



Gateshead Mechina

Independent School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

DfES Registration Number 390/6002
Unique Reference Number 108414
Inspection number 296810
Inspection dates 7-8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Mr Ronald Cohen AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Age group
10-15

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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, 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

Gateshead Mechina (formerly Gateshead Jewish Boarding School for boys) was established in 1944. In 1974 the school became a day school. It is the only secondary boys' school of its kind in Gateshead catering for the needs of the orthodox Jewish community. There are currently 99 students on roll, aged 11 to 15 years. The community is unique in that a large proportion of the male adult population is engaged in either teaching or studying of *Talmud* (written law) in *Yeshiva* (orthodox Jewish seminary for boys) and *Kollel* (Continuing Adult Education provision, mainly for married men, who wish to engage in life-time advanced study). Being the only school of its kind in the community, the school accepts students of vastly differing abilities. Its mission is to ensure that *'students learn those skills necessary to become productive, caring, thinking individuals suitably equipped so as to successfully embark on the next stage of their education. This is to be achieved by inculcating the students with core Torah values as transmitted by Rabbinic authorities as well as providing a secular education up to GCSE standard'*. In 2005 the school moved to new purpose built air-conditioned premises.

Evaluation of the school

Gateshead Mechina provides a good education for its students. It meets all the regulations. Its quality of care is good, and there are other good and outstanding features. The curriculum and the teaching by dedicated staff ensure that all students make good progress. These judgements accord with the school's self-evaluation and represent a commendable outcome at this stage in the school's development, given the very recent appointment of the current headteacher. His efforts, and those of his staff, to move the school forward, have already produced clear and measurable improvements since his arrival.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. A strength of the curriculum is the fusion of the secular elements (*Chol*) with the underpinning Jewish values of the school. This is achieved by effective use of an extended school day. The overall curriculum provision, augmented by the *Areivim*

(Support) programme, provides students who have special educational or emotional needs with extra support on a regular, one-to-one basis, and enables the school to meet the needs and interests of all its students, including those students who find engagement with learning difficult.

The spiritual and moral aspects of curriculum are outstanding. Care and respect for others permeate the entire curriculum, which includes an expanding range of enrichment activities both within the school and in the wider community. These are diverse and range from leading the daily synagogue services to engaging in white water rafting. Other extra-curricular activities, such as visits and a range of communal charitable projects, provide for the further academic, personal and social development of the students.

Students make good progress and attain good standards, particularly in the *Kodesh* (Jewish studies) elements. This gives them a good preparation for the next stage of their education, and indeed for adult life, since all students leave school at the end of Year 10 and all go directly to Yeshiva. Students 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.

Teaching and learning are good overall, with some that is outstanding. In the most effective lessons, learning is placed at the centre of all activities and students make good progress. Teachers create an exciting and stimulating learning environment, in which there is good interaction between teacher and students, based on relationships of mutual respect. Lessons have a good pace and appropriate challenge to which students respond well. Teaching is less successful where there is limited interaction between teacher and students; insufficient opportunities for independent working; a lack of adjustment of the teaching process according to the learning needs of the pupils, despite a wide range of attainment in the group; and a lack of pace. This sometimes leads to students going off task and the normally good behaviour is not maintained.

Assessment is satisfactory overall. Systems for target setting, monitoring and tracking of students' academic progress are increasingly effective, but differ between individual teachers. Consistency of good practice in using assessment to inform teaching and students' 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 students

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is outstanding. Gateshead Mechina enables its students to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence through religious instruction, incentive programmes and a general atmosphere of fairness and respect. The

ethos of the school enables the students to distinguish between right and wrong and respect the law. Students are provided with a broad knowledge of public institutions and services in England through topics in the curriculum.

Attendance is good. Students enjoy the education provided by the school. This is especially evident during *Kodesh* lessons where most students behave well and are actively engaged in their learning and have good relationships with their *rebbe*s (Jewish teachers, all of whom are rabbis). The '*Areivim Programme*' contributes to students' continued success in learning and acceptance by their peers. It also bolsters their self-esteem. Many students have a positive attitude towards *Chol* studies and their behaviour is generally good. However, some lessons are disturbed by some less enthusiastic students. Many students return to school after hours to continue their learning with study partners, drawn from amongst their peers. This is seen as a privilege and an enjoyable activity, not as a burden.

