosehill opened a 'resourced provision' in September providing specialist support for up to 10 pupils identified to have SEND with many having a diagnosis of autism. Summerseat now has over 30% of their pupils with SEND and over 10% have a diagnosis of autism. We strongly believe this increase is linked to pupils joining our schools knowing we have an inclusive ethos and will support every child to flourish, no matter what the barriers.
- 26 Summerseat joined our Trust in December 2020 as the first sponsored academy following their Ofsted inspection. Since joining the Trust the school has made significant progress and is now providing a good quality of education to all pupils. This rapid progress reflects the Trust's commitment to ensuring all pupils have the best possible school experience. We are proud of the difference we have made in the school. This, alongside many other aspects of our approach, has led to a growing reputation with the Department for Education.
- 27 We were immensely proud to celebrate one of our newly qualified teachers, Zoe Leyland, being a silver winner at the Pearsons Awards for Outstanding New Teacher of the Year. They talked about her impact being palpable not only in her own classroom but across the school. We congratulate Zoe on this incredible recognition but also reflect upon the outstanding impact our staff make across our schools as they relentlessly and passionately 'do all they can' for our pupils and for each other.
- 28 Last summer we embarked on a Trust wide project with Edukid in which schools sponsored 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 and provide care and Christian support to children experiencing some of the most traumatic of experiences such as being a child soldier or orphan. The children have been able to meet through zoom and to understand each other's cultures and build up connections. The children have recognised they whilst their lives are very different, they have much in common.
- 29 Collective worship has continued to play a central role in the life of our schools. The schools

welcomed the return to in person collective worship in the autumn term. Headteachers reported children singing with increased passion as the joy of collective worship and singing was appreciated freshly. The prayer spaces within the schools support the pupils' ability to explore their faith and communicate with God if they seek to. Pupils find worship a strong root that guides them in managing many of the situations they experience; the exploration and demonstration of the Christian faith helps them in grounding their own belief systems and faith. Chaplains continue to play a pivotal role in this work providing a strong link and joined up working between our schools and the church.

- 30** As the Trust has stabilised organisationally following the merger in November 2020, the Trust board committed to welcoming more schools into the Trust and a growth strategy was developed. Aligning with this was a message emerging from the Government regarding their aspiration that all schools belong to a family of schools in a Multi Academy Trust. As a result, there has been significant interest from schools exploring academisation. As a result, we have two of our Methodist schools that have applied to join the Trust. As the Trust grows to become a National Trust we welcome schools across the country, as this is different from the majority of Trusts that have a limited geographical spread. We are working with the government department responsible for academies, the Regional School Commissioner (RSC), to manage this effectively. We are looking to establish hubs of schools that can work closer together to overcome any geographical barriers.

*****RESOLUTION**

40/1. The Council receives the report.