

# Transformational governance

‘When we govern well, we transform lives and communities.’

EXPANDING lives through education is part of our commitment, as Methodists, to the transformation of life for all. In 2021 the Methodist Conference re-committed itself to this work with the school strategy “Transforming Lives”. It gave a name — and a focus — to what was already occurring within our schools because it wanted to highlight and support everybody involved in Methodist education and beyond.

Volunteers are an integral part of the Church’s ability to fulfil that commitment and without them Methodist education would not be what it is, never mind what it aspires to be. Across the country, Methodists are engaged in transformational governance, aspiring for the best.

Being a governor is a way of offering practical love in action. We see volunteers within our schools transforming lives as they build links with families, communities, local authorities and academy trusts. Our governors balance relationship building with regulation and compliance; challenge with support. They make sure finance, safeguarding and pupil care are all secure and that our schools carry the Methodist genome into communities. Volunteers give freely of their time, skills, expertise and souls to their schools. As one governor said, “This school finds its way into your heart”.

Good governance is not about doing, it is about enabling the doers to do and



do it well. As Ken Wales says within this editorial: when “... we govern well, we transform ...” Transformational Governance goes further: it takes in accountability, ethics, inclusivity and transparency to foster a culture of integrity, equity and inclusion. Transformational governance asks: What is right? What is for the best?

The stakes are high, as Mr Wesley recognised through his own commitment to education. I am sure you have heard the statistic before: more than 24,000 pupils attend 81 schools with “Methodist” in their name and above the doors. Volunteer School Governors can make a real, worthwhile and lasting impact on future citizens and on society. There are many roles and opportunities, as many Methodists have already discovered.

In April 2023, some 250 Methodist educationalists and leaders from all parts of the globe (except Antarctica) also agreed that this work is worthwhile. We gathered in Bristol and Bath with the shared overarching aim of transforming young people’s lives, of finding commonality (“Togeth-

er, Stronger”) and working for deep change. Contexts could not have been more different, yet conclusions could not have been more similar. This was joyful fellowship and Methodist Schools are on a long-term mission to realise that commonality of purpose across all institutions with Methodist-foundations.

### Answering the call

The case studies alongside this editorial are from governors or trustees involved in Methodist Schools, all of them volunteers. Many will tell you that this is not just a role they fulfil, but a call they answered. A governor’s work is more than showing up (although showing up and being seen is important); a governor quickly becomes an expert in finance and budgets, buildings, risk, educational standards and inspection, safeguarding and well-being, and most of all people, the pupils, parents and staff.

Here’s how some of our governors speak about their work:

“To serve, to support the head, to give something back and contribute and enjoy seeing pupils thrive and achieve.”

“I see first-hand how we are providing children with every opportunity to flourish and know I am making a difference.”

There is something beyond volunteering, beyond doing all the good they can, that has an undoubted spiritual dimension. A faith-led decision to serve children and communities brings Methodists and non-Methodists alike in partnership to serve as governors of Methodist Schools.

### Supporting partnership

“[We form a] ... supportive partnership with the school community ... a partnership based upon trust and mutual respect, not blinkered in any way, but able to see and act clearly at all times ...”

“Partnership is necessary, inevitable.”

Our 81 schools do not act in a vacuum. They are embedded in the community, forging relationships with the local churches, circuits and Districts, with other faiths, with the parents and families of those 24,000 pupils, with local businesses and local government. In these days of austerity and inflation, schools are food banks and breakfast-givers; sharers of resources and facilities, vital links to other schools outside the Methodist family and partnering with them.

As a volunteer school governor you would not act in a vacuum either. There is no silo mentality. You will join a group of like-minded volunteers who also seek to represent better their schools and bring



their diverse experiences to the group. One person’s view of a challenge is rarely the same as the other person’s and there is strength and learning in that. There is transformational governance in that, too. God gives us different perspectives not to divide but to teach us to find that commonality, to make decisions that are of benefit to all. It is a gift.

### Stewardship

“As each one has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4. 10).

The call to stewardship is a key tenet of Methodist faith and practice, and governance in schools reflects that same sense of service.

Stewarding the assets, of course, but also of aims, values and mission of the school to transform lives. Governors may ask: How does strategy promote and safeguard the children and the schools? How does their oversight and monitoring of leadership ensure that the outcomes for pupils are in line with them? By asking questions, especially the uncomfortable ones, we are fulfilling a calling in God’s world among his people.

