

Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School
London N16 6UB
Inspection report

LEA	LB of Hackney
Inspection dates	12 th – 13 th September 2006 = 19 th – 20 th Elul 5766
Reporting inspector	Mr J Gordon
Team inspector	Rabbi M Lebrecht

This inspection was carried out under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School	Secondary	School address	Egerton Road
School category	Voluntary Aided		London
Age range of pupils	11 – 16		N16 6UB
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	020 8826 5500
Number on roll	233	Fax number	020 8826 5505
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr H J Lobenstein
Date of previous inspection	-	Headteacher	Mrs R Pinter

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Introduction

Description of the school

Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School is a well-established secondary school for girls aged 11-16 located in Stamford Hill in North London, from the surrounding Orthodox (*Charedi*) Jewish community of which its intake is largely drawn. In September 2005 the school moved into impressive new purpose-built accommodation with excellent facilities for both *Kodesh* and secular studies at Key Stages 3 and 4.

The 233 pupils currently on roll are taught in two parallel mixed-ability classes in each year from Y7 to Y11. The school has the capacity and potential to accommodate a 3-form entry up to a maximum of 450 pupils.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Unsatisfactory

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Overall effectiveness of its provision for Jewish education

The school's own assessment of its overall effectiveness is "very good with some outstanding features". In the inspectors' judgement the overall effectiveness of its provision is good.

The school's main strengths lie in:

- its total dedication to maintaining and strengthening the ethos and values of the *Charedi* Orthodox community it serves
- the school's clear vision of what the *Kodesh* curriculum should be offering to its pupils in order to achieve this
- the firm leadership given by the Headteacher and her senior management team in implementing the *Kodesh* curriculum
- the strong personal religious commitment of the *Kodesh* teaching staff
- the serious attitudes and application of the pupils with regard to their *Kodesh* studies
- the high standards of learning and teaching that the school strives to achieve.

The main area for attention lies in:

- improving the level, adequacy and consistency of provision of help for pupils with learning difficulties or special needs in whole-class *Kodesh* lessons.

The school's capacity to improve is reflected in:

- a strong school ethos focused on achieving and maintaining high standards
- its policy of setting and reviewing learning targets for the pupils
- its initiative in exploiting the potential of its SIMS computer software for recording and tracking their performance and progress in the subjects of the *Kodesh* curriculum
- its ongoing efforts to refine and improve its systems for assessing the performance and attainment of pupils

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

As it has already rightly recognised in its own self-evaluation (in *Pikuach* Self-Evaluation Form paragraphs 3.2 and 7.2) and in its current Jewish Studies Departmental Development Plan, the school needs to improve targeted provision in *Kodesh* studies for pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties as well as for those who are gifted and talented.

Achievement and standards

The school's own judgement (as given in its replies to questions in Section 3 of its *Pikuach* SEF) of the attainment and standards achieved by its pupils in *Kodesh* studies is, in the view of the inspectors, substantially sound and accurate.

Pupils' ability to read and comprehend textual material in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew when dealing with passages from *Chumash*, *Nach* or the relevant *meforshim* is generally good and well in line with what can be expected of pupils at their age and stage. This seems to be confirmed by the excellent results achieved by Y10 pupils entered for GCSE examinations in Biblical Hebrew in which, in 2005, 54% of the thirty-nine entrants were awarded A or A* grades and 95% achieved grades A* to C.

The school has had concerns about the quality of marking in some *Kodesh* subjects and has drawn up policies to ensure proper standards are established and adhered to. In the event it did not prove possible for the inspectors to verify the effectiveness of implementation of these policies by conducting their normal scrutiny of the standard and quality of marking of pupils' written work. The inspection took place just after the end of the first week of the new school year and, in the circumstances, the school was not yet able to provide the necessary samples of current written work for review.

The school is to be commended for using the potential of its SIMS computer software for recording and tracking the performance and progress of individual pupils and whole classes in the subjects of the *Kodesh* curriculum as they move up the school, just as it does for the secular curriculum.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is exemplary and in conformity with the ethos and values of the community it serves. The cultural horizons of the school closely follow the moral criteria of the community and the guidance of its Rabbinate.

Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school is excellent and they display an impressive degree of *derech erez* (politeness and courtesy) towards visitors, teachers and peers.

Evidence from lesson observation, informal discussions with pupils and feedback from parents confirms that, in general, pupils have very positive attitudes towards their school and teachers and enjoy their Jewish studies.

The views of pupils are taken seriously by the school. They are able to raise issues of concern to them by using a suggestions box or through their elected class representatives at regular meetings of the School Council.

