

Methodist Schools Committee: Annual Report 2017/18

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Dr Roger L Walton, Chair of the Committee
Resolution	50/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To provide an annual report to the Conference, through the Council, as required by SO 343A(iii)
Main Points	Joint working and planned initiatives Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST) Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST) The Wesley Trust
Background Context	Reports 29 and 30 to the 2017 Conference

Introduction

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

Joint Working and Initiatives

2. The Trusts have worked together in the following ways:
 - a. Actively engaging with the Methodist Schools Committee (MSC).
 - b. Commencing 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 a Schools' educational strategy for the Church.
 - c. Through the Ethos Development Group, chaired by the Revd Peter Whittaker, sharing experience and needs across the Trusts including, for example, the new SIAMS framework.
 - 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; at the MIST Schools Conference in April we welcomed Heads of Methodist Schools not only from the UK but also Ireland, South Africa and Australia.
 - f. Adapted staff responsibilities, made new appointments and established arrangements for servicing needs of the three Trusts from a shared Methodist Schools office.
 - g. Collaboratively preparing and presenting materials and resources for worship at the Conference and working together to offer a Methodist Schools' presence for Conference representatives to meet with and engage.

Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST)

3. 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 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 13 MAST schools are academies in non-Methodist groups; this requires a particular kind of MAST oversight to ensure that the academy chains are honouring the schools' Methodist foundations.
 - In OFSTED terms, just over 91% of Methodist schools are currently judged good or outstanding
 - In the Statutory Inspections of Anglican and Methodist Schools (known as SIAMS) 98% of our schools are good or better; 65% are outstanding. Amongst church schools across the country, this is a particularly good marker.
4. In September 2017, Alan Davies succeeded the Revd 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 performance is monitored and that they are supported when they encounter periods of difficulty or transition.
 5. MAST schools are well regarded for their standards as a group overall, which is testimony to the quality of their work; where they have gone through periods of vulnerability, MAST can demonstrate that it has a creditable track record of supporting schools to improve. This is particularly important as, in most parts of the country, Local Authorities are no longer able to support school performance. However, Methodist schools are about much more than test results and all our schools are required to give a high profile to breadth of curriculum and well-being across the life of the whole school.
 6. A particular project for MAST this year has been the development of the new Church school inspection framework (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 programme for a number of years, cumulative changes in education and wider society have led to the development of a deeper schedule focused on the strands of: vision, wisdom, 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 places and change is always challenging, initial consultation suggests that this more reflective approach has been welcomed.
 7. MAST has been able to give significant high quality support to a number of schools and become a more familiar presence for the majority of Methodist schools over the course of the year. MAST has run two major schools' conferences, governor training, SIAMS training and new Headteacher support. There has been particular work with a small number of schools experiencing complex issues. Almost all the schools have been visited at least once and some several times. In the support of the schools, the love of the local circuit and Methodist congregations is invaluable. However, as a small organisation with a limited infrastructure, the ongoing issue for MAST is one of capacity , not capability. Going 'to those who need us most' sometimes means that those with more general needs have felt less part of the group and two part-time education leaders brought in by the group have been very stretched. From spring 2019, the support of the Southlands Methodist Trust and the Westminster College Oxford

Trust has meant that MAST has been able to appoint a full-time Head of Service. This will ensure that the substance and reach of the excellent support MAST has been able to provide to schools in targeted areas will be extended much more widely and with much greater impact. This will also be true of MAST's already strong reputation in the wider national education community.

Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST)

8. Facts and Figures:

- There are currently 21 independent schools linked in some way to MIST: Trust Schools (9), Acquired Schools (5), 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 for the 9 Trust Schools and as Sole Member of the Trusts of the 5 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
 - Fifteen schools have boarders as well as day pupils giving a significant national and international reach to the work of Methodist Education.
 - Four 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 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.
 - In academic year 2017/18 MIST schools provided £5,867,000 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 MIST (Trust and Acquired) schools totalling £80,000 and a further £32,000 for such families attending Associated or Affiliated schools.
9. The Department for Education has now launched the Boarding School Partnership Scheme (BSP), inviting schools to offer long term bursaries for young people currently Looked After in the care of their Local Authority. More than 25% of the first schools to get involved in the scheme are Methodist Schools. Lord Agnew commented, *"We know that boarding schools can be highly effective in improving both social and educational outcomes for vulnerable young people who could otherwise have quite chaotic lives. This commitment from so many of our best boarding schools to work with local authorities and subsidise boarding school placements will have a hugely positive impact on many vulnerable children"*.
10. Outside of this scheme, Methodist Independent Schools have a strong reputation for working with young people in need. For example, at Queens College (Taunton) and at Shebbear College (Devon), several Syrian refugee children continue to benefit from a fresh start at school in the UK thanks to partnerships with local charities.
11. 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. Woodhouse Grove School and One In A Million Free School (OIAMFS), Bradford, have signed a

