

Methodist Schools Committee: Annual Report

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Dr Roger L Walton, Chair of the Committee
Resolution	49/1. The Council receives the report.

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 and proposed merger with the Acorn Trust (see paper MC/20/50)

Introduction

1. The Methodist Schools Committee was established by Resolution 29/3 of the 2017 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.

Joint Working and Initiatives

2. The Trusts have worked together in the following ways:
 - a. Actively engaging with the Methodist Schools Committee (MSC) with the Revd Dr Roger Walton as the inaugural Chair;
 - b. Continuing through the MSC the necessary processes of discussion and identification of key areas of work required to enable the MSC, in due course, to submit to the Conference, in 2021, a schools' educational strategy for the Church; the purpose of the strategy is to help guide future planning and interaction between the Church and the schools;
 - c. Through the Ethos Development Group, chaired by the Revd Peter Whittaker, sharing experience and needs across the Trusts including, for example, how best to use resources such as Understanding Christianity and other RE teaching resources, including making access via the website to the Methodist story. A film resource is also being developed;
 - 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;
 - e. MAST and MIST have held conferences inviting Heads and/or Trustees from each Trust to attend;
 - f. Implementing a Service Agreement for the Methodist Schools Office to meet developing needs of MAST, alongside continued servicing and administration requirements of the Office from MIST;
 - g. Collaboratively preparing and providing a Methodist Schools stand for delegates to engage with and hosting a fringe event at Conference;
 - h. Discussing with Southlands College and Wesley House the development of leadership and governor training materials.

MAST

3. 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 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 Trust.
- In a development since last year, just under 10% of our schools are now in Methodist-based academy trusts.
- In OFSTED terms, just over 90% 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.

4. We continue to operate in challenging times for schools. In September, Ofsted introduced a new framework which shifted the balance of school inspections to take greater account of the breadth of provision alongside the consistent emphasis on results. At the same time, the schedule for church school inspections entered only its second year while the new legal expectations around provision of Relationships and Sex Education gave rise to disturbances in some schools and anxieties in others. The decline in the capacity of Local Education Authorities became even more apparent, even in areas where they have so far maintained a good service. Many schools are experiencing extreme pressures on their budgets. Specialist provision for Special Educational Needs is very limited while the need continues to increase, especially around issues of mental health. In many areas, schools are compensating for the loss of other support for families – sourcing clothes and food for children has now become routine where it was before, perhaps, exceptional.

5. This year has seen the appointment of the first full-time Head of Service for MAST (in March) which has transformed MAST's capacity to support Methodist schools in the state sector. In addition, a number of serving headteachers have been invited to act as Regional Leaders for Education (RLEs) to increase MAST's presence across the country. This will ensure that MAST has an individual supportive relationship with each one of its schools, wherever they are in the country. These developments have been made possible due to the generous support of the Southlands Methodist Trust and of Westminster College Oxford Trust. The popularity of our summer school leaders' conferences continues to grow. To these we have added a programme of regional roadshows to increase access and engagement, an enlarged support programme for new headteachers and a themed training event in the autumn. We continue to offer at least one annual event for chaplains as well as developing opportunities to support chaplains regionally. The new organisation, the Centre for Chaplaincy in Education, is a valuable partner in this work.

6. The introduction of a new SIAMS inspection schedule, by which the Council's legal responsibilities for the Christian character of Methodist schools is secured, has largely gone very well. In its second year it is being refined but not substantially changed. For example, in line with concerns about workload for school leaders, schools will no longer have to submit many pages of self-evaluation. SIAMS remains a significant piece of joint working with our colleagues in Church of England education. The reports of school inspections, which are all available online, highlight the many strengths of our Methodist schools. They also highlight the areas in which we need to develop future work such as

consolidating the strength of religious education. One of our most popular training sessions looks at what it means to be 'Methodist' in a school context. Staff often find this affirming and quite moving – although few of them are themselves Methodist, they warm to the commitment to working with those who need us most and doing 'all the good we can'. To supplement this Methodist understanding, the Methodist RE Resource has now been made available online and a Methodist story video is in production.

7. We are very sorry that Alan Davies will be leaving us at the end of his term of office in August 2020. Alan has overseen a sea-change in MAST's capacity to do well by its schools. The group is profoundly indebted to him and wish him the very best for the future. We are pleased to confirm the nomination of Steven Colledge as the new Chair of MAST to succeed Alan Davies. Steven is a recently retired Headteacher and educational leader currently based in Cirencester.

MIST

8. Facts and Figures:

- There are currently 19 independent schools linked in some way to MIST: Trust Schools (8), Acquired Schools (4), 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 4 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.
- Three 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
- All schools have Chaplains, most of whom are Methodist presbyters (with two lay Chaplains).

