



Role Description for Chair of Governors of a MIST School

(Approved by Trust and Chairs: Spring 2016)

Overview:

The Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST) delegates to each governing body the responsibility for delivering the highest standards of governance. In that context, the Chair of Governors is accountable to MIST for leading the governing body in a way that is consistent with the overall aims and objectives of MIST. The Chair must have the patience of a saint, drive and determination and all the skills of a diplomat.

Along with the Head, the Chair is the visible face of the school. He or she needs to personify the school's values in the public arena and behind the scenes. The Chair needs to exercise influential leadership in relation to the school's key constituencies: pupils, parents, all staff and the local community. The Chair also has primary responsibility for managing relations between the school and MIST. The Chair has to account to MIST for discharging effectively those responsibilities which are delegated to schools. With the Head, the Chair is the primary channel of communication with MIST.

The Chair has two broad overarching objectives: leading the process of setting the school's strategic direction and leading the governance of the school. Included in the former will be the long-term development of the school's buildings and facilities, as well as financial, academic and other objectives. For the latter, the Chair has to hold the Head to account for the effective day-to-day operation and management of the school, while avoiding being drawn into exercising those functions. Key priorities in this respect include: ensuring that the school complies with legal requirements (eg safeguarding, health & safety); ensuring good financial health; maintenance of the school's Methodist ethos; and ensuring effective governance.

Specific functions

Collectively with other members of the Governing Body, the Chair of Governors must ensure that he or she:

1. Strategy

- 1.1 Ensures the school has a clear vision that is shared and agreed between governors and senior managers and consistent with MIST's vision and ethos
- 1.2 Ensures the vision is analysed, expressed and implemented via a strategic plan that contains a clear set of objectives and is reviewed annually. All subsidiary plans, objectives and work should be consistent with the strategic plan. As a working document, the strategic plan should have sufficient flexibility to adapt to changes in circumstances and be responsive to opportunities as they arise.
- 1.3 Ensures the work of the governing body is a balance of necessary attention to current operational issues and the need to secure the future of the school by clear strategic, forward planning.
- 1.4 Ensures that the school's aims, objectives, ethos and the working of the governing body itself are consistent with MIST's aims, objectives and ethos.



2. Governance

- 2.1 Holds overall responsibility for guiding the governance of a school and ensuring governors are proficient and trained to carry out their duties. This includes proper regard for the responsibilities, authorities, powers and discretions as set out in the Instrument of Government and Memorandum & Articles.
- 2.2 Runs the Governing Body, which is much more than just chairing the meetings but includes ensuring that all meetings of Governors are properly and effectively conducted with decisions being consistent with the school's objectives and ethos and appropriate records kept with clarity over all decisions made.
- 2.3 Enables all governors to participate in debate, establishing trust and respect with each of the governors and between governors consistent with the ethos of the school (and Trust).
- 2.4 Ensures that appropriate rules are drawn up for the operation and work of the Governing Body and that appropriate committees are established to ensure adequate time for discussion and scrutiny of the school's activities, policies, procedures and progress.
- 2.5 Ensures proper arrangements are in place and scrutinised to fulfil properly the school's fiduciary and legal responsibilities, specifically including: employment, accounting, safeguarding and health and safety.
- 2.6 Is available to chair Governing Body meetings, to attend some school events and be available when emergency or other urgent needs of the school require it.
- 2.7 Sits on committees as necessary.
- 2.8 Liaises closely with the Vice Chair and Committee Chairs.
- 2.9 Ensures that there is a properly constituted appeal process in place for dealing with grievances, disciplinary issues and parental complaints.
- 2.10 Is prepared to speak at Speech Day and other public events.
- 2.11 Preserves, in an active way, the line between management and governance; calling both governance and management to account as appropriate.

