

Methodist Independent Schools Trust

SERVE

Spirituality, Ethos, Relationships and Values Evaluation

REPORT

Summary of findings:

Kent College's Methodist foundation continues to thrive, strongly reflected through its ASPIRE values of: Achievement, Support for All, Purposeful Citizenship, Individuality, Reliability, Respect and Resilience, and Enquiring and Creative Minds. Demonstrated through the actions of staff and pupils, there is a clear and common sense of purpose to an agreed set of values.

The school successfully nurtures academic success, personal growth, and both physical and emotional wellbeing. Pupils are encouraged to be aspirational, think independently, be creative, base their views on evidence, live healthily, and discover their own individual paths to fulfilment.

The school community extends well beyond the classroom and pupils, to staff, parents, and the local community. It is loving, warm and welcoming, encouraging pupils to be open-minded and non-judgemental, respectful of the rights of others, whilst being inclusive of all, by offering and providing fellowship and belonging. Through a range of partnerships, the school has extended its community beyond the school's boundaries, providing pupils with opportunities to share learning with pupils from other schools, support learning in local primary schools, and experience immersion in schools in other parts of the world.

The school provides a safe place for pupils to explore, develop and nurture a personal spirituality. Through teaching, chapel services and assemblies, and within the warmth, acceptance and understanding of the school's Methodist foundation, all are welcome and can participate with dignity and integrity without judgement or expectation. With strong leadership from the Head and ably supported by the Chaplain, the school fosters a distinctively Christian ethos rooted in Methodist principles.

Strengths

- The Global Citizenship programme
- The open and warm culture
- The light and warmth brought to chaplaincy by the chaplain
- The community and collective sense of purpose around the ASPIRE values
- The culture of inclusion and the celebration of difference
- The focus on innovation to support learning and pastoral welfare
- The scope and range of community partnerships

Main Report

The head and leadership team, strongly supported by the chaplain have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and their primary purpose is to serve and support the staff who in turn serve and support the pupils. There is deep humility and servant leadership at all levels. The school is a place of spiritual community and formation, where the education is inclusive and liberative; power is shared, and justice and equality are core values.

Staff understand the school's Methodist values and foundation and they uphold these as important. They recognise that, whilst many of the pupils do not have an active Christian faith, or indeed may hold a different faith, the Christian values expressed in Methodism provide a solid foundation for leading a good life that has both meaning and purpose. Staff successfully model the school's values, indicating in discussions, that many have chosen to at the school because its values match their own. They embrace the school's inclusivity and desire to meet pupils at where they are and to support them to become the best versions of themselves.

Pupils actively embrace the values and ethos through participation in all aspects of the school's education, community and spiritual life. They engage with enthusiasm, showing leadership and resolve by working hard to improve the world around them. They aspire to be active global citizens who will make a difference to the world, fighting for justice and the rights of those less fortunate than they are.

Inclusivity lies at the heart of much of what staff and pupils believe and do. The school successfully supports pupils, regardless of their background or ability, to achieve to their potential as a result of exceptional pastoral care and focussed learning support. Teaching is child-centred, responsive to individual needs, creative, innovative and adaptable, reflecting best practice. Staff have unconditional positive regard for pupils, who in turn, value and recognise the efforts staff go to in order to support them. Pupils are tolerant, accepting, and socially responsible. They celebrate diversity, recognise and challenge injustice, disadvantage and exploitation. They act with empathy and awareness of others' needs and are willing to question and challenge societal norms.

Pupils show respect for those with different views, having learnt to disagree well. Lessons frequently involve discussions and debates during which pupils show acceptance and tolerance for differing views. For example, in a Year 8 Global Citizenship lesson, and with reference to the work of Thomas Aquinas, pupils engaged thoughtfully and sensitively in discussions on whether war can ever be justified, reflecting a range of positions supported by evidence.

Pupils recognise and take pride in their own unique, individual abilities and skills. They also recognise strengths in others whilst acknowledging with acceptance either their own or others' challenges and needs. In discussions, pupils were comfortable talking about their needs, such as dyslexia, and how teachers adapt their teaching to make learning more accessible. Students from other countries described the International Study Centre, where they are given specialist support to learn English, as a home-from-homes.

