

Beis Aharon School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	204/6398
Unique Reference Number	131170
Inspection number	316908
Inspection dates	14-15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sandra Teacher

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).

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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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Beis Aharon day school is an independent *Charedi* (strictly orthodox) Jewish boys' school situated in the heart of the Jewish community in North London. Most of the 280 boys ages 3 to 12 belong to the local *Chasidic* community. The majority of boys speak Yiddish as their first language and *Kodesh* (Jewish Studies) is taught in Yiddish. In addition, literacy and numeracy, part of the secular studies (*Chol*) curriculum, is taught in both English and Yiddish. The school is open 6 days a week from Sunday to Friday and the majority of time is spent on the teaching of Yiddish and *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 to grow into responsible members of their community and of society at large.

The school is currently housed in the community synagogue but is looking forward to the imminent move to the new purpose-built premises next door.

This is the first published report for the school.

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of education provided by the school is inadequate because of the limited *Chol* curriculum. In *Kodesh*, the curriculum and quality of teaching are good, work is of a high standard and pupils make good progress. However, in *Chol* their progress is unsatisfactory because the curriculum is unstructured and insufficient time is available to enable the boys to achieve according to their age and ability. Spiritual and moral development is outstanding, and social development is good. Care and welfare are satisfactory. Checks on the suitability of staff are not always completed in advance of their appointment. Parents and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the school and pupils are well prepared for life in their community. The school does not meet all of the requirements for continued registration.

Quality of education

The overall quality of the curriculum is inadequate because the secular curriculum (*Chol*) is inadequate. Limited time is allocated to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and without a clear curriculum map and schemes of work to guide teachers' planning, pupils make inadequate progress overall.

The *Kodesh* curriculum is good. It is varied and exciting and ensures that pupils gain the necessary skills upon which to build as they progress in their Jewish religious education and future lives as observant Jews within the Beis Aharon community. The focus of the *Kodesh* curriculum is on the study of the *Chumash* (Bible), *Gemara* (Talmud), *Mishnayos* (Codes of Law) and *Halocho* (practical law). Pupils quickly gain the skills to read, translate and comprehend the sacred texts, studying in Yiddish, Hebrew and Aramaic. There is a clearly written curriculum policy and this is supported by appropriate schemes of work. This enables the majority of pupils to achieve high standards in all areas of their *Kodesh* studies. More able pupils are set challenging work appropriate to their needs and good one-to-one support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. In keeping with the usual practice in orthodox Jewish schools, personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) pervades the *Kodesh* curriculum through the teaching of *Musar* and *Midos* (morals and ethics).

The curriculum in the Nursery and Reception classes (Foundation Stage) is satisfactory. The school has been innovative in working with an integrated scheme which intertwines the Jewish education with the six areas of learning for children of this age. For example, following the story of this week's *parsha*, (weekly Torah reading) *Vayetzei*, the children constructed ladders and acted out the story of Jacob. The children develop their social skills effectively and learn to read and write in Hebrew and Yiddish. The outdoor environment helps to develop their physical skills but is not part of the planned curriculum.

Other subjects such as science, physical education (PE), design and technology, art and music are not taught. Thus the curriculum does not provide sufficient experiences for pupils in the scientific, technological, physical, and aesthetic and creative areas of learning. There are insufficient resources to aid the teaching and learning for these subjects. There are some good examples of integration between the *Kodesh* and *Chol* curricula, particularly in PSHCE. A lesson on first aid was linked to the concept of *pikuach nefesh* (laws concerning saving lives). Due to the school's religious ethos, information and communication technology is not included. Extra-curricular activities in sport, music and an after-school club enrich the curriculum.

Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. The best teaching was seen in the *Kodesh* lessons where it is good overall. However in *Chol*, it is only satisfactory and includes some weaknesses. The relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils' response to the teachers' high expectations is outstanding, particularly with regard to *middos* (good character traits including behaviour and respect). They display remarkable respect towards their teachers and visitors and they stand up immediately when an adult enters their classroom. Most teachers are extremely secure in their subject knowledge and are very successful in imbuing pupils with a love of Torah and *mitzvos* (commandments). In the best lessons, the planning clearly identifies what pupils are to learn and this is communicated to them. Good questioning techniques are employed which encourage pupils to think for themselves

and in these lessons they make good progress. Traditional methods of Jewish learning encourage pupils to study independently or with a *chavrusa* (in pairs) where they share ideas about the meaning of the text.

Because literacy and numeracy teaching only begins when pupils are eight years old, teachers are aware that there is a great deal to catch up. They inject pace and rigour into the lessons so that within a few weeks the majority of the boys learn to read and calculate, but they do not achieve as well as other pupils of a similar age and ability. Where lessons are unsatisfactory, teachers lack good subject knowledge, there is inadequate planning and pupils are all expected to do the same work. There are limited resources for art, music, history, geography, PE and science and these are not used effectively enough. Pupils would love to have their own PE equipment, although they do use the facilities of a nearby school.

