

# Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School at The Woodlands

Independent school standard inspection report

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## 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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Information about the school

Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School is an independent, *Charedi* (strictly orthodox) Jewish boys' primary school, founded in 1973 and situated in the heart of the Jewish community in North London. Most of the boys belong to the Belz *Chasidic* community. The majority of boys speak Yiddish as their first language and *Kodesh* (Jewish studies) is taught in Yiddish. *Chol* (secular studies) is taught in both English and Yiddish. The school is open six days a week from Sunday to Friday and the majority of time is spent on the teaching of *Kodesh* studies. The school is guided by the principles of *Torah* (Jewish law) and rooted in an ethos of *Torah* values which aims to train the boys into becoming self-motivated, mature members of society.

There are currently 343 pupils aged between three and eleven years on roll, of whom 54 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. All pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are entitled to free education. Two pupils have statements of special educational needs. The school was last inspected in October 2007.

## Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of education provided by Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School at The Woodlands is satisfactory and meets its aims. In *Kodesh*, the curriculum and quality of teaching are good and pupils make good progress. Although the school has recently adopted a new *Chol* curriculum which covers literacy, numeracy and science, the quality of teaching in *Chol* is only satisfactory, because the whole class proceeds at the same pace and the more-able pupils are insufficiently challenged.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as is their behaviour, welfare, health and safety, and robust safeguarding arrangements are in place. The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good overall and its leadership and management are outstanding.

The school has improved since the last inspection and now meets all but two of the regulations.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

## Quality of education

The overall quality of the curriculum is satisfactory, and in the Early Years Foundation Stage it is good. The school's greatest strength is the commitment of the pupils and the community to which they belong to Jewish religious studies. When asked what they liked best about the school, pupils unhesitatingly responded, 'the learning'. Parents and carers are unanimously positive and one parent wrote, 'I feel privileged that my son is a member of this school.'

The *Kodesh* curriculum is good. It follows the traditional curriculum used in Jewish religious schools, and there are detailed long- and short-term plans backed by an impressive range of teaching materials and modern text books in addition to the classic texts. Because of the stress on study within Judaism, pupils are motivated and eager to succeed and staff and parents are keen to help them. As a result, pupils make good progress.

The secular curriculum (*Chol*) is satisfactory. Adequate time is given to the teaching of basic skills in English and mathematics. There are long-term curriculum plans in place that help guide the work of the teachers. However, short-term plans are neither consistent nor detailed enough to provide sufficient opportunities to meet the needs of all the pupils, especially the more able. Consequently these pupils make the least progress in many lessons. Overall, however, pupils perform adequately in all areas of learning and make satisfactory progress.

The school has recently introduced a ground-breaking science curriculum that is taught in Yiddish within *Kodesh*, although English technical terms are introduced. It explicitly links science topics with the weekly Bible portion or with the Jewish calendar. Pupils talked excitedly about this development and were eager to learn more.

The overall quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory, although it is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Teaching in *Kodesh* is good. Teachers are experienced and their depth of religious knowledge allows them to cover a range of topics within the format of the lesson. Traditional teacher-led methods are employed, but in the best *Kodesh* lessons these are varied to allow pupils the opportunity to carry out their own investigations. Teachers know their pupils well and adjust their teaching accordingly. They are enthusiastic and convey this enthusiasm to their pupils who respond wholeheartedly, for example chanting translations with great gusto.

Assessment in *Kodesh* is by regular weekly tests and is good. Detailed records of progress are maintained. These are shared with parents and carers via contact sheets and used to inform lesson planning and to identify pupils who require additional support. Parents and carers are expected to revise the work with their children and to report back to the school on their attainment.

The teaching in *Chol* is satisfactory. Teachers' subject knowledge of literacy and numeracy is adequate. Planning results in activities that are matched to the needs of

most pupils, but are not always to the needs of the most able. Consequently most of these pupils make slow progress. For example, in one Year 2 mathematics lesson where the pupils were expected to count to 10, a number of the more able could easily have counted to at least 100 but were not encouraged to do so.

Assessment in *Chol* is satisfactory because there is regular testing of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. However, teachers do not always use these assessments to plan for future work that would further challenge the pupils to make better progress, especially the more able.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities throughout the school is a particular strength which was favourably commented upon by several parents. The school identifies pupils who require additional support early in their school career and can provide a wide range of assistance including remedial extraction from class, referral to appropriate professionals and even therapy on the premises during school time.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Jewish religious values and ethics are core to everything that the school does. Pupils were observed reciting their morning prayers at length and with concentration. In one class, pupils sang a prayer for success in learning with great sincerity before beginning their Talmud lesson. They are eager and enthusiastic because religious study and academic achievement are two of the central values of Judaism.