3. Appointing Governors & Succession Planning

- 3.1 Arranges a proper process for identifying and recruiting new governors (with delegation as appropriate to a Nominations Committee)
- 3.2 Plays a key role, in partnership with MIST (through the General Secretary), in the induction of new governors and provides guidance as required.
- 3.3 Appoints governors to committees and selects the Chair (or guides this as appropriate if delegated to a Nominations Committee).



3.4 Arranges his or her succession process well in advance of retiring; by notifying the General Secretary of MIST in the first instance and ensuring succession arrangements are in place as described in appendix 1 of this document.

4. Head & Senior Staff

4.1 Oversees the appointing of a new Head and Bursar (within guidelines provided by MIST).

4.2 Gives support to the Head; meeting regularly and listening (being a “critical friend”).

4.3 Advises the Head on performance and leads his/her annual review

4.4 Oversees the Head’s formal 360 (once every three years) appraisal.

4.5 Monitors and seeks to promote the Head’s personal development and well-being

4.6 Oversees the arrangements for the appraisal of the Bursar.

4.7 Ensures that the Head (and other senior staff) are properly rewarded (with due regard to MIST’s remuneration policy).

4.8 Ensures that the key relationships are working well and with clear divisions of responsibility (to include Head, Junior School Head, Bursar and Chaplain; and any other key relationship allocated by MIST, eg the Head of an acquired school).

4.9 Collaborates with the Head and Chaplain to ensure the Christian (Methodist) ethos of the school.

5. Responsibility and accountability to MIST

5.1 The Chair of Governors’ appointment will be made in accordance with procedures agreed by MIST.

5.2 The Chair attends the termly meetings of Chairs (or sends a designated representative) and receives minutes of MIST meetings thus serving as essential conduit, in addition to the General Secretary, between MIST and the governors of his/her school.

5.3 The Chair should be prepared to serve as a MIST Trustee by rotation (three year term) and thus contribute directly to the development of MIST in the interests of the Trust and its schools.

5.4 The Chair should be prepared to serve on MIST sub-committees.

5.5 The Chair should keep the Trust informed of all significant matters in relation to his/her school.



- 5.6 The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the Annual Report to MIST is completed by the School's Leadership Team as well as contributing to it personally in accordance with the guidance from MIST.
- 5.7 The Chair attends the annual MIST conference (or sends a designated representative).
- 5.8 The Chair ensures that MIST's policies are applied in accordance with the Instrument of Government.
- 5.9 The Chair ensures all inspection reports and the school's responses are communicated to MIST.



Appendix 1

Appointment Process for the Chair of Governors of a MIST school

1. Succession planning

- It is the responsibility of the current Chair of Governors (CoG) and the Head to ensure appropriate succession planning for the governing body though this may usually be delegated to a Nominations and Governance Sub-Committee. Such succession planning should include routine reviews of governors' length of service, the balance of a governing body and consider potential new governors who may have the right skills and experience to fill vacancies as anticipated to arise.
- Arguably succession planning referred to above is most important in relation to the Chair and to facilitate the process of appointing a new Chair it is important that the current Chair indicates his/her intentions in respect of his/her tenure at the earliest opportunity and, ideally, not less than 18 months in advance of a likely change.

2. Notification of a planned change of Chair

- A serving Chair should inform the General Secretary of MIST of his/her intention to stand down as per timescale suggested above and before the local Board and/or Clerk is notified. If the Chair has any concerns about the usual process for nomination and appointment of a successor from the current Board these should be raised at this early stage and consideration given to varying the usual process. Proper and timely planning should prepare potential nominees for the expectations that will be placed on them both by MIST and the local Board.
- Key reference points in these considerations are:
 - i. Can the potentially nominated person(s) fulfil the responsibilities as outlined in the role description of a Chair of Governors?
 - ii. Is the nominated Chair of Governors sensitive to and receptive of the guidance note regarding Christian allegiance and responsibility of the Chair outlined in appendix 2 of this document?
- If notification falls outside this suggested timeline it will be assumed that the current Deputy Chair will be willing/able to serve as Acting Chair until such time as the process of planning the succession can be undertaken in a considered yet timely fashion.

