

Inspection report

Beth Jacob Grammar School for Girls

Independent school

DfES ref no: 302/6092

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection:

6 - 9 November 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Beth Jacob Grammar School for Girls is an independent day school serving a section of the strictly observant Jewish community of northwest London. It was established in 1980 and moved to purpose-built premises in Hendon in 1998. It has 266 pupils on roll aged 11 to 17. Four pupils have statements of special educational needs. Six pupils attend who do not have English as their first language. The school is still under the leadership of the headteacher who helped establish the school.

The school is committed to the aim that *'the girls should be intellectually developed and stimulated in all areas of their learning and that they should feel happy and fulfilled in their studies'*.

Summary of main findings

Beth Jacob Grammar School for Girls is a distinctive school, which successfully achieves its aims. Pupils are happy, motivated and enjoy coming to school. They are made to feel part of the 'family' of the school, which is a close knit, caring community. As a result of a carefully planned curriculum which successfully combines both *Kodesh* (religious) and *Chol* (secular) studies and dedicated, well-informed teaching, pupils make good and, in many cases, very good progress. The school achieves very good results in public examinations and in particular in the A-level studies where pupils complete the two year course in one year. Much of this success is due to the inspirational leadership of the long-serving headteacher, who is ably supported by the senior staff.

What the school does well:

- it gives the pupils a love of their faith and enables them to study religious text independently;
- its well-planned curriculum meets the needs of the pupils;
- it gives very good individual support to all pupils, including those who need additional help;

- it encourages pupils to behave in an exemplary way and to develop self-discipline and positive attitudes to learning; and
- it keeps parents very well informed about their daughters' education.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

- attend to the training issue in section 3 of this report.

Next Steps

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- include formal music teaching in the curriculum; and
- integrate information and communication technology (ICT) more fully into the curriculum.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is reasonably broad and balanced throughout the school. It is divided into two distinctive strands, *Kodesh* (religious) and *Chol* (secular). *Kodesh* includes a range of Jewish studies covering the study of the Bible, Hebrew and Yiddish. This curriculum inculcates in the pupils an understanding of their Jewish identity and heritage, their culture and their religion. The *Kodesh* curriculum forms a major part of the timetable, and covers many basic skills. It particularly contributes to literacy, for example, through the detailed analysis of complex Biblical text.

The secular curriculum includes all subjects of the National Curriculum with the exception of music. Although some pupils learn musical instruments outside school, and the annual school 'Shows', assemblies and prayers include music, pupils are not taught music within the formal curriculum.

The tutorial system at the school is impressive and provides additional support for all pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs are very effectively supported with detailed plans for learning and strong links with specialist agencies. These

pupils and those for whom English is an additional language gain particular benefit from such provision.

Pupils sit internal tests culminating in examinations at GCSE and at A level, which is taken in one year of study. All pupils, including those who have special educational needs, have the opportunity to gain external accreditation.

There is a deputy headteacher with managerial responsibility for each of the two curricular strands. There is a clear curriculum policy, which supports conscientious long, medium and short-term planning. Both of the deputy headteachers have put much effort and support into the development of planning and teachers have responded well. The two strands of the curriculum are implemented effectively and monitored through scrutiny of planning and classroom observation. The deputy headteachers give effective training support to newly appointed *Kodesh* teachers and arrange professional development opportunities for other staff.

A high priority is given to pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE). PSHE is taught through discrete lessons, assemblies and work in several subjects. The school takes its role as a promoter of healthy living seriously, as evidenced by displays of pupils' work and discussions with pupils. Economic well-being is highlighted through the school 'Shows' and its charity work.

The school plans daily homework to support pupils' studies and although pupils reported that they find homework useful to consolidate their learning, sometimes the load is 'a little heavy'.

The school has re-evaluated its educational visits programme and has sought to widen the range of places visited to support all areas of the curriculum. There is no extra-curricular provision after school but the school offers additional projects and visits, such as a Walking Tour, the Bas Mitzvah programme and the much-awaited annual 'Shows'.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching for the secular subjects is good and in many cases outstanding. In *Kodesh* lessons it is at least satisfactory and often good. The staff are committed and dedicated to the personal development and education of the pupils.

In the best lessons staff set a brisk pace and give clear, concise explanations helping pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding and increase their skills. Well-targeted, effective questioning helps to challenge the more able and sympathetic, supportive help is given to those who need additional assistance. This is provided partly through the well-organised tutorial groups for individual pupils in mathematics, English and *Kodesh*, and through staff sensitively supporting pupils in lessons. Teaching assistants also provide good support. Staff support pupils very well, checking learning, answering questions and encouraging pupils to think for themselves. This consistent checking of learning makes a valuable contribution to pupils' progress. The majority of teachers use effective methods related to the learning needs of the pupils, matching the work to these needs and challenging them

to think for themselves, concentrate and persevere in their studies. In some less effective lessons teachers posed an insufficient challenge for the pupils. Some pupils were not engaged for part of the lesson, there was no clear focus for learning and time was wasted.

In the *Kodesh* lessons formal traditional teaching methods are used with some pupils given additional tutorial help to decode the complex text. A very good feature of the *Kodesh* teaching is the way in which pupils are encouraged to use critical thinking skills and analyse complex text. This promotes higher order learning skills even in the youngest classes.

Staff set high expectations for behaviour and work and pupils respond by working hard and behaving very well. There is a businesslike, purposeful atmosphere in many lessons, with pupils asking questions and requesting clarification or help when they need it: this is readily given by staff. The school day runs like clockwork: lessons start and end promptly and pupils move quickly between lessons. The timetable is carefully devised and implemented, as the combination of both curricula and the availability of the part-time staff present a considerable challenge.

