

Yesodey Hatorah School

Independent School

Inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Ronald Cohen AI

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Yesodey Hatorah is a mainstream *Charedi* (orthodox) Jewish religious school which has served the Stamford Hill area of North London since the school's inception in 1942. All the pupils come from strictly orthodox Jewish homes. However, they represent wide socio-economic differences and a relatively wide spectrum of Jewish cultural backgrounds. (Chassidic and non Chassidic; sephardi and ashkenazi). The school, though registered as a single entity, has three discrete and distinct departments. These are junior girls (age 4-11), junior boys (4-11) and senior boys (11-15). At the time of the inspection, there were 596 pupils on roll, of whom 417 were girls. The departments work as separate institutions for all of the activities in which they are engaged. Nevertheless, they share a common aim which is to *"provide a sound education along national standards together with a rich Jewish religious and cultural curriculum. This enables the children to play a vital role in their community, according to their needs and aspirations"*

Evaluation of the school

Yesodey Hatorah is a good school, with some outstanding features. It provides a good education for its pupils. The school very successfully meets its aims. It has many strengths, particularly the ethos of dedication and commitment to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The main focus is on the development of pupils' *middos* (desirable personal traits of responsibility, modesty, consideration). There is good teaching, at all key stages in both strands of the curriculum. The school has made significant progress in recent years and meets most but not all the requirements of the legislation. Pastoral care is a strong feature of the school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision is outstanding. The heads of each of the departments provide strong and purposeful leadership and are strongly supported by their senior colleagues and by their dedicated staff.

Quality of education

The good curriculum is divided into two distinctive strands, Religious Studies (*Limmudei Kodesh*) and Secular Studies (*Limmudei Chol*). *Limmudei Kodesh*, which is taught in the mornings, covers a wide range of distinctively Jewish studies, and educates pupils to an understanding of Jewish history, culture and religious practice. The teaching of *Limmudei Kodesh* is carried out mainly through the medium of

Yiddish. *Limmudei Chol*, which is taught in English, includes literacy, numeracy, science, history, geography and art and design. In the senior boys department, all pupils leave school at the end of Year 10 and all go directly to *Yeshivos* (Talmudical colleges). The boys therefore take GCSE at the end of year 9 and at the end of Year 10. The pupils are well prepared to take on the opportunities and challenges which will come to them as adult members of the strictly observant Jewish community.

Good quality personal, social and health education is taught as part of both the *Kodesh* curriculum and the secular studies curriculum. In the senior boys, there is no formal careers guidance, although informal discussion takes place regarding their further education in *Yeshivos*. Opportunities for girls to engage in physical education in the school day are limited.

The curriculum provision, which is augmented by an outstanding support programme, provides pupils who have special educational or emotional needs with extra support on a regular one-to-one basis. This enables staff to meet the needs and interests of all its pupils. Other extra-curricular activities, such as visits and a range of communal charitable projects, underpin the further academic, personal and social development of the pupils.

Teaching is good overall. Most lessons are good: some are outstanding, and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. As a result pupils make good progress in their learning.

In the most effective lessons, learning is placed at the centre of all activities. Teachers create an exciting and stimulating learning environment, in which there is good interaction between teacher and pupils, based on relationships of mutual respect. Lessons have a good pace and appropriate challenge to which pupils respond well. Homework is given to reinforce and extend the work done in class. Teaching is less successful where there are insufficient opportunities for independent working, and closed questions limit opportunities to check all pupils' learning.

Pupils achieve well because of the good teaching they receive, the strong work ethic within the school, and the high value given to education by the community the school serves.

Marking is regular and undertaken conscientiously. In much of the marking, there are constructive comments which make clear to pupils why their work is good or how they can improve some aspects. However, this good practice is not yet uniformly implemented.

Assessment is satisfactory overall. Systems for target setting, monitoring and tracking of pupils' academic progress are increasingly effective, but differ between individual teachers. Consistency of good practice in using assessment to inform teaching and pupils' learning is not yet embedded in all areas of the curriculum, nor is it consistently applied by all staff.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Central to this is the provision to pupils of a knowledge and understanding of their Jewish spiritual heritage. This is achieved well through *Limmudei Kodesh* lessons, regular opportunities for prayer and through the whole ethos of the school. Through extensive discussion of Jewish law and ethics, pupils develop a strong sense of right and wrong. As a result their behaviour is outstanding. Throughout the school, there are extensive opportunities for pupils to learn how to respond to others with kindness and consideration. As a result, the school is a secure and well-ordered community that is characterised by friendliness and mutual concern.