Memorandum of Understanding detailing a new collaboration between them. Kent College has established a social mobility fund to enable disadvantaged young people from the inner city to join the College in the 6th Form. Following the dissolution of Cornwall Council's music service at the end of 2014, Truro School was instrumental in helping to establish The Cornwall Music Service Trust (CMST) which is now hosted at Truro School. CMST now employs and manages well over 100 peripatetic music teachers and music therapy teachers, delivering a music service to 82% of all Cornish schools.

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 Kent College Canterbury visited their school and community partner schemes in Tanzania. Since 2005, Kent College Pembury has sponsored the Shree Deurali Primary English School based in the remote region of Lahachok in Nepal; over these years KCP has funded new classrooms, toilets, fresh water supplies, provided teaching resources and funded teacher training. In all such partnership activity, however, the student visits leave a lasting impression. A student provided a personal experience presentation at the Training Day for leaders of G2L AIMS (Global to Local Action in Methodist Schools); that day the delegates also participated in useful sessions from All We Can, the National Citizenship Service and Action for Children.
13. These international partnerships are not Western voyeurism generated from feel-good fundraising; they are making a lasting impact in the communities and changing attitudes in our students. 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; there have been a number of teacher exchanges and latterly student exchanges and placements and the initial partnership has now developed to include the joint building of a new rural nursery and primary school. Some new partnerships are underway too, such as the shared commitment of Truro High School, Queens College and Ashville College to sponsor 20 children from a village in Cambodia to attend school and Kingsley School's commitment to build a girls' dormitory for a school in Uganda.
14. 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 announcement of a 43% increase in the employer's contribution to teachers' pension scheme, 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.

The Wesley Trust

15. The Wesley Trust was created in 2017 to provide a vehicle 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. The Trust is unusual in being accepted by the DfE as a new multi-academy trust with aspirations to cover the whole of the UK whilst encouraging its schools to maintain and develop flexible local relationships as they chose. This is unlike Diocesan Trusts established locally by the Anglican and Catholic Churches.

16. Since its establishment the Wesley Trust has brought together an impressive Board of Trustees with an appropriate range of skills including eminent educationalists as well as those with expertise in law, HR, finance and property, both from within, and independent from, the Methodist Church. Its Founding 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). 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. The CEO is seconded part time from one of the MIST schools and there are close relationships envisaged with the newly appointed staffing in MAST.
17. The Wesley Trust converted its first academy on 1 September 2018 following a great deal of work to resolve various issues in gaining approval by the Schools Commissioners' Office. The first academy is Nutgrove in St Helens. (It is likely that Nutgrove was also the first maintained Methodist School in the country having been first opened in 1811.) The second school became an academy on 1 December 2018: Rosehill Methodist School which is in Oldham.
18. A number of other discussions are continuing with schools in the North West. A particular area of work is being undertaken with the Manchester Diocese 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 Heads and Governing Bodies of schools have been undertaken around Canterbury and Ashford, in Telford, Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire.
19. Another opportunity for the Wesley Trust is the creation of new schools in line with the Education Commission's recommendation to the 2012 Conference. Any new schools in England over this period have to be set up through the Government's Free School initiative although a new route, under the Voluntary Aided category, is currently being explored by the Department. As a result of extensive local work, an application through the DfE Wave 13 for Free Schools has been made in collaboration with the Northampton District. The possibility of making a similar application in Cornwall was rejected because of the specific criteria in Wave 13. Another opportunity is a new Methodist School in Essex; an application would have to be made through a 'local presumption competition' run by the Local Authority with a similar detailed application to the National round.

