

Merging MIST and MAST - The Developing Story

Contact name and details:	The Revd David G Deeks - Chair of both MIST and MAST david.deeks@gmail.com
---------------------------	---

Introduction

The Methodist Independent Schools Trust (**MIST**) directly oversees 10 independent schools, 9 of which are all-age schools with a Methodist foundation and one is an acquired prep school. The trust works in close cooperation with 3 further 'Associated' Methodist independent schools; and the other 2 Methodist independent schools in the UK are affiliated to MIST.

The Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (**MAST**) oversees and supports, on behalf of the Methodist Council, 65 schools of a religious character in the maintained sector: almost all of them are primary schools and 6 of them are academies. A significant proportion of the schools/academies are joint Anglican/Methodist or ecumenical in character.

All Methodist schools, independent and maintained, share the same Ethos Statement.

The 2012 Conference adopted a wide range of recommendations relating to the Methodist Church's engagement with formal education, as proposed by the Education Commission. Among the resolutions was a direction for MIST and MAST to merge no later than 2017.

What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all that is happening in relation to MAST schools, even less to MIST (which reports directly to the Conference). This report identifies one significant change of emphasis and direction for MAST, which is presented for general endorsement by the Council. And it indicates in the light of that some of the steps being taken towards the formal merger of MIST and MAST, on the one hand, and the coming together of the two families of schools on the other.

1 MAST has identified a change of focus: MAST will encourage academisation among its maintained schools.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 MAST has the authority to sponsor academies.

1.1.2 MAST may originally have been imagined as a nation-wide multi-academy trust (MAT) for Methodist maintained schools becoming academies.

1.1.3 In truth, MAST set itself firmly against becoming a nation-wide equivalent of an Anglican Diocesan Board of Education (DBE).

This judgement was made in the context of

- MAST's limited resources;

- MAST's heavy dependence on DBEs, notably where there are joint Anglican/Methodist schools;
- The DfE's reduction of support for over-large and geographically over-extended chains of academies.

1.1.4 In adherence to the thrust of the Methodist Church's policy, as agreed in response to the report of the Education Commission to the Conference in 2012, MAST has taken a stance of neutrality in relation to academies.

This has meant that there was no explicit encouragement of schools to think about becoming academies, where they were entitled by their educational achievements to do so. Discussion of the pros and cons of academisation has been the prerogative of the the local governors.

1.1.5 However, where a MAST school, so entitled, has chosen to become an academy (a converter academy) and where a school has been required by the Secretary of State to become an academy (a sponsored academy), MAST has given its best advice and supported the necessary processes through personal support from a MAST officer and through instructions from MAST to its solicitors to ensure that the legal changes were enacted.

1.1.6 In these processes MAST has adopted the following policies:

- Where a joint school has become an academy, the school has been placed under a diocesan MAT, on to which a MAST-nominated Director has been appointed. (Wainfleet, Lincolnshire, and Emmanuel, Sheffield, are examples.)
- A local MAT has been established in the case of Methodist-only schools becoming converter academies (eg Bedford Hall and Westleigh, Wigan, under the Acorn Trust). The MAT has a MAST-appointed Director and the power to control the number of Directors; and has established lines of communication between MAST and the MAT to ensure that MAST can be appropriately supportive.

1.2 Why a change of focus?

1.2.1 Resources

Whoever forms the next government, it is overwhelmingly probable that the academy programme will continue and (especially among primary schools) will accelerate. If MAST is to retain any influence with its own schools, it needs to be pro-active in the overall programme of academisation.

MAST's financial resources are very limited. It is unlikely that the Church will increase its grant to MAST and may not even sustain current the current level of funding (£31K per annum for 2 years only, 2013-2015, which only meets the Trust's ongoing administrative costs). What remains of a DfE capacity grant towards preparing MAST to support academisation is a very small amount (£37K).

MAST cannot reasonably expect significantly to increase its income by making a charge for its services on MAST schools because:

- The joint schools have a long tradition of paying to DBEs for services provided and will be disinclined to pay also to MAST, especially when MAST is not mimicking a DBE in providing a wide range of professional support services.

- The Methodist-only schools have developed over the generations their own access to a range of support services (largely local authorities and sometimes also a DBE). Even where LA support has been scaled down, they are unlikely to turn to MAST for the support they need: they will turn to locally available services.

MAST's best hope of finding additional income is by being an active encourager of academisation processes, which would give MAST the opportunity for a legitimate percentage of money provided by the DfE for this work - both in the set-up stage and in funding ongoing support.

1.2.2 The Church's basic philosophy

While academies vary in quality, like any other category of school, on the whole they have demonstrated that the 'independence' granted to them encourages and facilitates creative and high quality teaching and learning, with improved outcomes for children.

The Church's ambition is that each and every child should, on a fair basis, have access to the best opportunities for developing their aptitudes, knowledge, skills, understanding and life-opportunities and realise their individual potential for all-round growth and for responsible participation in society. In the light of what has been achieved in academies, the Church can give general support to the academy model of organising schooling for children, not least in areas of social and economic deprivation, and encourage more schools to become academies.