3. Nominations of a new Chair

- These well established guidelines for the appointment process will follow after the steps outlined above have taken place.
- The Clerk to the Governors will inform the governing body that the current Chair will not be seeking re-appointment at an agreed date and seek nominations from the Board in accordance with the current arrangements which are as follows:
 - (i) Following the announcement of the intending retirement of the Chair of Governors, and at the conclusion of each three year period of office the Clerk writes formally to each Governor to ask for nominations by a specified date. Such nominations should be made only with the consent of the nominee and meet the test of the key considerations listed above. Governors will receive the role description (and appendices) so their nominations can be informed by this documentation.



- (ii) In the papers for the normal Governors' meeting following the receipt of nominations - or for a special meeting if necessary - the Clerk includes information about the nominations. The nominees (or nominee) withdraw(s) whilst an open and unminuted discussion takes place in the presence of the remaining Governors and the Head.

If only one nomination is received the Governors may choose to agree the nomination - in which case stage (iii) is unnecessary - or to allow one other nomination in which case the new nominee also withdraws whilst discussion takes place.

- (iii) As soon as possible after the meeting the Clerk organises a postal ballot and acts as Returning Officer. The person receiving the most votes is the next Chair.

In the event of a tie a second secret ballot is held at the next meeting of the Governing Body. If the second ballot is also tied, lots are cast between the tied candidates to determine the outcome of the election.

(It is established practice that because of the special relationship between the Chair of Governors and the Head, that anyone wishing to nominate to the post should consult the Head).

4. Induction of the new Chair

- The newly appointed Chair will meet formally with the current Chair of School Governors, the Chair of MIST and the General Secretary of MIST no later than the term prior to the succession, agree responsibilities and commit to the communication required between the school and MIST (and MIST and the school).
- The newly appointed Chair will be invited to one meeting of the Chairs of MIST prior to taking up their responsibility.



Appendix 2

A note about how we might understand a Chair of Governors' responsibilities in relation to the Methodist ethos of a school

This note attempts to review the role of a Chair of Governors (CG) in relation to the Methodist ethos of a school and of the Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST). The broader intention is to help equip the Governing Body (GB) to exercise a collective responsibility for ethos, in respect of their own life together and in oversight of their school - and to look again in the light of that at the specific competencies required of a Chair.

This note also includes reflections on some of the essential ingredients in not only embedding and evaluating a school's ethos, but also in constantly refreshing it; and also dealing with points of potential criticism or anxiety relating to faith-based schools.

1 To explore the work of a GB and the responsibilities of the CG in relation to Methodist ethos, we must set the GB in a context. The three themes in the following sketch of this context are core material for the induction of all governors and trustees (as indeed of senior staff). *[They may sound a bit repetitious. But they are separable. And I think the first point of contact with a potential new governor or trustee is the 'school' as an institution, rather than the somewhat abstract notion of 'ethos' (beloved by educationalists, but hardly ever used anywhere else in society!)]*

1.1 Something about a Methodist school

A Methodist school never means: a school for Methodists only or primarily for Methodists (though surely every Methodist student, Methodist parents/carers and visiting Methodists will always feel at home in a Methodist school).

A Methodist school is, of its essential nature, as inclusive and hospitable as possible, offering an all-round education, with an insistent emphasis on quality for every aspect of the school's life, to students from every context and background. [This point is to be stressed in the public debates currently washing around in which critics of all faith-based schools insist that such schools are necessarily sectarian and divisive and inhibit social cohesion. Some schools, independent and maintained, may well be prone to that criticism; but never an authentic Methodist school].

A Methodist school is convinced that, through its ethos and values permeating everything in and around the school, it is inspired efficiently and effectively to harness all its resources (human and material) for the overall growth and development of each student, whatever their context, needs and background. Theologically, such a school is grounded in the grace and truth of God - a reality that is deeply enlarging and attractive but simultaneously challenging for everyone, of whatever faith commitment or none. This sets the 'spiritual environment' in which students are helped to discern and develop their gifts and potential, grow in wisdom, and practise responsibility as future (global) citizens.