The school successfully enables pupils to make strong progress as evidenced through highly positive value-added scores at GCSE. Teaching is rigorous, exciting, challenging and effective in supporting pupils to learn. It successfully meets the range of needs and interests of the pupils to enable them to develop in line with their individual interests so far as is practically possible. Staff receive useful and well-planned training to support their own development, so that they can continue to meet the diverse needs of pupils.

Pupils are curious and motivated, engaging with enthusiasm in lessons. For example, Year 2 pupils in a religious education lesson, were highly engaged and asking interesting questions about the Easter story.

They are rational in their thinking, aspirational, independent and open minded. In a curriculum rich in opportunities, they show creativity and understanding of how to discern fact from opinion, basing their own views on research and evidence.

Teaching encourages pupils to reflect on, understand and explore their own strengths and weakness, supporting the development of strategies to manage these effectively. Teachers model strongly the values of the school, creating an environment that is supportive, kind and nurturing. Consequently, pupils are reflective and self-aware, able to use feedback to develop and improve themselves, both academically and personally. Pupils behave well, showing respect and support towards staff and one another.

The school culture successfully celebrates lifelong physical health, with participation, enjoyment and endeavour at the heart of a programme that enables the whole community to engage positively. Pupils learn both why physical fitness is important to living a fulfilling life and practical ways to help maintain physical fitness, even when not actively involved with team sports. The school ensures pupils have access to a variety of physical activities to support good health. Pupils learn about the key ingredients to a healthy lifestyle, including diet, activity, and the impacts on health of smoking, drug use and alcohol. For example, Year 5 pupils, in a PSHE lesson, discussed with enthusiasm issues around smoking and vaping, working successfully in collaboration to complete a quiz about the potential harms that might arise.

Pupils and staff understand the importance of good mental health and the key aspects of how to ensure it is maintained and supported. The school actively promotes this by encouraging openness and respect. Pupils are supported in learning to self-regulate and manage their emotions to enable them to function successfully and with confidence in a variety of social situations and different, challenging environments. Pupils in the Prep School have recently started using the “Zones of Regulation” initiative, to support them in learning to recognise and talk about their emotions.

Pastoral support is thoughtful and tailored to meet pupil’s emotional individual needs. Pupils understand how to recognise the signs that either they or someone else may need additional help to maintain or restore their mental health and well-being. The school has good provision in place to meet the mental health needs of pupils. The creation of the Pastoral Hub since the last SERVE visit with learning support, and the chaplaincy co-located at the centre of the school site has significantly improved the visibility of available support and provides safe havens for pupils-in-need. In discussion, pupils reflected on feeling understood and listened to. They also acknowledged the support given by staff to enable them to develop better social skills and manage their relationships more successfully, recognising that at times this is a compromise between being authentic and being accepted socially. The recent introduction of “Girls-On-Board” in the Senior School and the “Zones of Regulation” initiative in the Prep School reflect a thoughtful and strategic approach to pastoral care based on evidence gathered from pastoral surveys and responding to needs identified with pupils through school forums such as the school council and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) group.

The school successfully encourages pupils to be active global citizens through service to society and personal growth. Throughout the school, service to one another and support for younger pupils is seen as natural. The use of the house system to bring older pupils together with younger pupils creates frequent and effective opportunities for pupils to support and nurture each other. For example, many sixth formers train as mentors in order to support pupils in Year 10. Pupils, in discussion, stated that raising concerns or making suggestions on how to improve the school was easy and encouraged by school leaders. They identified a range of different channels of communication by which they can be heard, ensuring that even the most withdrawn pupils can raise concerns. Pupils in the prep school, for example, were able to identify tangible outcomes, such as the provision of additional playground equipment, from discussions held by the school council. As a result, pupils have a strong sense of belonging and inclusion. In discussion they

stated that: “Everyone’s got a crowd. No matter who you are, you are accepted – inclusion couldn’t be stronger.”

The school successfully ensures all within its community are kept safe through rigorous and clear-sighted safeguarding procedures. These are constantly reviewed and adjusted to meet ever changing demands and needs. Staff and pupils recognise their own responsibilities for helping to maintain this high level of vigilance and welfare.