Attendance is good. Pupils enjoy their education and have a good attitude to learning. The ethos of their families and community is very much learning oriented and most pupils follow this example and strive, from a very young age, to meet high expectations. The ethos of the school enables the pupils to distinguish between right and wrong and respect the law. Pupils are provided with a broad knowledge of public institutions and services in England through topics in the curriculum.

Pupils are imbued with a deep appreciation of, and respect for their own culture. They are also given opportunities to discuss other cultures in various lessons, both *Kodesh* and *Chol*, and are encouraged to appreciate the virtues of tolerance and harmony.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school cares well for its pupils and encourages them to adopt healthy eating habits. Parents correctly commented that opportunities for the pupils to take physical exercise within school time are limited.

The school has a suitable range of policies in place but some of its procedures for ensuring the day to day safety of pupils, staff and visitors are too informal and record keeping lacks rigour. The school undertakes a range of risk assessments in relation to premises, activities and individual pupils but some of these are not written down.

The admissions register does not meet requirements because it does not record the name of the child's parents. There are regular fire drills in all departments but these are not sufficiently well documented. Similarly, fire safety training is not appropriately recorded. The girls' department has not addressed all the recommendations of the most recent fire service report.

The school has named officers for child protection and these have undertaken appropriate and up to date training. Training for other staff is carried out internally through whole staff meetings.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school's recruitment procedures lack rigour and consistency in implementation. For example, the school accepts verbal telephone references for some applicants. It does not always carry out the necessary checks before allowing a person to start working at the school; for example some staff do not have CRB checks or those working at the school for some time do not have List 99 checks. The school has set up a single central register of staff but this is not fully completed and so is not up to date. The regulations which the school does not meet are listed at the end of this report.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is housed in older premises which have not been adequately maintained over years. The proprietor is now taking steps to make improvements but some parts of the buildings are in need of urgent attention. The school has good plans to use the space created by the senior girls moving to another site. The standard of maintenance and decoration around the school is poor overall, although those areas which have been refurbished are now bright and attractive and more conducive to good learning. The school has plans to develop specialist facilities for science and technology. Flooring in some areas is not of an adequate standard and causes a trip hazard. There is insufficient attention to ensuring that the school is kept in a clean, tidy and hygienic state. Some of the classrooms are cramped for the number of pupils in them and this hinders ease of movement.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides satisfactory information for parents, of a general nature. However, there is some inconsistency in systems both in and across the three departments. Weekly and monthly news letters keep the junior and senior boys' parents well informed about school affairs. In the junior girls' department, individual teachers provide termly information about the curriculum by letter to parents. However, there is no system for including a summary of this in the school prospectus. There is no summary of pupil attainment provided in any prospectus. The prospectus has insufficient reference to the availability of information about the number and nature of complaints. In addition, records of staff employed in the primary girls' department are not included.

School reports are adequate and provide parents with detailed information about the progress that their children make at school on a regular basis. Information provided to outside bodies is tailored to suit its purpose.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedures meet requirements. Parents are aware of the school's complaints policy and understand how a complaint can be lodged and the processes and procedures which follow. Any complaints of an informal nature are dealt with promptly and resolved.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- maintain a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by its risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and by any report from the Fire Authority (paragraph 3(5))
- maintain an admissions register and an attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff carry out appropriate checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in the United Kingdom, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- ensure that an enhanced criminal record check been made by the proprietor in respect of any member of staff appointed to a position at the school and that the enhanced criminal record certificate which is the subject of the application is obtained before or as soon as practicable after his/her appointment (paragraph 4(2)(b))
- in relation to each member of staff in post on or after 1 August 2007, ensure that the register shows checks made (and certificates obtained where relevant) of: his/her identity; qualifications (where required); whether an enhanced CRB was obtained, or where appropriate, that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (List 99) and further

ensure that the register includes the date on which each such check was completed or the certificate obtained (paragraph 4C(2 and 3)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide assurance that any load bearing structure complies with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(c))
- having regard to the number, age and needs (including any special needs) of pupils, ensure all classrooms are appropriate in size to allow effective teaching, and that all areas of the school do not compromise health or safety (paragraph 5(j))
- maintain classrooms and other parts of the school in a tidy, clean and hygienic state (paragraph 5(n))
- ensure a satisfactory standard and adequate maintenance of decoration (paragraph 5(q))
- ensure there is appropriate flooring which is in good condition (paragraph 5(s)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications. (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