### The critical friend

“To challenge, question and verify; listen, hear and support ... to be that all important critical friend.”

Part of governance is offering challenge to the schools. Respectful debate is to be welcomed and the establishment of trust between those running schools and those governing them is the single most important factor in enabling such debate to take place. It improves governance and better outcomes for the pupils.

Governors have the oversight role and often the distance to be able to see things differently. The ability to question respectfully; listen hard and well; hear what is said and unsaid; challenge what feels necessary; verify carefully. All this makes up the complete

package that is labelled, the “Critical Friend”. Not only that, but good governance also encourages and engenders reflection. This requires headspace and headspace requires time. Time is precious and reflection is far too important a part of transformational governance to be sidelined.

“Everyone is given time to look beyond themselves, towards the other and to others.”

### The pastoral role

“Just quietly listening is all that is needed.”

“Each is an individual, needing support and recognition. Cultures, religions and languages intermingle.”

Everyone in a school community is important and their well-being is central to the emotional health of a school and its capacity to function effectively. The people, along with the culture and ethos, are the foundations of strategy and operations. There can be no transformation without people and pastoral care of them.

The head — often a figurehead — is central to this.

We have all been aware of the growing pressures on schools and the head shoulders the public burden of these. Governors ensure they do not do this alone; that no head ever feels the pressure alone.

### Where are you?

“There was a shared sense of purpose and values, with a commitment to transform lives through education.”

God’s first question to humankind in the Bible is: “Where are you?”

How we show up as school leaders and faith leaders really matters. Schools transform lives. Methodist Schools is engaged in Transforming Lives. As volunteer governors responsible for the educational lives of the children in our care, you would strive to keep feet planted on the earth and eyes lifted to the sky.

We must always remember that faith and values underpin our schools and our behaviours as stewards: open mindedness; kindness; warm heartedness; supportiveness; and inclusiveness.

What could be more important than a role in making future citizens?

For further information about volunteering as a governor visit the Methodist Schools website ([www.methodistschools.org.uk/governors](http://www.methodistschools.org.uk/governors)).



# A partnership based on trust and respect Maintaining the right balance

ON September 1, 2022, I changed hats and from wearing a hat labelled "Recently retired headteacher", I began to wear the "Newly appointed chair of governors" hat here at Moorlands School, Leeds, and alongside me, also wearing equally brand-new hats, were my seven fellow governors. A new challenge for all eight of us indeed.

So upon reflection, what for me have been the highlights of this first year? Well initially the joy of seeing the governors come together in partnership to offer their

own individual skills and experiences so willingly, and the great good fortune to have, in such a small number, such an incredible range of expertise. Secondly, to see the whole team build a wonderfully supportive partnership with the school community, a partnership based upon trust and mutual respect, not blinkered in any way, but able to see and act clearly at all times, to be that all important critical friend.

For me personally, adjusting to my unique position of having years of experience of manage-

ment within a school, but now fulfilling a governance role, has certainly been a challenge and keeps me on my toes. I have to be careful to stay on "my side of the line", but I am privileged in that I'm able to appreciate fully the massive responsibility that falls to a headteacher, and sometimes that sixth sense of experience enables me to slip into that important pastoral role whereby so often, just quietly listening is all that is needed.

**Gill Wilson is chair of governors at Moorlands School.**



"I WAS appointed, and this is what happened," I started to question whether it was an "appointment" or a "call". Either way, I was pleased to accept the call to be appointed as a trustee of Methodist Independent Schools Trust.

I quickly became aware that despite the different perspectives, with occasional challenge, there was a shared sense of purpose and values, with a commitment to transform lives through education.

I observed through school visits that young

people had been natured to find and use their voices, for causes that mattered to them, advocating for others and engaging in impactful pursuits for their communities and the whole society. It was invigorating to observe ways in which they live their values and use their voices confidently, but with humility and appreciation for the opportunities that their education gave them.

While Methodist Schools have an ethos of respect and value for people of all faiths and no faith, prin-

ciples/teachings of the Church evidently underpin the governance of its schools, which aim to be inclusive, warm and thoughtful environments. Also where safe spaces are created for young people to explore their faith, if they choose to do so.

However, in this age of complexities and pressures, how do we maintain a balance between the beliefs of the Church and the changing demands of modern society? How do we sustain a balance between academic rigour and at-

tainment while ensuring that the overall well-being of school communities have been preserved? Not easy or simple but that is where having different voices can add value. Where it does add value.

