

Etz Chaim School at the Belmont

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Chanan Tomlin

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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.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Etz Chaim Boys' School was established in 1993 in North Manchester as a strictly orthodox Jewish secondary school, serving a particular strand of the local Jewish religious community. There are currently 99 students on roll, aged 11 to 16 years. The school accepts pupils of vastly differing abilities, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Three students at the school have statements of special educational needs. The school's mission is:

'to provide religious, personal and academic education, in order to prepare pupils for a full religious life in accordance with the religious outlook of their community, whilst forming upright citizens, who will be able to give to the community at large'.

To achieve these aims:

'emphasis is mainly on cultivating enthusiasm and love for Jewish studies, practice and ethos, which prepare pupils adequately for their next institution, whilst concurrently providing a basic secular education to GCSE level, an understanding of the natural world and the world around them, and some skills which will be of economic use to them in their future'.

The school was last inspected in June 2007.

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of the education provided by the school is good and the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school has made steady improvement since the last inspection and meets its aims. Arrangements for safeguarding and the welfare, health and safety of the students are satisfactory. The school meets most of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The overall quality of the education provided by the school is good. The curriculum is satisfactory and is made up of two strands, Kodesh (religious studies) and Chol

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

(secular studies). The Kodesh curriculum is largely dictated by the class teachers and includes all the core subjects needed to equip students for their futures in yeshiva ketanas (rabbinical seminaries). Kodesh subjects include gemoro (Talmud), chumash/rashi (Bible with commentaries), mishna (Mishnaic studies), halacha (Jewish Law) and nach (Prophets). Curricula for both Kodesh and Chol cover an adequate range of subjects. The Kodesh curriculum is essentially multi-lingual and gives students a good grasp of Hebrew, Aramaic and English. It effectively integrates some aspects of other areas of learning such as personal, social, citizenship and health education (PSCHE), history and geography. However, this integration does not usually feature as an integral element of planning. The health element of PSCHE is lacking because students do not learn enough about healthy eating and lifestyles. The curriculum does not provide students with many opportunities to contribute to and take on responsibilities in the school or in the wider community and enrichment of the curriculum is very limited.

The main emphasis of the Chol curriculum is on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and to a lesser extent on information and communication technology (ICT), geography and history. The school offers GCSE courses in the core subjects, history, geography and Biblical Hebrew. It also follows a commercially produced qualification for ICT.

Schemes of work for both Kodesh and Chol are basic. For *Kodesh*, these are devised by teachers and often lack detail. For *Chol*, teachers follow the schemes of work attached to the texts used for each subject. The teaching and assessment in the school is graduated according to the abilities of the students and students with learning difficulties are well-supported by designated staff. Marking is at best basic; often a series of ticks and some work is not marked at all. When work is marked, it is often not prescriptive or meaningful to the students.

The school provides a basic range of extra-curricular activities. These include modelling and extra ICT. Students go on outings as rewards for good behaviour and those in Year 10 take part in an annual trip to Jewish sites in mainland Europe. Students enjoy learning and are especially enthusiastic about Kodesh.

Overall teaching and assessment are good. Where teaching is especially effective, the atmosphere in the classroom is charged with excited interest and students are exuberant in their participation in class discussions. This is especially true in Talmud lessons at all levels. Teachers have good subject knowledge; students admire their teachers and enjoy lively debates with them. Teachers use a very limited range of teaching methods especially in Kodesh lessons. In these lessons, teaching is more formal, although pupils are given opportunities for independent learning and self-expression when they study in pairs. Most teachers plan their lessons satisfactorily, although differentiation for students of varying capabilities seldom features in planning. Lessons are paced well and the school day is interspersed with a good number of breaks so that students can recharge themselves throughout the day. Overall, there are effective forms of assessment throughout the school and good

systems of recording inform teaching and ensure progress. Teachers have very limited avenues for professional development. Regular in-service training and constructive lesson observations are not undertaken to improve the standards of teaching throughout the school.

Students make good progress at all levels and the more gifted ones are given the opportunity to take GCSE examinations early. Students are tested regularly by their teachers and take part in oral examinations by their headteacher. Teachers record marks and progress in order to inform learning and planning. Test results show a consistent upward trend and overall GCSE results for 2010 were better than previous years especially in English.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are happy, generally enjoy school, and behaviour and attendance are good. Students are generally well mannered, responsible and courteous. They have plenty of opportunities to challenge their teachers and take part in discussions and debates. This helps students grow in self-esteem and self-confidence. Some of the extra-curricular activities, such as model-making further bolster students' opportunities for self-expression.