Pupils understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and the school is implementing a Healthy Schools programme which encourages them to do so.

The school's *Chesed* programme requires pupils to contribute to the local community in a variety of ways which prepare them for their future roles and responsibilities as mothers and family managers: visiting local Jewish homes for the aged, mentoring younger children in the Junior School and helping with child care and household duties in an Orthodox Jewish domestic environment.

Grade: 1

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Lesson planning by teachers is for the most part competent, showing an awareness of the need for differentiated tasks for less or more able pupils in whole-class teaching, though with as yet limited effectiveness in achieving this for pupils with learning difficulties.

The subject knowledge of the teachers seen was fully adequate to meeting the requirements of the *Kodesh* curriculum they were teaching. The quality of teaching in two thirds of the lessons seen was good; that of the remainder was satisfactory. In none of the lessons seen was it less than satisfactory.

The pace of most lessons was brisk, both as regards delivery by the teachers and the speed of response expected from pupils in oral work and follow-up exercises. The more able and most of the average pupils were able to meet the challenge posed but this was beyond the capability of some of the least able.

The school's inclusion policy ensures that pupils with learning difficulties are taught together with the other pupils in their class for *Kodesh* lessons. Socially this has much to commend it but it is not at present being balanced by any provision for supplementary learning help or support for them in class other than can be derived from working briefly in pairs or groups with other pupils during the lesson.

Most pupils responded positively to their lessons, worked with interest and made sound progress. Teacher-generated worksheets provide the basis for most classroom tasks for pupils in both Key Stages 3 and 4 classes. In some of the lessons seen, pupils were required to use their reference/searching skills to find information in the

Chumash and/or *Kitzur Shulchan 'Aruch*. In other lessons seen, however, there was little or no opportunity for them to do so with these or other books or resource material.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

For all classes from Y8 to Y11 *Kodesh* studies are allocated 14 teaching periods per week, just over 34% of the weekly total of 41 timetabled teaching periods, each of 40 minutes duration. In Y7 there are 13 periods of *Kodesh* studies per week. This enables the school to provide a curriculum of breadth and appropriate depth which is largely successful in meeting the expectations and requirements of the community that the school serves.

There is a printed syllabus covering eight major areas of study and this has very much in mind the religious obligations and duties of the Orthodox Jewish woman and the religious knowledge base that she needs to fulfil them. The syllabus gives broad outline guidance about what needs to be covered in each year group, thus providing a structured framework within which medium and short term lesson planning by teachers can take place. For some of the study areas - for example *Tefillah* (prayer and the rules pertaining to it) and *Toldos Yisroel* (History of the Jewish People) – quite specific and detailed guidance is given about the essential points and issues which must be dealt with.

Positive efforts are being made to identify and establish cross-curricular links between the *Kodesh* and secular curricula of the school. For these to be fully meaningful, they must be sought not only in the area of skills but also with regard to content and concepts.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

The school has appropriate policies in place and effective arrangements for the supervision and safeguarding of children by staff throughout the school day. Security measures on the site are sound.

The relatively small size of the school has the advantage that all pupils are personally known to the staff and the fact that many of the girls have or have had siblings in the school adds to the family atmosphere of the school. In addition there is an Anti-Bullying Club which provides a valuable informal channel for promoting the well-being and sense of security of more vulnerable pupils and provides them with a practical and effective example of citizenship in action.

The school's daily acts of collective worship are conducted in an atmosphere of perfect decorum and *kavonah*. They comply fully with the requirements of the relevant Education Acts. The positive involvement of pupils in both leading and participating in personal and congregational prayer during the school day is noteworthy and exemplary. The importance of the *mitzvah* of *Tzedakah* (giving charity) by the individual is stressed by the regular donation of a token sum of

money each day before *Tefillah*. Each class, as a group, also collects charity annually for a good cause of its own choice.

Grade: 1

Leadership and management

The inspectors largely concur with the school's self-evaluation. Overall the leadership and management performance of the Headteacher and senior leadership team (which includes the Head of *Kodesh*) is effective and is a significant factor in maintaining high standards, raising pupils' achievement and moving the school forward successfully. Classroom observation of teaching by colleagues is undertaken by the Head of *Kodesh* Studies. A documented syllabus and schemes of work for *Kodesh* studies are in place, as are policies and procedures for monitoring and assessing performance and progress of pupils. The school has efficient mechanisms for dealing with the concerns and suggestions of both pupils and parents.

Grade: 1