Assessment is satisfactory overall. It is good in *Kodesh* because the headteacher *vehers* (assesses) each pupil and parents are involved in their children's learning. Visiting Rabbis test the pupils and encourage and inspire them. This enables the school to track how well pupils are doing in relation to similar pupils in other schools. In *Chol* subjects, there are regular tests in maths and English. The quality of marking of pupils' written work varies and, in the best practice, helpful and evaluative comments are given to inform pupils what they must do to improve in the future.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall. The considerable emphasis placed on the moral and social aspects of their education, with the ethos of Torah values, leads to pupils' growing understanding of justice, right and wrong and respect for all. These aspects are taught very well and contribute to the very good attitudes and outstanding behaviour of pupils both inside and outside the classroom. Pupils acquire a sense of responsibility for themselves, others and their surroundings. The school provides an environment in which pupils feel safe, happy and respected. This is greatly appreciated by parents. The pupils have very upbeat views about their education. They said '*this is a good school, in which we enjoy the lessons because the teachers make it fun*'.

Spiritual and moral development is outstanding. The way pupils *daven* (pray) with *kavono* (sincerity) sets the tone for the day's learning. Love of their religion shines through their faces. Confidence and self esteem are built up through praise and encouragement and pupils have the chance to be elected as the *Purim Rav* and to give a *d'var Torah*.

There are many aspects of school life which give pupils the opportunity to make a contribution to the community. For example, they help the infirm and elderly, sort out the money collected for charity and organise the food for the *siyyum* (graduation). However, older pupils feel that they do not have a voice in the school and that their views are not always taken into account.

Pupils do not have sufficient knowledge of British institutions and services. The school plays a major part within the local Jewish community and teachers make use of the wider multi-ethnic Hackney community to develop pupils' appreciation of other cultures.

It is to be celebrated that boys study in four different languages: English, Hebrew and Yiddish and Aramaic. The study of *Mishneh* and *Gemara* (Talmud), with their emphasis on discussion and analysis, gives the pupils a range of transferable skills not only for life but also for their future economic well-being within their own and the wider community.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school ensures that the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is satisfactory. An appropriate range of policies is in place to promote the safety and well being of pupils in all circumstances. Parents, staff and pupils report that they appreciate the warm, family atmosphere provided by the school. However, the designated person for child protection has not received recent formal training. Hence the school does not meet the requirement in this area. The number of adults per child in the Early Years department is insufficient to meet requirements. This was an issue in the recent Early Years Ofsted report and has not yet been rectified.

Healthy living is in keeping with Torah values, and this is an integral part of school life. Clear policies to promote good behaviour ensure that pupils learn in a calm, positive atmosphere. Rules are simple and clearly understood by all. Although attendance is good, attendance registers are not kept in accordance with regulations. The school does not have a plan with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is at the heart of the local Jewish community and the governing body meets regularly. At present, although the school has requested Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for all staff, a full response has not yet been received. Appropriate checks on staff prior to employment as regards their identity, medical fitness and references are not fully in place on a staff register.

School's premises and accommodation

Every effort has been made to patch up the disrepair in the synagogue premises, and the accommodation is just satisfactory. The uneven flooring, the lack of space for a medical room, physical exercise and a library will soon be rectified. The imminent move to the new premises will ensure that the regulations which are not met in the present building will be complied with.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Almost every parent responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and all are highly satisfied with almost all aspects of the school's work. However, both the parents and pupils would like more physical education and a wider range of activities. Inspectors agree. There is a newly-prepared prospectus which collates all the necessary information for parents and others. This is sent out to all parents and prospective parents. In practice, informal lines of communication between parents and staff are always open in this close-knit community, so that most parents feel well informed. Informal meetings with parents are encouraged in addition to parents' evenings. Parents do not receive a full written report on progress in all subjects. This means they do not have full picture of how well their children are achieving and what needs to be improved. Some parents commented on this.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has revised the complaints policy and it meets all of the regulations. There have been no formal complaints from parents in the last 12 months.

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 the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish a curriculum policy for *Chol* set out in writing, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work and implement it effectively (paragraph 1(2))
- provide pupils of compulsory school age experience in the following areas of learning: scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- ensure the subject matter in *Chol* is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of pupils, including those pupils with a statement of special educational need (paragraph 1(2)(b))
- ensure the *Chol* curriculum provides the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress in their *Chol* studies (paragraph 1(2)(i))
- ensure teachers' planning takes full account of different ability groups (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- increase resources across the school (paragraph 1(3)(f)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d)).

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

- ensure that all staff have received appropriate training in child protection procedures (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- employ sufficient staff in the Early Years to provide adequate supervision at all times (paragraph 3(7))
- maintain the attendance registers 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, ensure that :

- appropriate checks been carried out 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 and that such information been taken into account in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- ensure that details of staff checks are included in a single central register (paragraphs 4C (2 and 3), 4C(6 and 7) and 4C(9)).

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

- provide sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils, including facilities for pupils with special needs, which take account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l))
- ensure the flooring 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 parents with an annual written report of the progress and attainment of their children in the main subject areas taught (paragraph 6(5)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

School details

Name of school	Beis Aharon School
DCSF number	204/6398
Unique reference number	131170
Type of school	Jewish Day
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1981
Age range of pupils	3-12 years
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	280
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	1
Number of pupils who are looked after	0
Annual fees	£1,820
Address of school	97-99 Bethune Road London N16 5ED
Telephone number	0208 800 7368
Fax number	0208 806 7368
Email address	dbk@ttbal.plus.com; sstbd11@yahoo.co.uk
Headteacher	Rabbi Greenfeld and Mr Pomeranz
Proprietor	Mr Litschitz
Reporting inspector	Sandra Teacher
Dates of inspection	14-15 November 2007