

Beis Malka Girls' School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Sandra Teacher

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is 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 Malka is a Hassidic ultra-Orthodox Jewish Girls' School, established 30 years ago and owned by a charitable trust. It is situated near Stamford Hill, in the London Borough of Hackney. It provides education for pupils from three to 16 years of age. The school has a crèche for children under three which is separately managed and is not part of this inspection.

The school is in three parts; nursery, primary and secondary, each with its own headteacher. There are 393 girls on roll. There are 82 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and 56 children who receive funded Nursery education. Although located on one site, the school operates as three distinct and separate schools. Approximately two thirds of pupils come from Yiddish-speaking homes and use English as an additional language. A small number of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are three pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

The school aims to instil in pupils a determination for self-improvement, both academically and personally, through combining an education which is inspired by the school's religious and cultural ethos yet is uncompromising in its intention to achieve high educational standards. The school was previously inspected in 2007.

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of the education provided by the school is good. It is stronger in the primary and secondary departments. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Teaching of middos (moral values) holds the highest priority and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The religious and secular curricula and the quality of teaching are good and enable pupils to make good progress. The school has made a steady improvement since the last inspection. Arrangements for safeguarding the pupils are fully in place and the provision for their welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school meets its aims and most of the regulations for independent schools.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of the education is good, as is the curriculum and teaching in the primary and secondary schools. The curricula for both kodesh (religious studies) and chol (secular studies) provide the pupils with a solid grounding in all of the required areas of learning. Many aspects of secular learning are integrated within kodesh; these include meaningful experiences, particularly in history, geography and music. The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is only satisfactory as not all the required elements are fully embedded.

The kodesh curriculum is robust and includes all of the subjects appropriate to the backgrounds and expectations of the pupils and their parents. The pupils are trilingual learners and can communicate, read and write in Yiddish, Hebrew and English. For the chol curriculum, the school uses the National Curriculum as a guide for the teaching the main subjects. The school has recently implemented new physical education (PE), accounting, music and information and communication technology (ICT) schemes of work, although these subjects have yet to be fully embedded into the work of the school. The school provides a limited range of additional educational visits, but the high priority given to charity work and school productions all enrich the pupils' learning. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs are especially well cared for and are supported well by teaching assistants, and there are good links with outside agencies.

Teaching is good overall but assessment is satisfactory. Staff are dedicated and committed, and teachers have good subject knowledge. The school reaches high reading standards in Hebrew, Yiddish and English in the primary school. Where the teaching is good or better, pupils are fully engaged and excited; for example, in an English lesson on writing their autobiographies, pupils were challenged to reflect on colours and music which best represented their personalities. As one girl wrote, 'I am red because I am always happy.' However, where learning is not so successful, lessons are too teacher-led and formal. As a result, pupils are not always given opportunities to learn independently or to take the initiative in the learning process. Planning is generally sound, but does not always refer to how the pupils' different learning needs will be met. Teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory and staff provide suitable learning opportunities that interest and engage children and which they find enjoyable.

Relationships are excellent and this, coupled with the pupils' strong drive for learning, ensures that good progress is made. Pupils achieve well and attainment is above that expected nationally for pupils at both 11 and 16 years of age. Resources are adequate and are used efficiently, but the limited resources for science, PE and ICT limit achievement in these areas. The school prepares pupils well for their future lives within the Jewish community and the majority of the girls go on to study at a Sem (girls' seminary).

Assessment is only satisfactory as marking is rather superficial and pupils do not always know how to improve their work. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff do not assess the children's starting points early enough. There are effective tracking systems to evaluate pupils' progress. There are standardised assessments for Hebrew reading, with written tests and regular examinations set by the senior management along with national tests and examinations at the end of Year 6 and Year 11.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. Children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result of debate and deliberation that takes place during Torah (Jewish Bible) study, pupils gain in confidence and self-knowledge. Chavrusa, or 'paired work', is especially effective in strengthening pupils' speaking and listening skills. Outstanding relationships exist between staff and pupils and pupils genuinely enjoy school. As one pupil put it, 'I like my school a lot! We take pride in our school!' Behaviour is excellent and attendance is high.

Pupils take their learning seriously. The intense study of Torah provides the pupils with keen analytical skills that, as well as preparing them for Sem, equip them well for their future lives. They learn good time-management skills when preparing for festivals such as Pesach (Passover) in conjunction with their GCSE coursework.

Pupils take an active part in many aspects of the running of the school, such as the davening (prayer services), holiday programmes and helping those less fortunate than themselves. Older pupils show good leadership qualities by arranging melave malkas (Saturday night get-togethers), a Chanuka (Dedication) festival show and Purim celebrations. The more capable singers are members of the school choir.