9. After many years of support and in face of continuing deficits, MIST decided that Kingsley School in Bideford (formerly Edgehill College) needed to be sold, or, if a suitable buyer could not be found, closed, though MIST was anxious to ensure, if it could, the jobs of staff and continuity of education for the pupils. MIST had provided very substantial financial support to the school over many years but, especially in recent years, deficits mounted and actions to stem the deficits proved unsuccessful so the overall debt accrued by the school had become too large to justify or sustain. Fortunately, a buyer was found that was prepared to take the school over and considered that it had the resources needed to invest in the school's future as well as protecting its cashflow in the short term. This buyer was also supportive of the school's established ethos and so all-round continuity of provision was secured. This single decision has strengthened the Trust's cashflow and thus protected the interests of the whole group.

10. 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. The 43% increase in the employer's contribution to teachers' pension scheme and the likelihood of business rates relief being withdrawn threaten to

make them less, rather than more, affordable. In academic year 2018/19 MIST schools provided over £5,000,000 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 made awards for Methodist families attending Methodist Independent Schools totalling just over £130,000. At Queens College (Taunton) and Shebbear College (Devon), Syrian refugee children continue to benefit from a fresh start at school in the UK thanks to partnerships with local charities. In other schools, either through local partnerships or arrangements with national organisations, such as Springboard, our schools are able to make it possible for many children affected by a wide range of personal difficulties to become pupils at our schools. In this way the schools seek to be as inclusive as possible and they are determined to raise more funds to extend these opportunities in the future.

11. Methodist Schools have a strong reputation for working with young people in need. For example, Methodist schools are actively engaged in local community partnerships with a wide range of social groups, sports clubs and schools; putting their facilities to good use for wide benefit. Some such activities are informal, others subject to more formal agreements. In the most recent annual reports to Trustees, for example, it is estimated that MIST schools are used by several hundred outside groups, with tens of thousands of people (children and adults) making use of the schools' facilities. Queens College in Taunton, for example, runs an extensive range of Saturday classes for local schoolchildren, Woodhouse Grove hosts the Bradford City academy programme, Truro School hosts the Cornwall Music Service, Kent College Canterbury hosts a Porchlight annual dinner, and there are many more examples reaching people of many different ages, backgrounds and interests.
12. Methodist Schools are also actively engaged in international outreach and partnerships. Ashville College in Harrogate, Kingswood School in Bath and Culford School in Suffolk, for example, have long established links with sustainable projects in Malawi. This summer, students and staff from Woodhouse Grove visited their school and community partner schemes in Uganda and Truro High School undertook a development project trip to Cambodia. Two former students from Kent College Canterbury arranged a student conference in Oxford in September; this enabled students to develop resources for assemblies back in their host schools drawing on a range of presentations including Christian Aid, Edukid and All We Can.
13. These international partnerships are making a lasting impact in the communities and change attitudes in our students and thus in our schools. Culford's Malawi commitment, for example, over the past decade has enabled a new school to be built from scratch and that now provides a life changing education for 160 children each year. Kent College Canterbury has been involved with Klerruu School and Saba Saba School in Iringa, Tanzania for the past 10 years and Kent College Pembury has had a similar partnership with a Shree Deurali primary school in Nepal.
14. During the year MIST discussed and consulted on its new Group Plan, for 2020-25. This has four key objectives: *Christian in Character; Connected; Collaborative and Effective; Commercially Strong and Affordable*. At the core of the plan is the commitment of MIST to developing a culture that encourages and enables collaboration, communication and co-operation between the schools and MIST and between MIST, MAST and the Wesley Trust. Such commitment to co-operation goes beyond Methodist boundaries too. We are committed to a collective aim to deliver a financially sustainable, inclusive education that is focused strongly on both the individual and the community experience, shaped by Christian values.

The Wesley Trust

15. Facts and Figures:

- There are currently 3 Methodist schools within the Wesley Trust educating approximately 1000 children aged 3-11
- All 3 schools joined the Trust in the 2018/19 academic year
- The schools are all based in the North West of England
- In OFSTED terms, all the 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.
- There are approximately 110 staff employed across the schools.
- There have been significant changes to key personnel within the Trust.

16. 2019 was a busy year for the Wesley Trust. It started the year with one academy: Nutgrove in St Helens; Rosehill, Tameside joined in January 2019 and Wesley School, Bury joined in July 2019. We are now in the early stages of starting to work collaboratively, establishing cohesive systems across the schools. This harmonisation of approach better facilitates providing economies of scale and enabling school to school support. As we develop this further it will strengthen our offer to our schools and their pupils and staff.

17. Anyone visiting the schools quickly recognises the Christian ethos within each school which is demonstrated through strong relationships and pastoral care. It is clear the schools go out of their way to support both pupils and staff, often going the extra mile for the most vulnerable pupils. The academic standards of Nutgrove remain high and Rosehill continues to improve under the strong leadership of Kathy Allen. We continue to work with Wesley to support good results in all subjects.

18. The head of Nutgrove retired and the Trust was involved in the appointment of the acting head for the present year. The experienced head of Rosehill was commissioned to support the Trust providing school improvement support and mentoring to the other schools as required. The Wesley Trust worked with the collective Trade Unions to establish a Recognition Agreement for all Wesley Trust Schools nationally moving forward.