It is imperative that we

continue to welcome different perspectives, voices, backgrounds, experiences and commit to exploring what more and what else!

**Henrietta Mbeah-Bankas is a trustee of the Methodist Independent Schools Trust.**

## Promoting and sharing values

IN the least affluent area of our city the only remaining Methodist presence is a school for Key Stage 2 children. Each day, 280 children and some 45 adults co-operate and compete, work and play, teach and learn, make mistakes, and do a thousand other things. Each is an individual, needing support and recognition. Cultures, religions and languages inter-

mingle. Partnership is necessary, inevitable. We, the school's Methodist governors, protect the foundation and make sure the laws of the land are observed. Crucially, we ensure that a safe environment prevails for all. We promote and share our values throughout the school. We offer our partners, the community and the school a wider vision

still. Broader experiences, raised ambition, enhanced self-esteem, the well-being of all to overcome disadvantage. We do all we can to grow the school as a beacon in the community.

Respect and application, joy and laughter, compassion and service are hallmarks. Visits from and to the school nourish growth, widen vision. Diversity is

recognised and celebrated. The riches of music, art, drama and sport are made tangible. Technology serves rather than dominates. Everyone is given time to look beyond themselves, towards the other and to others.

Governors create the framework where all this can happen. We encourage, we monitor progress sensitively, we re-

flect. We express gratitude and recognise endeavour. We support each other and seek God's guidance upon our activity. When we govern well, we transform lives and communities. We do all we can.

School governance — mission in action. Be one.

**Ken Wales is chair of governors at Ribbleson Avenue Methodist Junior School.**

## A rewarding experience

THE Epworth Education Trust (EET) is the home of Methodist Academies in the North of England and December 2022. However, my governance journey starts back in 2007 when I felt the call to support my children's school, Nutgrove Methodist VA Primary, as first a parent governor and then chair (2015-2021).

Key successes during my period as chair include an Outstanding SIAMS inspection, construction of a new community centre, the recruitment of a new headteacher and conversion to Academy status with the Wesley Trust. I was heavily involved in developing how local governing bodies would work within the trust. In 2018

I was asked to become a trustee and remained so until the merger with the Acorn Trust to form the Epworth Education Trust in 2020. I was asked to sit as an independent person on two EET sub-committees, and to be a trustee last December.

Trustee boards need to have a range of skills so that they make the best decisions that benefit young people, families and the local community. There is a growing need for those with a professional background but it's not a requirement, it's also important to have what some term as "soft skills" too such as strategic thinking, evaluating risk; reviewing financial information; digesting reports; comfortable to challenge where

necessary; commitment, accountability and not being the silent one in meetings!

When you put so much in, it's important that it's a rewarding experience. Studies have shown that voluntary trustees are more self-confident, have improved well-being and are more motivated. "Do All You Can" summarises EET's vision as we believe anything is possible when approached with this attitude. I see first hand how we are providing children with every opportunity to flourish and know I am making a difference. There aren't many more rewarding causes than that.

**Steve Myers is a trustee of Epworth Education Trust.**

## Reaching out to the community

ACCORDING to the Gospel of John 21. 17, Peter was asked to tend the sheep. We as ministers are very good at doing this and have been commanded in Matthew to go and proclaim the good news. We put great effort into having a vision day, drawing missional plans and appointing pioneer missionaries. Some of our circuits are blessed with schools attached to the church. We can plan different events to reach out to the people; for me, the mission field is the schools.

There are great opportunities to reach out to dif-

ferent groups of people such as children, parents and grandparents and I feel we need to encourage our church congregations to associate more with the schools rather than look for opportunities outside.

There is a great opportunity for reading with the children in the school, having Sunday worship in the schools, messy church, and many more. I would like our circuits and churches to be more involved in shaping the Church's future by engaging with the schools within our local communities.

We are encouraging the

schools to come to the churches hoping that, at a later stage, they will become pillars of the Church.

There is no harm in thinking in this perspective, however does Jesus not reminds us that he went to the people where they were? At times people feel uncomfortable in the church and its environment, therefore let's make that shift and broaden our horizons and reach out to the people where they are and share the love of Jesus.

**Wilfred Robinson is a trustee of the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust.**

## Methodist Schools in England and Wales