Pupils report that they enjoy their lessons and this is evident. Older pupils rise to the challenge of the most demanding teaching work diligently and are given more responsibility for their learning. Younger pupils are well supported; staff give them clear guidance, understandable explanations and appropriate homework. During lessons pupils work well together, in pairs or small groups, helping each other with tasks allotted, as, for example, in a Year 7 science lesson, experimenting on weight and mass.

Resources are good and are used effectively. All classes have opportunities to study ICT for one lesson each week, and the science department uses ICT very well during lessons. This use is not as common in some other subjects in the curriculum.

There is regular, consistent and effective testing of pupils' learning throughout the year. End-of-unit tests, annual examinations, twice-yearly academic reviews and two detailed written reports all combine to give a clear and detailed picture of each pupil's progress, culminating in public examinations. Pupils achieve very good results in these, and particularly the Year 12 pupils, who take the whole A level course in one year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school helps pupils to develop into mature young people able to think for themselves. Pupils have plenty to say, with much that is worth listening to. The teachers are very successful in fostering pupils' enjoyment of school and their positive attitudes towards learning, particularly in regard to *Torah* study. In

discussion, one girl said: 'The best thing about this school is the way the teachers have time to listen'.

Tefilloh (prayer) makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual development by allowing them the opportunity for reflection and to have their own space. The school places a strong emphasis on celebrating pupils' efforts through attractive displays of their work. The Bas Mitzvah programme celebrates the achievements of Year 7 girls with excellent inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties.

The headteacher and staff set high expectations of behaviour, which all pupils meet successfully. Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors and are very supportive of one another. They form a cohesive family group and the older girls act as very good role models for the younger ones.

Discussion times and well-chosen stories help pupils to understand their responsibilities to others and to the broader community. Pupils help both old and young by supporting not only the elderly but also busy mothers. Each pupil can play a major role in the life of the school, for example, helping to organise fund-raising events for those in need by collecting 'pennies', or participating in the annual 'Shows'.

Pupils' cultural development is good. They study three or four different languages. They acquire a secure base in Jewish teachings and as a result, are confident in their religious identity and appreciate being educated in a Jewish school. There are many opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultures, for example, discussions about religious costume included ways in which both Hindu and Muslim women dress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. There is much good practice in the school to ensure that the pupils are well looked after and kept safe. The school has devised and implemented a range of well-thought-out policies for anti-bullying, health and safety of pupils on visits outside the school, child protection and behaviour. The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach to behaviour and the pupils behave very well both in class and around the school. The named child protection officer has not yet attended up-to-date training but the school has reacted very promptly to this omission by arranging an appropriate course for the staff next term.

A comprehensive health and safety policy covers all areas of school life. Risk assessments are made on various activities both within school and on visits outside. The school is vigilant about fire safety with regular, documented fire drills, all fire appliances are checked annually and a detailed fire risk assessment has been carried out. There are several trained First Aiders at the school who follow the clearly written First Aid policy. Well-stocked boxes are located where needed,

accidents are carefully recorded and some older girls are taught First Aid as part of the curriculum. The pupils are very well supervised at all times while they are at school. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to regulations. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that the designated child protection officer and all staff receive appropriate training to comply with current Department for Education and Skills guidance (paragraph 3(2)(b)).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has checked all the staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. Many of the senior staff have been at the school for some years but some younger members of staff who teach *Kodesh* have only recently joined. The school has suitable appointment procedures in place. The headteacher has been at the school since its foundation and with the effective support of the senior management is the 'lynchpin' of the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The purpose-built, five-storey building provides good accommodation. The premises are well maintained and in good decorative order. They are accessible to the disabled, with lift access to all floors.

Classrooms are adequate and suitably furnished for the current number of pupils. The outdoor play area is well used to support physical education lessons and there is also the hall and the flat roof if additional space is required. Attractive displays, particularly in *Kodesh* and art, give out moral messages, which add to pupils' personal development.

The hall is adequate in size for some curriculum activities, as well as for assemblies and lunch. There are a number of specialist subject rooms including a library, science laboratories, an art room, home economics facilities and two ICT suites. The school makes effective use of space, with every nook and cranny used for individual or small group sessions with teachers and therapy staff.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school tries very hard to ensure that all parents are kept well informed about the school and their daughters' progress and is successful in achieving this. There are detailed curriculum documents available to them from when they first join the school, a sixth form code of conduct, weekly newsletters produced by the Year 11 pupils, a helpful and informative prospectus, a concise pupils' handbook and several up-to-date notice boards informing parents of events.

The parents who responded to the questionnaire sent out before the inspection were positive in their praise for the school. Above all, they appreciated the way the headteacher and senior staff make themselves available to speak to parents, who know that 'the door to the headteacher's office is always open'. Parents do not hesitate in coming forward when they wish to speak to her. Parents have two detailed reports on their daughters' progress at different times of year, according to their year group, as well as regular meetings to discuss their progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a detailed complaints procedure, which meets current regulations. A copy is available to parents and prospective parents on request.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Beth Jacob Grammar School for Girls
DfES Number:	302/6092
Type of school:	Secondary
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 - 17 years
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 0 Girls: 266 Total: 266
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys; 0 Girls: 4 Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils):	£4,680
Address of school:	Stratford Road Hendon London NW4 2AT
Telephone number:	0208 2034322
Fax number:	0208 2028480
Email address:	a.lvey@bjgs.org
Headteacher:	Mrs A D Steinberg
Proprietor:	Beth Jacob Grammar School for Girls Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Jill Bainton
Date of inspection:	6 - 9 November 2006

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