The Church is confident that establishing a Christian/Methodist ethos in its schools enhances the overall educational outcomes for students. The Church is equally confident that if, through a Methodist-influenced MAT, its ethos can reach out into non-Church-sponsored schools who relate to such a MAT, that will be good news for children.

There is considerable interest currently in many areas of the country in the Methodist Church, in partnership with the Church of England and other denominations, sponsoring new schools.

Where such schools are constructed by LAs, the DfE insists they must be academies.

NOTE. MAST has kept open a door for conversation with groups exploring the formation of free schools; but currently has no particular partnerships in place to pursue this option.

1.3 How could MAST encourage academisation in practice?

MAST will offer a package containing the following elements:

- Advice about transitional processes towards becoming an academy;
- Support and advice to ensure or improve the quality of educational achievement for children in preparation for and through the process of transition; this includes leadership training towards new models of headship;
- Guidance about procuring quality support services locally (accounting, HR, property management, supplies, etc) at competitive rates, from a range of suppliers;
- Resources and consultancy to deepen the Christian/Methodist ethos of a school (through RE, worship, chaplaincy, local Methodist support, global development and citizenship education);
- Training for members of governing bodies and MATs;

- Legal services.

MAST intends to have available a range of professional resources to enable this package to achieve its desired outcomes: MAST's Executive Officer; two consultants; access to the relevant departments at Roehampton and Oxford Brookes universities; Methodist independent school expertise; and PWW (solicitor).

MAST will aim to pilot this process in the coming 12 months, by facilitating academisation in up to 4 instances.

MAST will recoup the cost of these services from the public funds allocated to academisation, and will be able to accumulate additional resources to develop its own work¹ with an agreed 'top-slice' of these funds. Understandably MAST will need to access some initial funding to invest in the programme of academisation of its schools: it will explore with MIST in the first instance whether it can offer such seed-corn investment.

2. **MAST and MIST will both flourish through ever greater growing together in mutual support**

2.1 **Background**

The Methodist Conference has directed MIST and MAST to merge by 2017.

MIST and MAST share the same Ethos Statement.

It is hoped that World Aims² will be able to develop resources for primary/prep school age children, which will be available to MAST as well as MIST schools.

2.2 **A change of culture**

The coming together of the 2 Trusts requires a change of culture in both and in both families of schools.

This will be enabled by a two-track process - a short-term and a medium-term process:
Short-term. The legal merging of the Trusts, to form the Methodist Schools Trust (MST), at an early stage - realistically by 2016. (See section 3 below.)

Medium-term. The development of awareness, through mutual encounter, around both groups of schools that all are 'members one of another' in a single Methodist Family of Schools (MFS), nurturing relationships of mutual support at a regional (and national) level. (See section 4 below).

¹ One of the pressing needs for additional resources would be in establishing data monitoring systems and excellent communications with all MAST schools and academies, so that at an early stage, signals of a school or academy encountering difficulties in educational provision could be identified and the school offered support and advice.

² World Aims is a partnership between MIST and All We Can, which provides resources for education in global development and citizenship to be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum.

3 **Merging MIST and MAST to form MST: a short-term goal**

3.1 Legally this can take place very straightforwardly. Basically MIST, renamed as Methodist Schools Trust (MST), operating within its existing purposes, takes responsibility for MAST.

3.2 MST to be populated by, say, no more than 14 people who:

- have a sufficient breadth of concern and interest to cover responsibilities for schools in both sectors (maintained and independent);
- are passionate about harvesting the full potential of a single Trust (delivering, to mutual advantage, the strengths of difference, complementarity and cooperation);
- will set clear guidelines and priorities for possible future developments that will represent and embody our ethos and values (of which MST is the principal guardian and advocate), eg
 - the highest possible quality of RE and school worship which is confidently open to public scrutiny in a secular and multi-faith society
 - doing everything possible to enable all schools to deliver to all their students the highest quality of all-round education and personal development
 - engaging with the education of children with special needs (social, physical and mental)
 - academies and free schools
 - teaching schools
 - overseas schools
 - national and global citizenship and global development education
 - taking under MST's umbrella existing schools in both the maintained and independent sectors, on condition that they espouse our ethos and values.

3.3 However **each existing Trust has responsibilities and concerns that require specialised knowledge and commitments on the part of trustees**. How are they to be adequately fulfilled?

MIST

Is the legal owner of 10 schools (within the 15 Methodist independent schools), with large financial and property resources to oversee. Much of the responsibility is delegated to local governors (who are volunteers) but the reporting and accountability of each school to MIST is currently being reviewed, to enhance its quality and reliability. We are yet to determine how a governing body, through its Chair, will be immediately accountable to MIST and responsible (with the Head) for performance and future planning.

Has arrangements in place to encourage mutual consultation and sharing among the 15 schools (with 13 fully involved) - eg termly meetings of Heads and Chairs of Governors, and appropriate constituted Committees to facilitate proper stewardship of these immense resources.

Has committed to enhance the quality of support from MIST to inspire ever greater standards and generally to improve the links between the Trust and the schools, by

- appointing a new senior staff team (General Secretary and Director of Finance);
- expecting trustees to have some basic knowledge of their schools, through occasional visits.