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

20. Methodist Schools continue to be distinguished by their commitment to a distinctive ethos. This has particularly been reinforced over the 18 months through the focus on context and vision in the new SIAMS schedule, prompting schools to revisit the fundamental questions of 'Who are we? Why are here? How then do we live?' or, phrased in Methodist terms, 'What is the work of God in this place?' and then ensuring that this distinctive understanding of purpose is understood across the whole school community. One school, for example, has built its vision statement around the strapline, 'I shall lift my eyes to the hills': for this particular school community in a socially and educationally disadvantaged, mono-cultural pocket in the North West of England, leaders have identified the imperative of extending children's horizons, socially, intellectually and spiritually. Several others amongst the schools have focused their thinking around bringing, 'Life in all its fullness'.
21. It is common for church schools to describe worship as the 'beating heart' of the school. Worship is collective rather than corporate, invitational not compelled, taking into account the range of standpoints and experiences of people in the school. Its character is distinctively Methodist but its traditions can vary according to the context of the school. For example, at one of our schools the recent inspection commented on the vibrant nature of worship and the

ways in which it enriches the already strong relationships with the local church. Through worship, children are deepening their understanding of what it means to live by Christian values in everyday life. They sing, and sign, the hymns enthusiastically – particularly their school song, written by the local Methodist minister to embed their commitment to doing ‘all the good we can’ and entitled, ‘The Wesley Can Can’! In another school, the anniversary and rededication of the school chapel was celebrated with a procession of banners made by the children and young people, a powerful sermon and moving singing. Our schools are committed to ensuring that worship is engaging, creative and participative – in the planning and delivery but also in the monitoring and evaluation. ‘Assemblies’ are not only important for the children, but also for the parents and families who also sometimes attend. They are often the only contact which people have with the message of the church and the person of its ministers. They have often led to the reported comment from parents, ‘For us, you are the church’.

22. All our schools are heavily invested in Learning and Caring. The quality of pastoral care remains an outstanding feature and one which strongly attracts parents from all backgrounds to Methodist education. Mental health and wellbeing is given particular priority. Many of our schools have invested in Mental Health First Aid training and the new SIAMS framework asks inspectors to consider how the school contributes to the wellbeing of people within and, sometimes, beyond the school. Our schools are already, to a large extent, centres of learning excellence including for international learners. The Methodist Schools website continues to develop as a home for supportive resources for learning themes which particularly support our ethos including a training module for school staff, and SIAMS inspectors, about the Methodist story and approach in education. There are strong contributions from the Pastoral Visitor, as lead chaplain of the group who supports staff with a range of assembly resources. There are also strong links with All We Can, with a growing number of Methodist schools taking up the Partner Schools programme and widespread take up of the seasonal resources. It is a hallmark of our schools that children learn about living ‘on a wider map’. A particular initiative in one of our schools this year is the work with children’s author, Onjali Rauf, nominee for the Blue Peter and Waterstones Children’s Book of the Year award. Her story about ‘The Boy at the Back of the Class’ resonates particularly with schools helping children to understand the refugee crisis. She will be addressing a fringe session of the Methodist Conference about her work when it meets in Birmingham in June. This also indicates the schools’ commitments to service at both a global and local level, which has been mentioned many times above. The offer of the schools also represents the service of the Church, in local communities and as a presence in the national education debate.
23. ‘For us, you are our church’. As public bodies, Methodist Schools might be cautious in their use of the language of ‘evangelism’ but, in reality, telling God’s story is their full-time occupation. Our schools live out the words of Psalm 67, ‘That your ways may be known upon earth’. They keep the ‘rumour of God’ alive, often within communities for whom the Gospel message seems distant or irrelevant. Through the schools’ work with children and their wider communications with families, the seed of the message can fall on otherwise barely cultivated ground. All the schools express a clear Christian vision for their work and articulate Christian values, exploring constantly with children what it might mean to live them out. Under SIAMS our schools’ vision and policies are measured according to the extent to which they articulate Christian imperatives such as forgiveness and reconciliation. Children who have struggled elsewhere speak of finding a fresh start or life-changing opportunities through moving to one of our schools. The Christian way of being is the visible plumbline toward which the life of the school aspires, from Early Years to Sixth Form. Many of the schools have adopted the ‘Do all the good you can’ saying as a school motto or school prayer. In one school it forms the chorus of the school song, with around 400 children singing out with gusto, ‘We will do (clap) all the good we can in (clap) all the ways we can...’ on a weekly basis.

24. As schools construct their ethos more visibly around the headings of *Our Calling*, they are supported by the local minister or chaplain and are supported centrally by the Ethos Development Group. One of the MAST chaplains has worked with their new Headteacher to recalibrate the school's work under the four *Our Calling* headings and she is sharing this work more widely amongst the chaplain group. For another of our chaplaincy vacancies, candidates were challenged to make their presentation to the panel on how the schools live out *Our Calling* and how the chaplain can support this. The presentation of the successful candidate was stunning – and will now be shared more widely to support our school chaplains in their ministry.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 50/1. The Council receives the report.**