

Side by Side Kids School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	204/6409
Unique Reference Number	133439
Inspection number	329728
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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

The Side by Side Kids school (Side by Side) is an independent day special school. It currently caters for 66 pupils aged two to 16 years who come from the local orthodox Jewish community in Stamford Hill. English, Yiddish and Hebrew languages are taught and spoken in the school. Religious studies (Kodesh), which take up between 25% and 50% of the day, are taught by trained Rebbes (Rabbis).

Twenty one pupils aged five to 16 with statements of their varying special educational needs attend the main school. Their difficulties range from profound and multiple to moderate learning difficulties. There are five small classes for primary aged pupils, and one class for secondary aged pupils which was established one year ago. The remaining 45 pupils attend one of three nursery classes, which cater for children with and without learning difficulties and disabilities. The nursery is registered with the Early Years Directorate and is inspected separately from the main school. Side by Side first opened about ten years ago with five pupils, and has been a registered school since 2002. It has moved several times since it opened, and is now situated in two temporary buildings adjacent to park land. The land is rented from Hackney local authority. A plot of land has been purchased and fund-raising is in process to build a new school. The school's last full inspection was in May 2004.

The school's stated aim is to: *'Employ the finest special educational techniques within a Torah setting in order to help our children achieve a level of performance commensurate with their abilities, intellect and talent.'*

Evaluation of the school

Side by Side provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. Provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and they make good progress in this aspect. Pupils make satisfactory academic progress, with good progress in Kodesh, literacy and numeracy. The school has effectively addressed the issues identified for improvement in its last inspection and monitoring visit, and now meets most, but not all, of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

Side by Side provides an adequate quality of education and all regulations are met. Parents are very pleased with the school's work and their children's progress. The school's aim is to provide a high quality religious educational setting to help pupils learn about the practices, ethos and structures of their own community so that they can participate fully. It achieves this successfully. The Kodesh curriculum is good. There are detailed short term plans and activities but no long term plan to show what pupils will learn, and how their skills will build up during their time at Side by Side. The Kodesh curriculum is coordinated by a member of school staff, mainly taught by Rebbes, and reinforced and supported by all staff throughout every day. Pupils make good progress, and come to understand the community's and family's practices and celebrations. Older pupils carry out religious practices and routines as expected, and also spontaneously, for example, saying the right prayers before eating. Most learn to read both Hebrew and English.

The rest of the curriculum is currently undergoing wide-scale revision and is satisfactory. Good support is being given to the school by a new, highly experienced part-time member of staff who is supporting the school with curriculum development and subject teaching, particularly for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some pupils regularly integrate into local mainstream Jewish schools; this provides good support for their achievement and personal development.

Side by Side is moving towards a more creative curriculum that incorporates the National Curriculum subjects within broad, termly themes. This term, for example, the primary department's theme is 'seasides.' The secondary department's work is organised under three dimensions: 'creativity', 'healthy living' and 'enterprise'. Most subjects of the National Curriculum are included and suitable plans are being written as each topic is addressed. Planning for the secondary department is less advanced, particularly for pupils in their last two years. The school is, appropriately, developing careers education and accredited learning for older pupils. The curriculum and teaching for pupils with more severe learning difficulties is also undergoing positive change to meet the complexity of their needs. Personal, social and health education forms a significant part of the Kodesh curriculum and is not taught as a separate subject. Pupils make good progress in their personal development. They make satisfactory progress in other curriculum areas because, at the moment, there is an insufficient focus on the systematic development of individuals' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Assessment is satisfactory. The school implemented a good, commercial assessment system a year ago which charts small steps of progress in curriculum subjects. This is used to set literacy and numeracy targets on individual education plans. These are of good quality, take account of pupils' statements of special educational needs, and are supplemented effectively by goals set by therapy staff. In addition, records are kept of pupils' developing reading and number skills which show they make good

progress in these areas, due to the individual basis on which they are taught. However, as yet, the new system has not been used to underpin planning in other subjects, to track progress, or to inform the managers of the effectiveness of their provision and whether pupils are achieving enough.

Teaching is satisfactory. Lessons are taught by qualified and unqualified staff. There is too much variation in quality because not all staff have sufficient understanding about how best to teach and support pupils with special educational needs. Furthermore, opportunities are often missed for pupils to use their initiative or to work and learn independently, and some lessons lack clearly defined learning objectives. Some staff do not have the skills to work effectively with pupils with the most complex needs, particularly in terms of communication and helping them know what they are about to do next. Resources are limited for this group of pupils. However, other teaching is good. It is lively, interesting, follows on from previous work very effectively and often uses song to reinforce learning. Some lessons incorporate both therapy and educational content, and this is a good use of time. In these good lessons, pupils clearly enjoy what they are doing and learn well.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of Side by Side's work. This aspect of the provision is good with some outstanding features, and all the regulations are met. Attendance is good and pupils enjoy school. Parents' questionnaires and a wealth of letters of appreciation indicate that this is their view too. Pupils have great fun in many lessons, for example, learning aspects of literacy through song and play. Their spiritual development is outstanding as a result of the school's emphasis on this aspect of their development. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem grow as they learn and see the benefits of trying hard.