A Methodist school is further convinced that every student, every member of staff, every governor and every parent/carer has something to contribute to enrich the Methodist/Christian ethos of the school, i.e. to make it more authentically a lived experience for everyone of becoming more human as an individual person (which necessarily entails openness to transcendent Mystery) and of being nourished by relationships of mutual help, friendliness and fairness.

A Methodist school, as a consequence of the above and of the history of the Methodist Church, is 'liberal' in its theology. Liberal is a slippery word in this context. Here it means that nothing in the Church's resources or teaching (including the scriptures) is immune to the critical approaches that the modern world has practised in exploring all historic literature and thought. To put this another way, there is no space whatsoever in Methodism for Christian fundamentalism (which insists that the scriptures, uniquely, transcend all critical enquiry and thereby attract to themselves an absolute and inviolable authority). [This is relevant in responding to Parliament's recent insistence that school safeguarding policies must in future assess the risk of extremism - violent or non-violent - and have in place procedures for early detection and response to hints of extremism. This is, I guess, a low risk in Methodist schools (though of course IT policies and the like will need to address the risk). Indeed, the government's definition of extremism is extremely curious and inadequate, making no reference to the religious dimension of extremism - probably because of the theological illiteracy of modern society. The official benchmark are the so-called 'British values'. Methodist schools should rest content within a much richer range of human and humane values that they absorb from the classical Methodist culture, which is itself constantly open to liberal and critical exploration].

NOTE

A question: How does MIST enable the schools we acquire not only to belong legally and share formal disciplines about finances, property management, educational development and accountability, but also to appreciate, participate in and enrich the all-pervading Methodist/Christian ethos that we want to be the hall-mark of the group?

1.2 The MIST/MAST Ethos Statement is a given, in its brief and full forms.

1.3 The Ethos Statement needs ongoing refreshment.

This does not mean that it needs to be edited or rewritten regularly. The usefulness of an Ethos statement is that it stands the test of time for, say, a decade or more, whatever its imperfections and inadequacies.

By 'refreshment' we mean:

the Ethos Statement is read regularly and reflectively by all who have leadership and oversight responsibility for MIST schools, individually and as a prompt for discussion together;

the Ethos Statement becomes more than a written document: it is transmuted into a living, transformative 'spirit' forming and renewing the 'esprit de corps' of the school and influencing the way in which every activity of the school and of all groups connected with the school is conducted and evaluated.



Learning from the wider Methodist Church, a Methodist school practises in appropriate ways what each congregation discerns to be essential for the constant renewal and refreshment of its ethos, namely:

- Connections to and learning from the several expressions of Methodist collective life in local churches, the Circuit, the District and the Conference;
- The practice of prayer and worship in a Methodist tradition - which has normative patterns and resources (e.g *The Methodist Worship Book*; *Singing the Faith*) but is also open to forms of spirituality and liturgy from many denominations and cultures, and welcoming of contemporary creative insights;
- Exploration of the Christian scriptures, particularly the New Testament, using critical enquiry, emotional intelligence, memory and imagination .

2 The GB

2.1 The GB must have at least 50% of its members who are Methodists or are worshipping members of another Christian Church (usually a Church in membership of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) and in sympathy with the purposes of the Methodist Church. One of the 'Methodist/Christian' members will be *ex officio* the Chair of the Methodist District, the senior regional representative of the Church (or, in the future his/her representative).

2.2 It is crucial that MIST now develops a pattern of scrutiny prior to appointment and then induction of new governors which enables all those appointed with an explicit Christian allegiance to embrace a responsibility within the governing body not only as persons with particular professional skills and experience but also as people of Christian faith who are pledged to uphold, sustain and refresh the Methodist/Christian ethos of the GB and the school. Some indeed may be appointed with that sole responsibility, carrying the life of faith as their particular 'skill and experience' that is necessary for the effective functioning of the GB.