The school places strong emphasis on the moral and ethical teachings as taught through Kodesh. This instils in the students the importance of distinguishing between right and wrong. Students learn to understand the importance that Judaism attaches to respecting the law of the land and being law-abiding citizens.

Students contribute to the local and wider Jewish community in a variety of ways. They raise funds for the school and local charities and help children with special educational needs after school hours. They are given some opportunities to learn about public institutions and services in England through the Chol curriculum.

Students prepare for their future economic well-being through well-structured mathematics lessons, GCSE and other qualifications and through healthy attitudes to learning. They are prepared well for the next stage of learning when they attend yeshiva ketanas (rabbinical seminaries) after they graduate. Opportunities to learn about other cultures are limited to oblique references during history and geography. In discussions with pupils, it was evident that they understand the importance of showing respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and cultural traditions. However, this is more a result of natural attitudes than knowledge imparted by the school.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Pupils are not taught to keep healthy and safe in any significant way. They know what is healthy

eat and that they must keep fit, although opportunities for physical activity are limited and the school does not expect or educate the students to eat healthy food. The school provides a safe environment. However, large windows in the upper floors of the building can be opened wide posing serious dangers. In addition to this, break times in the mornings, during Kodesh lesson times are not suitably supervised.

The school has a suitable anti-bullying policy and ways of promoting good behaviour amongst pupils are clearly stated in its behaviour policy. However, a very small number of students have reported that bullying does happen at school, although most agree that if it does happen, it is dealt with by staff appropriately. Students are clear about the sanctions imposed by the school for misconduct and a sanctions record is in place. A suitable first aid policy has been produced and staff are trained in first-aid.

Clear procedures and policies are in place for educational visits, health and safety, including fire protection, and all meet the requirements. The school carries out regular fire drills and these and general fire checks are recorded. Routine monitoring of health and safety takes place and is adequate. There is a child protection policy and it is implemented satisfactorily.

The school has a suitable three year plan to improve accessibility as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 2001. The school maintains a comprehensive register of admissions but its daily attendance registers are not always completed and do not have sufficient detail of the reason for absences.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has adequate recruitment procedures in place and ensures that all staff, including temporary staff, have undergone the necessary checks before commencing work at the school. All staff have the required enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau and the single central register of staff checks is complete.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The buildings are safe and the school complies with fire safety and general health and safety regulations, apart from the unrestrained windows on the upper floor. There are sufficient classrooms to enable the teaching of the curriculum. Classrooms are an adequate size and are bright and airy, however they are scantily decorated and no pupils' work is displayed anywhere in the school. There is adequate flooring throughout the building and the accommodation is maintained in a satisfactory decorative order. However, the playground is dirty and untidy. The number of toilets and hand basins is adequate and there is warm running water for students to wash their hands. Arrangements for looking after pupils that are ill are satisfactory and there is a designated medical room.

Provision of information

Parents are provided with clear information about the activities of the school and about their children's progress. Parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire reveal that they are generally positive about the quality of education their children receive.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The procedures for handling complaints are clear and comply fully with the requirements. There have been no formal complaints from parents in recent years.

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.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

- ensure that the provision made for personal, social and health education reflects the school's aims and ethos (paragraph 2(2)(f)).

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

- ensure that there are effective measures to ensure pupils' health and safety which have regard to the DfES guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers* (DfES 0803/2001) (paragraph 11)
- deploy school staff in such a way as to ensure the proper supervision of pupils (paragraph 15)
- ensure that attendance registers are maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 17).

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

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made

- ensure that no areas of the school compromise health or safety (paragraph 23(i))
- ensure that all parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state (paragraph 23(m)).

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 systems to ensure that students know that bullying will not be tolerated in any form and at any level
- provide regular in-service training and constructive lesson observations to raise the standards of teaching throughout the school
- ensure that all work is marked and that marking is consistently prescriptive and meaningful to the students
- develop the curriculum so that students are taught to respect and show tolerance for those of different faiths and cultural traditions in more meaningful, practical ways.

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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School details

School status	Independent
Type of school	Secondary Boys' School
Date school opened	July 1993
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 98
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5580
Address of school	The Belmont, 89 Middleton Road Manchester, Lancashire, M8 4JY
Telephone number	0161 740 0300
Email address	manager@ec-school.org.uk
Headteacher	Rabbi Eli Cohen
Proprietor	Mr N. M. Halpern