MAST

Has some formal procedures and responsibilities to fulfil, eg

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) - appointing inspectors, training them, coordinating inspections, guaranteeing quality reporting, collaboration with the National Society;

Scrutiny of Foundation Governor appointing procedures
Scrutiny of Admission procedures
Relationships with a significant number of partner Diocesan Boards of Education (through the Directors of Education)
Formal appointments to Diocesan Multi-Academy Trusts (in the case of joint academies) and establishing and overseeing MATs in the case of Methodist-only academies

Must monitor school performance generally and take responsibility for working with under-performing schools, facilitating advice, training etc

Must advise on a range of possible developments (academisation, involvement in proposals for free schools, advising on processes towards establishing new schools and preparing, with partners, bids for new schools).

Currently MAST relies heavily on the commitment of James Royal (Head of an Anglican/Methodist school), as its Executive Officer - for which a termly payment is made to his school for 2 days/week secondment and support with car hire and technology; a small indirect subvention from MIST (to pay for MAST administration and MAST's accounts to be dealt with by MIST office staff); considerable volunteer time from highly qualified members of MAST (e.g. in areas like SIAMS and technical advice and oversight); and from a veritable army of local well-wishers/visitors and governors, presbyters and lay people performing chaplaincy roles, together with District Schools Officers - who also encourage Methodist support of community schools generally in local neighbourhoods).

Questions currently being discussed: **How are these responsibilities to be adequately fulfilled under MST, in terms of staffing, resources and structures? And how will MST sustain parity of esteem between the two sectors of education - though the responsibilities and resources attached to them are so different?**

- 3.4 There are some structural developments that could be made quickly, to facilitate ongoing cooperation.
 - 3.4.1 The MIST Ethos Committee is due to get under way later this year. From its inception it will have a 'MAST dimension', to enable sharing at the most fundamental level applicable to all Methodist schools; and in particular to enable chaplaincy models and experience, RE and worship resources to be exchanged across the sectors.
 - 3.4.2 Mention has been made of the World Aims project, which has been well grounded in the Methodist independent schools for a decade, principally in the senior schools. Developments in the next phase could include resources accessible to prep and primary schools, to sponsor age-appropriate development education and global citizenship.
 - 3.4.3 A joint Business and Legal Affairs Committee could be established to oversee a range of related initiatives and needs, applicable to MIST and MAST and their joint working, to include:
 - MIST acquisitions of schools
 - A MAST business plan

- New school projects: new-build schools/academies; academy sponsorships; schools overseas; academisation of maintained schools
- The development of Teaching Schools
- Opportunities for joint purchasing

4 **Medium-term developments**

- 4.1 MST to oversee both the best interests of each family of schools and the growth and development through collaboration and cooperation of the MFS.
- 4.2 MST to encourage members of staff and governors to invest in the winning of hearts and minds to the advantages of cooperation and collaboration, mutual learning and joint training.

NOTE. In many cases there are clusters of MAST schools with no neighbouring MIST school (eg in the North-west of England, whose nearest independent school is Rydal-Penhros). In other situations, there are MIST schools (e.g. Truro) with no neighbouring MAST schools. Both MIST and MAST schools will be looking for partners beyond the Methodist family, for support and to offer support.

Government policy of late has been to encourage independent schools to offer help to community schools in their locality, sponsor academies and create free schools. Linked to this is the discussion of 'public benefit' in the case of independent schools, which is likely to involve more than bursaries and facilities made available for community use. However public policy develops, **it is natural for any school in the Methodist tradition to look outside itself to develop partnerships with other schools (of varied types) for relationships of *mutual nurture*.**

- 4.3 Build on shared experiences so far: eg

Barbara Easton (Methodist Church Director of Education) works committedly with both MIST and MAST, and is a strong advocate in the Church for their working together.

James Royal and Sally-Anne Huang, respectively Heads of a MAST and a MIST school, have worked together over a period, to draw experience from both sectors. (Sally-Anne leaves the MIST family in the summer.)

In the Canterbury/Kent area there are easy geographical connections between MIST and MAST schools and joint activities and sharing of resources have happened creatively.

We need urgently to extend the Canterbury experience to include the SE cluster of MIST and MAST schools; and to pioneer in other regions an opportunity to 'break the ice' and bring together, say, Heads of both MAST and MIST schools to explore practical options for mutual sharing and support. (The formal clustering in regions is already agreed; it is largely in harmony with the regional grouping of the Church's Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network - which should be a natural ally and enabler in this process. And through such regional groupings there is a natural way into the regional devolution of the Schools Commissioner's Office.)

A joint bid for a new academy, though unsuccessful, was prepared by MAST and Kent College Pembury working together.

There have been some shared governor training sessions for governors of MIST and MAST schools.

The new senior staff of MIST have cooperation/merger between MIST and MAST written into the background of their jobs and into their 'normal' activities. In the next few months, developing awareness of MAST will be part of their induction.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

62/1. The Council receives the report.

62/2. The Council gives general approval to the change of focus of MAST, in section 1.