Behaviour is outstanding. The pupils are friendly, kind and accepting of one another. They play and work together well. This supportive ethos stems from the nursery, where pupils with and without difficulties work and play 'side by side' from the age of two. Kodesh studies reinforce the importance of living by given rules and distinguishing right from wrong, for example, what one can and cannot do on the Sabbath. This helps pupils learn how to take full part in and contribute to their own family and community. Some aspects transfer into the wider world, and pupils develop a broad understanding of some of the public institutions and services in England.

Pupils are prepared well for adult life and future economic well-being within their community. They make good progress in literacy and numeracy, and in religious studies, which is such an important part of their families' lives. They are not, however, always given enough opportunity to use their initiative during the school day or to consider their position in the wider world. The developing curriculum supports preparation for adult life adequately. Older pupils are starting enterprise work and careers education. All pupils contribute to and enjoy social and cultural

events and festivals which are celebrated in the school. However, this does not extend widely to other cultures.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's practice for safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of pupils is satisfactory, but two regulations are not met and the school does not have a disability access plan as required. Some essential policies are not sufficiently robust to underpin the school's practices, and do not always take sufficient account of relevant guidance. For example, the staff recruitment policy does not outline all the checks that the school actually carries out before staff are appointed, and the first aid policy does not contain all relevant information. This leads to a degree of informality and lack of standardisation about some of the school's procedures. In addition, office systems are not always efficient. Consequently, important records and documentation are not always easily to hand.

Pupils are very well supervised at all times. The school works well to ensure that they enjoy their education and make healthy and safe choices. Healthy eating and hygiene are frequently addressed because they are an important part of Kodesh studies. Physical activity is included in school time and after school activities. There have been no bullying or racist incidents in the last few years, and pupils' behaviour is excellent. The school has a strong family ethos, and parents are overwhelmingly positive about its work and the support it gives them. Staff and pupils have excellent relationships and pupils are very well cared for and cherished, physically and emotionally. This is an outstanding aspect of the school's work.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All but two regulations are met in this area. Suitable checks are made on staff before they are appointed but some of these are not systematically recorded. All staff appointed in the last few years have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. However, the outcomes of checks made on a few very long-term members of staff have not been recorded in the school's central register of staff checks.

School's premises and accommodation

All regulations are met for this area. A number of issues identified for improvement by a monitoring inspection when the school first moved into these premises have been effectively addressed. However, the school is fast growing out of its current premises, and is suffering from a lack of storage. For example, buggies are kept in the small hall, which reduces the space available for physical activities. There are no specialist curriculum facilities, such as for science or art. Nevertheless, the school makes the best of its accommodation and makes good use of its playground and situation close to park land, an adventure playground and the River Lea. Most classrooms are of a good size and in reasonable decorative order, enhanced by

displays of pupils' work and resources to support learning. Arrangements allow pupils to work and learn effectively and safely, in groups and one to one with staff.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information meets all but one regulation. The prospectus contains all the required information and is produced in-house so that it can be easily updated. It informs parents of additional information that is available on request and gives a helpful outline of the school's ethos and philosophy. Pupils' annual reports do not give enough information on their attainment and progress in each of the subjects taught. Reports are very short and, in some cases, there are unexplained gaps in the information. Not all subjects are reported, and some subjects report curriculum coverage rather than pupils' attainment and progress. The entrance hall and corridors have a wealth of information for parents and displays of the school's activities and pupils' achievements. The attractive class newsletters also do much to keep parents informed about the school's activities.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear complaints procedure, copies of which are on display in the entrance hall. Parents' questionnaire returns indicate that they understand the procedures. There have been no complaints in the past year. All regulations are met.

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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a satisfactory written policy on first aid (paragraph 3(6)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

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- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, make and record suitable checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references, and where appropriate, qualifications and professional references. This information should be taken into account in determining whether the appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(2)(a))
 - ensure that, in relation to each member of staff who was appointed prior to March 2002, the register should show checks made that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (List 99), or that an enhanced check has been made with the Criminal Records Bureau (paragraph 4C(2 and 3)).

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 each registered child in the main subjects 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	Side by Side Kids School		
DCSF number	204/6409		
Unique reference number	133439		
Type of school	Day Special School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2002		
Age range of pupils	2-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 34	Girls: 27	Total: 61
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 2	Total: 5
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 24	Girls: 12	Total: 36
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6240		
Address of school	9 Big Hill London E5 9HH		
Telephone number	0208 880 8300		
Fax number	0208 880 8341		
Email address	school@sidebysidekids.org.uk		
Headteacher	Ms R Atkins		
Proprietor	Mrs R Rumpler		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth		
Dates of inspection	25–26 June 2008		