2.3 This would make the 'at least 50%' of explicit Methodist/Christian governors like Foundation governors in the maintained schools of a religious character. For the record, the MAST schools have the following percentages of Foundation governors: a voluntary controlled school - not fewer than 2 Foundation governors and not more than 25% of the membership of the GB; a voluntary aided school - a majority of two over and above the rest of the GB put together. (In both sorts of school, the *ex officio* Methodist governor is the Circuit Superintendent). So, on this score, a MIST GB comes in between the VC and VA models of GB; though - as required by government - maintained school GBs are smaller than MIST GBs.

2.4 What is fundamental in all Methodist school GBs is an absolute refusal to allow even a hint of a division in the GB on the basis of personal faith allegiance. Methodists ought to be expert at encouraging the GB to be a united and coherent body of people from diverse backgrounds contributing to a common cause. The reasons why this should be straightforward for Methodists are twofold: (i) the Wesleyan tag, 'A Methodist is a friend of all and an enemy of none'; and (ii) the Wesleyan perception that the Spirit of God is silently present and active in every human heart, seeking to release in anyone and potentially in everyone some perspective on the love of God -



hence, the 'Catholic Spirit' of Methodists, meaning that each and every Methodist is always on the lookout for some expression or other from the heart of everyone they meet of the divine love - which is the basis of cooperation and shared life ('If your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand', John Wesley).

2.5 Maintaining, nurturing and refreshing the ethos of a Methodist school is essentially the shared and collective responsibility of the GB. It never depends on one person, however devout they may be or however well connected into the formal structures of the Church. This insight is not only characteristically Methodist; it also resonates with the advice of the Charity Commission on how trustees/governors are to make decisions: 'Trustees have a duty to make decisions collectively. Trustees do not always have to agree or take part but for most decisions it follows that all trustees have a duty to participate in the process (unless there is a conflict of interest) and all trustees taking part in decision making should be allowed to ask questions and express their views....Once a decision is made, trustees must support and carry out the decision.' This advice holds supremely on all reflection in a GB relating to something so fundamental as the Methodist/Christian ethos of the GB itself and of the school.

2.6 The GB has the responsibility of evaluating and developing the Christian ethos of the school. How is this to be achieved?

Because it is exceptionally difficult to 'measure' achievement in embedding an ethos in everything a school does, perception of the creative impact of ethos is basically intuited.

All Christian experience suggests that those most likely to intuit an ethos that makes a difference to a community are people who are committed to living within that ethos themselves.

To avoid any whiff of hypocrisy, a GB should practice the Methodist/Christian ethos in the way it establishes relationships between members, in the manner of contributions to debates and decision-making, in the way that disagreements are handled; and in the commitment to 'refreshing' the value/ethos basis of their common life.

The latter typically includes the insistence that GB meetings begin and end in prayer which is more than cursory or a passing formality. It should be allocated serious time and should include carefully prepared reflection inspired by the scriptures or the Church season to the challenges of a common life or contemporary education, and prayerful support of particular pastoral issues in the GB or the school. There are many resource people the GB can draw on to help with this: some of the 'at least 50%' avowedly Christian/Methodist governors may be able to do this (certainly the Chair of District; and there may be a local preacher or equivalent from another tradition who can lead in this way) - though it is not the case by any means that every Church-going Christian is able or confident at leading prayer and reflection for others. From within the school, the obvious person to call on is the Chaplain (though even here expectations may need to be raised in some cases); or there may be members of staff, both within the RE department and more widely, who are authorised or suitably experienced lay leaders for this purpose in the Methodist Church or a partner Church.



No evaluation of the school's ethos can be entertained until the GB has evaluated critically its own 'embodiment' of our ethos.