Students 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.

Students prepare for their economic well-being through the in-depth study of classical *Talmudic* and *Halachic* (legal) texts and by being encouraged to apply practical lessons to daily life. Students learn how to be responsible with money and show full understanding of their religious obligations through a practical application of charity, tithes and returning lost property.

All students in the school come from strictly orthodox Jewish families within the Gateshead community. The ethos of the community is very much learning oriented and most of its members are actively involved in education. For the most part, the students follow this example and strive, from a very young age, to meet the expectations that necessitate filling these roles. Students make a positive contribution to the school community by running prayer services, organising the study hall daily, fund raising and arranging major school events twice yearly. They also make a positive contribution to the community at large through choir performances, visits to the local nursing home, fundraising communal charities, and a popular '*sheimos*' disposal service (usually old and unusable holy objects, which contain the name of G-d. These include: old holy books or Torah scrolls that are falling apart or have become invalid; unwanted pieces of paper that have Holy words on them. They cannot be destroyed but must be buried in accordance with Jewish law and custom).

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety are good. The students are encouraged to be healthy through lessons which raise an awareness of the importance of healthy eating and not smoking. In addition to this, a drug awareness session is a major feature of '*Safety Works*', an interactive safety off-site centre that is visited by classes on a regular basis. '*Safety Works*' also includes sessions on road and cycle safety, first aid and emergency response, environmental and building safety, and water and fire safety.

The school ensures that the students stay safe through well-equipped facilities and has prepared and implemented appropriate written policies for bullying, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, health and safety, and behaviour and sanctions.

The school has regard for the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) guidance on health and safety and has a satisfactory level of fire safety and an implemented written policy on first aid.

Staff members are deployed in ways that ensure the proper supervision of students. The school keeps careful, computerised records of sanctions imposed upon students, appropriate admission and attendance registers and it fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Staff recruitment and vetting procedures are implemented effectively. Staff have been subject to a check by the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level to confirm their suitability to work with children. The records held at the school comply with requirements.

School's premises and accommodation

Gateshead Mechina moved into purpose-built premises in September 2005. The premises and accommodation create an excellent environment, which is conducive to learning. All teaching and administrative areas are on the ground floor and a large, safe play area is located on the roof. The school is equipped with state of the art facilities for science and information and communication technology (ICT), a library and a study hall. The classrooms are airy and of suitable sizes for the classes. There is a well-appointed first aid room and there is ready access for emergency vehicles when necessary.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents and prospective parents with comprehensive and useful information through its parents' information pack and its prospectus. These documents contain full details of key school policies. Parents are regularly updated by informative meetings. An interim (mid year) clearly detailed termly report is produced for each pupil. This is augmented by a further report at the end of the academic year, which gives parents a clear picture of the progress their son(s) are making in each subject.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has detailed and comprehensive complaints procedures that are clearly outlined in an informative policy document. All parents are informed of the procedures when students are admitted and the school makes further copies available on request.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that all teaching is of the standard demonstrated by the best practice, particularly in involving students more in independent learning
- ensure that pupils' progress is even more effective by creating, implementing and sustaining uniform systems of marking and assessment.
- replicate in the Chol lessons, the successful rewards and sanctions systems which feature in Kodesh lessons and which encourage students' high levels of sustained engagement.

School details

Name of school	Gateshead Mechina		
DfES number	390/6002		
Unique reference number	108414		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1944		
Age range of students	10-15		
Gender of students	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 99	Girls: 0	Total: 99
Annual fees (day students)	£ 5635-20		
Address of school			
Telephone number	0191 4771431		
Fax number	0191 4771432		
Email address	info@gjbs.gateshead.sch.uk		
Headteacher	Rabbi M Kupetz		
Proprietor	Mr D. Schleider		
Reporting inspector	Mr Ronald Cohen AI		
Dates of inspection	7- 8 March 2007		