19. During Autumn 2019 there were significant changes to the personnel within the Trust. David Lamper stepped down as founding CEO to enable Julie-Ann Hewitt (CEO of Acorn Trust) to take up the role. This change was recognition within the Trust that the CEO needed to be based closer to the schools in the Trust to facilitate collaborative working and provide hands on support to the schools. David Lamper led the Trust well during his tenure and established the strong foundations upon which we will continue to grow and develop. Julie-Ann has extensive experience of leading an academy trust and will utilise this knowledge in developing the Wesley Trust. At the same time Alan Davies retired as Chair of the Trust. David Kershaw, the Vice-Chair has now been appointed as Chair. Alan played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Trust and its early development, building up a good reputation for the Trust and developing its profile; David Kershaw has committed to continuing to build upon this.

20. Growth is a priority of the Trust and considerable work has taken place to facilitate this.

- The CEO and Chair have been proactive in visiting Methodist Schools to promote the Wesley Trust and the benefits for schools in joining the Trust. They also continue working at raising the profile of the Trust.
- Good progress was made with the Manchester Diocese of the Church of England - this was an area where there had been barriers to the academisation of Methodist Schools: the protocol for

jointly founded Methodist/Anglican schools to academise was approved by the Wesley Trust and by the Diocese.

- One of the ambitions for the Wesley Trust is to open a new Methodist School - this needs to be done through the Free Schools programme. The Wesley Trust has responded to the requests of Methodist Districts and Circuits to explore the possibility of establishing a new school. Conversations have taken place with church leaders in:
 - **Saltash, Cornwall** - this was not a DfE target area for Free School - so we explored the possibility of establishing a new faith school - the DfE have not yet given permission or recent precedent for this
 - **Northampton** - this was progressed to a major bid through DfE Wave 13 and the WT was interviewed by the DfE - the usual model of a local school expanding to take on a new adjacent school was eventually the preferred solution.
 - **Colchester** - this was progressed to a major bid through 'local presumption' with Essex Local Authority - the usual model of a local school expanding to take on a new adjacent school was eventually the preferred solution.
 - **Chilmington Green, Ashford, Kent** - meetings have taken place with Kent LA - the next requirement for new schools on this development will be considered in 2023.
- Considerable work has been undertaken to explore the possibility of a merger between Wesley Trust and the Acorn Trust. The Acorn Trust currently has 2 Methodist primary schools within Wigan. There is very strong alignment between the vision and values of both Trusts and the merger would further strengthen the work of both trusts. Proposals for the merger of the Trusts are brought in MC/20/50. It is proposed that the merged Multi-Academy Trust would adopt the current Articles of the Wesley Trust thus keeping it close to the Methodist Church (as envisaged in the founding of the Wesley Trust) but keep the Company number of the Acorn Trust which would enable it to benefit from the sponsorship status of the Acorn Trust in the further expansion of the Multi-Academy Trust. The merged Trust would have a new name indicating its close affiliation to the Methodist Church but also welcome community schools with no current Methodist affiliation.

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

21. 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.
22. Our schools offer frequent, moving and creative opportunities which invite children to **worship** in formal and informal settings. Children experience a breadth of styles of worship, from the grandeur of the cathedral to reflective prayer spaces in their own classroom. Many schools have an outdoor prayer walk or incorporate worship in their Forest School. Around the schools group, the quality and creativity of what is offered in worship is often very high. This is supported by our training for chaplains and the high quality resources for worship available on the Methodist Schools website. Schools are encouraged to maintain an attitude of awe and wonder outside defined worship times, so that marvelling and reflecting on life and the world are woven into the fabric of school life. The SIAMS framework reinforces this, looking for worship as the 'beating heart' of the life of our schools.
23. 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 themselves on the extent to which they emphasise opportunities for rounded human development by expanding children's horizons through co-curricular experiences. In contrast to the struggling state of religious education nationally, the schools group aims for Methodist Schools to be beacons of good practice. The Methodist Schools website hosts the digitised and updated version of the Methodist RE Resource with material on distinctive features such as the covenant, the Methodist Art Collection, JPIT, All We Can and learning about John Wesley. This is

available not just to Methodist Schools but has been promoted across the RE teaching community and the wider Church. A video is in production, telling the background 'Methodist Story' to support staff in developing the ethos of our schools. The website also hosts teaching materials on aspects of the legacy of the Reformation, such as a popular lesson on the first woman to be ordained in Britain, and valuable material on world citizenship. It is a feature of our school communities that we 'watch over one another in love'. Across the group the high standards of pastoral care in our schools are much valued. But also valuable is our support for staff and the support afforded by belonging to a group. This is particularly true for our headteachers, for whom the role can often be a lonely vocation. Our close relationships, caring oversight and the fellowship of our headteacher communities allows for a fellowship for headteachers, which is otherwise often lacking.

24. **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) continues the work of World AIMS and gives 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 continue to link up with the work of *Action for Children* and 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.
25. 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. Our schools are denominational but not confessional. This means that they do not proselytise or limit pupils' own faith choices. 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.

***RESOLUTION

49/1. The Council receives the report.