Pupils have a keen understanding of spiritual issues and strive for perfection in religious observance. An example of this is the Chesed (kindness) and Tzinos (modesty) projects which enable pupils to become better citizens. A younger pupil commented on how this helped her to stand up when some do not have a seat on the bus or train. Pupils are aware of moral issues and they respect the law as a core feature of the ethos of the Jewish tradition. Cultural development is less strong, although pupils acquire an understanding of different cultural traditions through a study of Jewish history and know that they are duty-bound to exhibit tolerance towards people of other faiths and traditions. One pupil commented with reference to living in Hackney that, 'We all need each other. We respect our postman.' Pupils learn about public institutions and services through the secular curriculum and educational visits

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety in the school and in the Early Years foundation Stage is satisfactory. There are suitable procedures to ensure the pupils' well-being, but policies are not always implemented with consistent rigour. For example, a fire drill takes place late in the autumn term some time after new pupils have started at the school. The behaviour policy is implemented consistently and, as a result, students feel safe and are confident about asking for help whenever they need it. Discussions with the pupils revealed that they had a good understanding of healthy eating.

Effective safeguarding procedures are in place, and staff have attended the required training in child protection and know what to do if a concern arises. Appropriate checks are made on electrical and fire equipment. There is a detailed policy for first aid. All incidents requiring first aid are recorded and parents are informed. The school also uses the local Hazoloh (Jewish paramedical service). Day-to-day supervision around the school is good. Admission and attendance registers are maintained to the required standard. The school fulfils its duties in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are clear procedures for the recruitment and appointment of staff. The school undertakes all the required checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). All other required checks are carried out diligently on staff, the proprietor and trustees. The school has compiled a single central register which provides details of all checks made and the dates on which they were completed.

School's premises and accommodation

There are some shortcomings with the fabric of the premises. Repairs are ongoing, and there have been good internal improvements since the last inspection, although much of the external fabric is in a poor condition. A lack of space means that there is not a dedicated area for pupils who are unwell. In some areas, the flooring and state of decoration are unsatisfactory. In the playground, the drainage system does not always allow for the dispersal of waste water. Bright and stimulating displays enrich the learning environment, but they are not found everywhere. The playground is rather barren, with few resources for the pupils to use at break times, and the school does not make full use of local parks or leisure facilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Every parent who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they are highly satisfied with all aspects of the school's work. They wrote comments such as, 'I have been really pleased with the efficiency the school has displayed in taking my suggestions and concerns into account.' The parents' handbook, written in both English and Yiddish, includes all the required information, and informal lines of communication between parents and staff are always open in this close-knit community, so parents feel well informed about their children's progress and well-being.

Private meetings between the school and parents are encouraged, in addition to the bi-annual parents' evenings and termly reports. In the younger classes, daily notes are pinned up on the wall, under each child's name. There are regular newsletters informing parents of all aspects of school life.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is only satisfactory because the required framework for this age range has not yet been fully implemented. All of the learning and development and welfare and safeguarding requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are met. However, staff do not, for example, always check the cleanliness of the toilets, or that children always wash their hands. The leadership and management are satisfactory but rather fragmented as the Reception class and Nursery staff are not part of the same team.

Within each class, staff provide safe, suitable and well-designed learning opportunities that interest and engage children. Consequently, children enjoy learning, for example, about Purim through dressing up or Pesach through making seder (Passover meal) plates. Outdoor play provides children with opportunities to support their physical health as well as developing their motor skills, but the planning for outdoor learning lacks precision. The children's personal, social and emotional development is good. They behave well and show particularly good self-control, for example, in waiting to say the brocho (blessing) before a snack. Communication, language and literacy in Yiddish give them the appropriate skills to tackle English at a later stage, so that they become proficient bilingual learners.

As a result, children make at least satisfactory progress in all areas of their development and feel safe and well cared for. While there are satisfactory systems to

assess the children's progress, staff do not carefully assess the children's starting points early enough and therefore sometimes find it difficult to compile a detailed picture of the children's progress over time.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

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

- improve the drainage system in the playground so that waste and surface water can be disposed of appropriately (paragraph 5(b))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l))
- improve the standard and maintenance of decoration (paragraph 5(q))
- rectify the defects in the flooring and ensure it is in a good condition (paragraph 5(s)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that all staff make pupils aware of how to improve their work
- develop and fully implement schemes of work for music, ICT and PE.

In the Early Years Foundation stage:

- fully implement all the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum
- improve the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?			✓	
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?			✓	
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?			✓	
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?			✓	

School details

Name of school	Beis Malka Girls' School		
DCSF number	204/6337		
Unique reference number (URN)	100295		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	EY521898		
Type of school	Orthodox Jewish Day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1980		
Age range of pupils	3–16		
Gender of pupils	Girls		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 393	Total: 393
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 3	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2080		
Address of school	93 Alkam Road London N16 6XD		
Telephone number	020 8806 2070		
Fax number	020 8806 1719		
Email address	mail@beismalka.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Wind (secondary school), Mrs Sheinfeld (primary), Mrs Spitzer (nursery)		
Proprietor	Mr A Grossman		
Reporting inspector	Sandra Teacher		
Dates of inspection	8–9 March 2010		