

Talmud Torah Chaim Meirim School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	204/6377
Unique Reference Number	100296
Inspection number	320388
Inspection dates	15-16 January 2008
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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

Talmud Torah Chaim Meirim School is situated in the predominantly Jewish area of Stamford Hill, North London. It was established in 1979 in response to the wishes of The Viznitzer Rebbe. During a visit to London he expressed a wish that a Viznitz Talmud Torah should be established. Since then it has grown from six pupils to the current 176. Pupils in the main school are aged between 5 and 12 years old and there is a nursery which caters for children from the age of two. It is owned and maintained by a charitable trust, CMA trust, and serves the strictly observant (haredi) Jewish community. The school charges no fees and relies on voluntary contributions from parents and other sources. The vast majority of pupils have English as an additional language and most come from homes where Yiddish is the main language used. The school has one pupil with a statement of special educational need, supported by Hackney Local Authority. The curriculum is divided into two distinctive strands, Jewish Studies (Kodesh), and Secular Studies (Chol) which are non-religious subjects. Kodesh lessons, which are conducted in Yiddish, take up about 85 percent of the school day. This is the first published inspection report for this school.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory. The provision in Jewish Studies (Kodesh) is outstanding but there are some weaknesses in the secular curriculum. The school meets most regulations and those not met are detailed in this report. Teaching is good and pupils are making good overall progress. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their behaviour are outstanding. The school takes good care of its pupils. Parents and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the school.

Quality of education

The overall quality of the education provided by the school is satisfactory. The curriculum is inadequate overall because the secular curriculum (Chol) is unsatisfactory. Limited time is allocated to the teaching of science and the curriculum does not provide pupils with enough experience in technological, physical, aesthetic and creative studies.

The Kodesh curriculum is outstanding. 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 strictly observant Jews. The focus of the Kodesh curriculum is on the study of the Chumash and Nach (Bible), Mishnayos and Gemoro (Talmud), Halochoh (practical law) and Yedioh Kelolis (General Jewish Knowledge). As a further enhancement, there are incentive schemes to encourage pupils to commit to memory lengthy and complicated factual information, for example the 613 commandments in the Torah. It is impressive to note that 45% of pupils have successfully accomplished this challenging task.

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, some aspects of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) pervades the Kodesh curriculum through the teaching of musar and midos (morals and ethics).

The secular curriculum is taught for one and a half hours each day and therefore is limited in breadth. There is adequate provision in mathematics, which enables pupils to acquire sufficient skills to prepare them for the next steps in their education and for their future lives. It is strongly focused on numeracy aspects of mathematics, but the school ensures that as pupils get older, they have increasing opportunities to apply their learning in problem solving and through activities such as preparing budgets for their residential visits. Good provision for learning languages enables pupils to become fluent in English. For the vast majority, English is not their mother tongue or that used at home. Pupils are also educated in Hebrew and in Aramaic for different aspects of their education, demonstrating a very good command of language.

Provision for pupils' human and social development is good. It is within the Jewish studies, and consistent with the ethos of the school and the community. There are few, if any opportunities for pupils to develop sufficient skills and build enough knowledge and understanding in scientific, technological, physical, and aesthetic and creative aspects of their development. Neither is there enough planned provision made in the secular curriculum to ensure that those pupils capable of harder work do as well as they could or that pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities receive appropriate support. The school has not demonstrated a clear understanding of the impact of these weaknesses because there was no self-evaluation form available at the time of the inspection.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is outstanding in the Kodesh lessons. These teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are outstanding role models for the boys as Jewish adults. Pupils can see clearly in their teachers the good

character traits and qualities that the school is endeavouring to instil in them. Teachers display very warm and caring attitudes towards pupils and they display a lot of patience in listening to them. They have a very clear understanding of pupils' attainment and achievement and assessment is on-going. It is mainly through questioning and through written and oral tests which establish what pupils have learned and how well they have learned it. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils and they convey this clearly, so pupils know exactly what is expected of them.

Teaching in secular instruction is satisfactory. Methods are generally appropriate and teachers support pupils' learning through clear explanation and support when pupils find difficulty and ask questions. Some teachers find suitable tasks for pupils to complete when they have finished their work ahead of others, such as further developing English language writing skills. In some other classes more-able pupils are simply directed to 'colour in' when they have finished. This does very little to help pupils move on and in fact holds their progress back. Teachers have a good idea about how well pupils are doing. They mark books regularly and through regular tests at appropriate times, know how well pupils are doing. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour but sometimes expectations of what higher-attaining pupils can do in their work are not high enough. Not all teachers show sufficient knowledge of how to match work to meet the needs of the wide range of pupils in classes.