Not only do pupils explicitly study *mussar* (self-improvement texts) but respect for others and proper behaviour are emphasised throughout the curriculum. For example, a Talmud lesson was widened to include fundamentals of belief and the importance of respecting others' property.

The result is that behaviour is outstanding and remains good even in lessons where pupils are less engaged due to the quality of teaching. Pupils show respect for one another and for adults, standing when visitors enter the room and getting on well together both in and out of the classroom. They are accepting and supportive of those of their classmates who have special educational needs. Since pupils, parents and carers all regard study as a religious duty, attendance is good.

Pupils are encouraged to take on positions of responsibility when organising and participating in school events such as celebrations to mark festivals or success in studies.

Although they belong to a relatively closed community, pupils are taught to be respectful to members of other communities and ethnic groups. Particularly striking is the popularity of the non-Jewish fitness trainer who teaches physical education (PE).

The school has developed its own curriculum to give pupils knowledge of English institutions and pupils are keenly interested in learning about local democracy and preparing for their future lives as citizens of the country.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. All relevant policies are very securely in place and staff have received comprehensive and up-to-date child protection training. Together with diligent staff appointment procedures these ensure the robust care and safeguarding of pupils. Behaviour support is strongly based on a range of reward systems and the school is quick to involve parents and carers if any issues arise. Pupils feel exceptionally safe and valued in school and are confident that the principal will help them if they have problems. The staff are deployed well to supervise pupils effectively at break times.

Pupils know how to keep safe and healthy and enjoy the fitness lessons provided. They particularly commented on the high quality of school dinners which contribute to healthy eating.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school has carried out all necessary checks on staff and proprietors. It maintains a single central register which complies with the regulations. Supply staff are not used.

## **Premises of and accommodation at the school**

The school premises consist of a number of buildings, including former houses and some demountable units. Although some are in a relatively poor state of repair, they are adequate and are suitable to ensure safe and effective learning. The school has received planning permission for a development which will consolidate the existing accommodation into one purpose-built building.

The teaching accommodation is of adequate size overall. Classrooms are furnished simply and laid out in a manner which is conducive to the traditional Jewish religious style of teaching.

Play areas are good in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where an impressive outdoor playground has recently been installed, and are satisfactory for the rest of the school. The school has access to a neighbouring community hall which is used for school lunches and for PE.

There are sufficient toilet facilities for the current number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage but insufficient washbasins. The school plans to develop the Early Years Foundation Stage washroom area to provide sufficient facilities for the foreseeable future. Although there is a room for pupils who are unwell, it does not contain a washbasin.

The school has prepared an appropriate plan to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

### **Provision of information**

The school provides a good range of information for parents and carers. There is an informative prospectus, outlining the aims of the school. Parents and carers are kept well informed through regular contact with staff and two formal consultation meetings per year. Written reports are available at the end of the summer term on pupils' progress in both *Kodesh* and *Chol*.

### **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school has a set of procedures which meet the regulations.

### **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children are happy, safe and respond well to staff in an attractive and stimulating environment. Generous staffing ratios encourage children to participate. Thoroughly planned sessions and frequent meetings ensure that all areas of learning use recent training and new initiatives to benefit the children's development.

Outcomes are good. Most children speak English as an additional language and lessons are taught in Yiddish. Children acquire English through displays and some of their speech. The setting follows the 'Every Child a Talker' project and encourages communication. While the children's progress in communication and literacy is judged to be good in Yiddish and Hebrew, the school has been instructed by the local authority to score their profiles in relation to English, meaning that their profile scores fall below the national expectations in this area.

Provision is good. Children have access to an enormous range of resources. The recent addition of the thoughtfully planned outdoor playground has provided an exciting additional area for their learning. Due to the steep steps down to this playground, use is timetabled, rather than by free access.

Parents and carers are well informed and the school undertakes a parental survey twice yearly. Staff have access to training, share expertise and maintain meticulous records. Enormous progress has been made since the last inspection and leadership and management are outstanding.

Special educational needs and their early identification are a high priority. Links with outside agencies enable parents to access a wide range of professionals. Risk assessments are undertaken daily and remedial action recorded.

### **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>3</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- provide sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils, including facilities for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, which take account of regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(j))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with regulation 5 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(k)).

## **What the school could do to improve further**

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Develop *Chol*/lesson plans to provide challenging material for more-able pupils
- Continue to explore ways in which the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage can increase their access to the outdoor play area.

## Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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### The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		

## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Orthodox Jewish Day School		
<b>Date school opened</b>	1973		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 343	Girls: 0	Total: 343
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£0		
<b>Address of school</b>	98 Clapton Common, London, E5 9AL		
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8800 6599		
<b>Email address</b>	klein@bezlondon.com		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rabbi A Y Silbiger		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Rabbi J Baumgarten & Mr A Klein		