Pupils have a strong global awareness through the Global Citizenship programme in Years 8 and 9 with a particular focus on positive change and support. Pupils throughout the school participate and engage in local community life through a broad range of activities, such as volunteering within the local community and collecting donations for the local food bank. Prep pupils fundraise through sponsored walks, comic relief, home clothes days, colour runs, and sponsored triathlons.

The school has a number of successful partnership projects such as an Independent State School partnership (ISSP) with two local state secondary schools delivering an Astronomy GCSE to pupils from all three schools, culminating in a joint stargazing night. Pupils also visited a Methodist (MAST) primary school in Sussex to deliver a Dragons Den session for their pupils.

Pupils in the prep school successfully develop an awareness of the natural world through the Forest Schools programme, ably led by the Chaplain. This is successful broadened out later through the Global Citizenship programme in to issues around sustainability.

The curriculum strongly supports spiritual, ethical, and philosophical growth, offering opportunities to explore Christianity, the Methodist tradition and other faiths. Teaching encourages individual and communal exploration of faith and what it may mean on a personal level. Pupils are given the opportunity and skills to challenge, question, and explore contradictory convictions in many faiths in order to develop their own personal, spiritual understanding and ethos. The frequent use of discussions and debates enables pupils to safely explore their ideas and understanding. In lessons, assemblies and chapel, pupils explore questions of morality and philosophy. Teaching and discussions are free of dogma and bias, and are non-judgemental to those who express themselves in terms and ways that are either devout to their own faith or are at odds with cultural norms. Faith and spirituality are valued and supported with no presumption of hierarchy or orthodoxy. Pupils are given space and time to be reflective. Pupils engage actively with a rich variety of expressive art forms such as music, drama and art at an advanced standard, demonstrating, through their performances and creations, high levels of aesthetic understanding.

The school celebrates the importance of chapel, where Methodism is expressed as an example of how some Christians practice their religious and spiritual beliefs, and whose values, traditions and rituals provide a structure that may support both spiritual and personal growth. Chapel is regular and makes use of the local church that sits adjacent to the school. It is invitational and welcoming to all, inclusive, reflective and engaging, allowing everyone to participate with integrity. Pupils are actively encouraged to contribute to chapel, assemblies and the spiritual life of the school, often taking an active leadership role, writing prayers and delivering sermons. During the visit, a Years 7 & 8 chapel service on Jonah and the Whale was engaging and included a highly thoughtful sermon written by a sixth form Chapel Prefect. The vibrant, energetic and open approach of the chaplain makes chapel engaging and accessible for pupils of all ages. In discussions, pupils talked with enthusiasm about attending chapel services, saying: “It’s really cool to go the church.” They welcomed the return to using the local church since the last SERVE visit. Services are not only reserved for the chapel, however, with boarders’ prayers, for example, being held on the climbing wall, reflecting John Wesley’s approach of taking the church to the people, wherever they are.

The school has dedicated safe spaces such as the library and the Hub to support personal reflection, and stillness within the school environment. The chaplaincy, co-located with the Pastoral Hub, and with its open-door policy, offers emotional and spiritual support for pupils and staff alike, in a soft, warm and comfortable environment. Pupils of all faiths make use of this space, adding prayers and thoughts to the prayer wall in their own time and at their own initiative. The warmth and engagement of the chaplain is recognised and appreciated by pupils and staff alike.

The school continues through the chaplain to maintain strong links with the local Methodist Circuit and other local church groups, such as the local Anglican and Baptist churches. The chaplain also continues to maintain strong links with other school chaplains through the MIST Chaplains Group.

School and visit information:

School	Kent College, Pembury
Address	Old Church Lane, Pembury, Tunbridge Wells
Age range	3-20
Head of School	Miss Katrina Handford
Head of Prep School	Mrs Salli Hall
Chaplain	Reverend Katie Osweiler
Date of SERVE visit	Wednesday 25 th February 2026
SERVE Visitors	David Jackson (Head, Farringtons School). Matthew Lovett (MIST Serve Co-ordinator)