Overall, pupils' progress is good in this school. Their achievement in Kodesh lessons is outstanding. In secular studies their overall progress is satisfactory. Pupils progress well in language. From a low starting point (the vast majority of pupils have English as an additional language) pupils soon become fluent communicators in English in terms of speaking and listening, reading and writing. They then have the skills to continue their education in English (for all secular lessons), Aramaic and Hebrew (sacred texts studied are written in Hebrew or Aramaic) and Yiddish (language of instruction and communication) for Kodesh. Progress in mathematics is good with pupils developing numeracy knowledge and understanding and problem solving skills sufficiently well to provide a secure preparation for their futures. Achievement in areas of the curriculum that are not sufficiently met in the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality and effectiveness of the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils is outstanding. Pupils have very positive attitudes towards their school and attendance is excellent. The behaviour of pupils is outstanding and they display great enthusiasm and enjoyment in their lessons. The school's strong emphasis on the moral and ethical teachings, as taught through the Kodesh curriculum, permeates every aspect of their lives. This instils in the pupils the importance of distinguishing between right and wrong. In keeping with Jewish law, pupils are taught to respect the law of the land and to grow up as law-abiding citizens.

Pupils' contribution to the local and wider Jewish community is very good. They raise funds for charity and they display kindness to each other. For example, they produce get well cards for their classmates if they are sick. Pupils are given some opportunities to learn about public institutions and services in England. For example, some classes recently visited the Science Museum and a visit to Greenwich is scheduled to take place in the near future. Pupils fully appreciate their own culture and they are encouraged to appreciate other cultures through discussion and by example. Their respect and tolerance of other cultural traditions is evident in their dealing with adults who visit the school, and their neighbours.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school provides a good level of care for all pupils. Behaviour and standards of work are carefully monitored and early intervention and consultation with parents is effective in maintaining high standards of behaviour and a safe learning environment, which is free from any form of oppression or harassment. The health and safety of pupils is provided to a high standard. First aid is readily available, as is medical support from Hatzola, a rapid response team of highly skilled paramedics, who support the school in more urgent cases. Full health and safety checks, such as fire risk, first aid provision and risk assessments for all visits and trips out of school are made. Although there is a brief plan that highlights where and how the buildings can be adapted to improve access for people with disabilities, there is no three-year plan prepared by the proprietors that sets out the priorities, responsible people, resources to be used and timescales.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has carried out all the necessary Criminal Records Bureau checks for staff and adults in contact with children. The school has a good staff appointment system which ensures all appropriate checks are undertaken on the suitability of staff before they are appointed.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are good and are conducive to effective teaching and learning. The school is based in a former synagogue and considerable rebuilding and refurbishment have been undertaken to adapt it to its needs. The premises also contain a luxurious banqueting suite and the beautiful dining room is available for pupils to eat their lunch each day and for daily acts of collective worship. The classrooms are of a suitable size for the age and number of pupils. There are an appropriate number of washrooms and toilets. The general décor of the building is satisfactory and further refurbishment of some classrooms is planned. The playground area is large enough to accommodate all pupils.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is satisfactory in all but one area. The school does not provide parents and prospective parents with information of its policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions. There is regular contact with parents about the pupils' work and achievements.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for handling complaints are clear and concise, and comply fully with requirements. There have been no formal complaints from parents in the last year.

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 and the quality of teaching and learning (standard 1) and must:

- provide pupils of compulsory school age experience in the following areas of learning: scientific, technological, physical, and aesthetic and creative (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- provide pupils with knowledge and understanding of healthy living within personal, social and health education, consistent with the schools aims and ethos (paragraph 1(2)(f))
- provide teachers with the skills to match work closely to pupils' individual needs to enable pupils to acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability (paragraph 1(3)(a))
- establish procedures to support teachers in using their understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e)).

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

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:

- extend the work of the newly appointed special needs coordinator, which has already started in the nursery, into classes for older pupils so that those with learning difficulties or disabilities or those capable of harder work are sufficiently supported.

School details

Name of school	Talmud Torah Chaim Meirim School
DCSF number	204 6377
Unique reference number	100296
Type of school	Jewish Faith
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1979
Age range of pupils	2-12
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 176
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0
Number of boarders	Boys: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	No fees charged
Address of school	26 Lampard Grove London N16 6XB
Telephone number	0208806 0898
Fax number	-
Email address	intcolinvestment@aol.com
Headteacher	Mr Samuel Hoffman
Proprietor	CMA Trust
Reporting inspector	David Speakman AI
Dates of inspection	15 - 16 January 2008