No evaluation of the school's ethos can be rounded enough unless a significant proportion of the GB are willing to reflect on personal involvement in the school - to assess, e.g., the style and character of relationships, the quality of compassion and care in all 'pastoral' situations, the school worship and RE. [To draw together all partners in the shared ethos of a school, MIST is encouraging in each school an annual Dedication Service where new staff and governors are appropriately welcomed and all pledge to work together within the spirit of the Christian life].

Only against this background of experience and reflection will the GB be equipped to explore a formal report on ethos and values in the school from the Head and Chaplain, relations with local Methodists etc. [MIST has allocated to its Ethos Committee to look at the best models for structuring such a report, and has suggested that MIST look sympathetically at the procedures used in MAST, through SIAMS, for content, breadth, style of preparation and conversational assessment; and the value of a sympathetic external voice in clarifying what is to be affirmed and what can be improved].

The GB is accountable to MIST for the effective prioritisation and nurture of the Methodist/Christian ethos of the school. (A GB has the right to expect that the Trust itself will be just as committed as the GB to practise, refresh and review its own experience of living our shared ethos).

3. The CG

3.1 Indispensable is the self-understanding in a CG that he/she, by virtue of their role, is a co-leader with the Head of the school. The CG is therefore on many occasions the public face of the school, carrying responsibility for governance and being accountable to parents in particular. But the CG is simultaneously needing to embody and articulate the values and distinctive character of the school as a *Methodist* institution of learning - or (in the case of acquired schools) of a school that has become part of a Methodist organisation, MIST. In a real sense, then, the CG, like the Head, is sometimes representing in public what the Methodist Church stands for.

3.2 What else do we expect of the CG? MIST certainly needs the CG to be excellent at chairing meetings! That is their distinctive responsibility and skill within the GB.

3.3 No CG can be fully competent on all aspects of a GB agenda. They must call on the particular skills of those around the table. So the Chair of the Finance Committee and Bursar lead on the finances of the school, etc. But each chair will

- a) have some or at the very least one area of expertise that is their own;
- b) have a working awareness of *all* the issues on an agenda, and must be able with suitable confidence to scrutinise with wisdom and critical questions all areas of the GB's work. (It is disabling if the chair tries to chair well an item of which he/she cannot even grasp the meaning or significance). One test of an adequate chair is that they could give a credible account of each item in the minutes to an interested outsider.



3.4 All this applies to the role of the CG to consideration of ethos and values - whatever their personal faith, if any. And we must never lose sight of the fact that for all believers there are periods of uncertainty or doubt as well as confidence in things Christian; and every sympathetic but religiously uncommitted colleague will have periods when they are particularly intrigued and times when they are totally disinterested in things to do with faith and value.

3.5 The result is that we would require the CG to sit somewhere in a spectrum of personal stances: At a maximal level: is a confident witness to Christian discipleship in the Methodist tradition, naturally making links between regular experience as a worshipper in a local congregation and what is going on in the school and the GB, and taking a constructive and skilful lead in articulating and refreshing the Methodist/Christian ethos.

At a minimal level: is willing to affirm that the school *either* has a Methodist foundation of which it can be proud *or* has gladly become part of the MIST family, so that he/she is always under obligation to help the school to embed and develop its participation in the ethos shared by all MIST schools; and is pleased, naturally and without embarrassment, to honour the significance of this and honestly and sympathetically share in celebrating it - while not pretending to any personal commitment of faith.

3.6 In MIST's judgement, each CG, whatever their personal relation to faith, must:

- ensure that the agenda of the GB gives great importance to this theme, for itself and for the school; and is framed suitably in prayer and reflection;
- be able and willing to articulate to parents, staff and to MIST, in ways and language that are authentic to themselves, how the GB and the school perceives the significance and outcomes of commitment to our ethos (i.e. what difference it makes to our priorities, policies and the 'feel' of the school), and what discipline it imposes on all pupils (e.g. in relation to school worship, RE, charity work and responsible citizenship);
- work with the Head and the Chaplain in reflecting as co-leaders on initiatives to improve, deepen or make more distinctive high-quality participation in our ethos.