

# **Jewish Demography and Jewish Education in the UK: The Continuity Crisis and Jewish Renewal Efforts**

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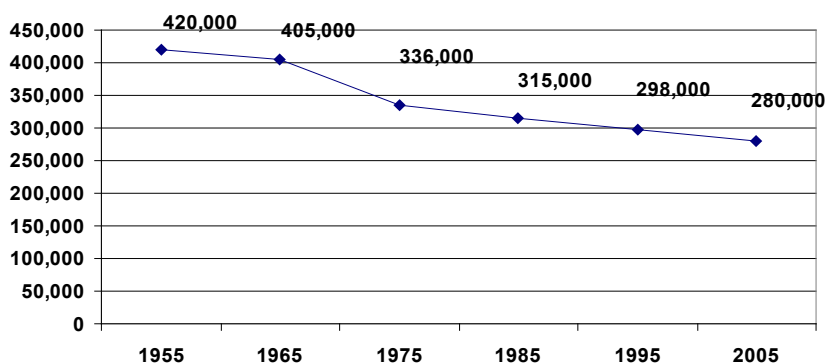
## **Introduction**

British Jewry has been dominated by two looming narratives in the past decade: anti-Semitism and the continuity crisis. Anti-Semitism has troubled and pained Jewish communities worldwide for many years now, but today it seems to have reached new heights, specifically in Europe, sparking new fears as it disrupts Jewish communal life and injures Jews as individuals.

At the same time, the most pressing contemporary Jewish anxiety is that of Jewish continuity. Jewish communities in the Diaspora are declining demographically compared with Israel and with the larger societies of which they are a part (Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2005; DellaPergola, 2006), and British Jewry is no exception (Figure 1). The Continuity Crisis is often perceived as a consequence of changes in Jewish family patterns: higher rates of out-marriage and non-marriage, late marriage, new cohabitation and divorce patterns, and the ensuing low birth rates. However, research conducted during the past decades suggests that these patterns are symptoms of the larger, more ominous predicament of Jewish assimilation, disaffiliation and apathy (Cohen, 2006; Cohen &

Kotler Berkowitz, 2004; Philips, 1997). Throughout the generations the fittest Jews – those who are highly educated, committed and engaged – seem to survive and thrive Jewishly, while withdrawal, out-marriage and disaffiliation seem to be more prevalent among others who may be less knowledgeable, less interested and uninvolved (Cohen, 2005; 2006; Fishman, 2004).

**Figure 1: Jewish population in the UK 1955-2005**



The challenges facing Jews in Britain today are emanating both from outside the community and from within, and the question is, how can Jewish identity be sustained in an open, secular society and under adverse circumstances?

More than a decade ago Chief Rabbi Prof. Sir Jonathan Sacks published a series of articles (1993; 1994) in which he alerted the community to the pending crisis of Jewish continuity, and issued a call for collective action to offset these prevailing trends. Together with other leaders who were deeply troubled by the predictions of a demographic descent of the Jewish community and the erosion of Jewish culture, they urged the community to place education at the top of its agenda as the main mechanism to address the crisis. The British Jewish community has stated clearly that the main challenge for the next generation is ensuring the future survival and quality

of Jewish life. Under the banner of 'Jewish Continuity', and with a firm belief that Jewish full-time education is the most effective means for countering both patterns, communal leaders advanced a transformation of Jewish education. They raised the necessary resources to establish additional day schools and worked to develop, strengthen and support their day-to-day work.

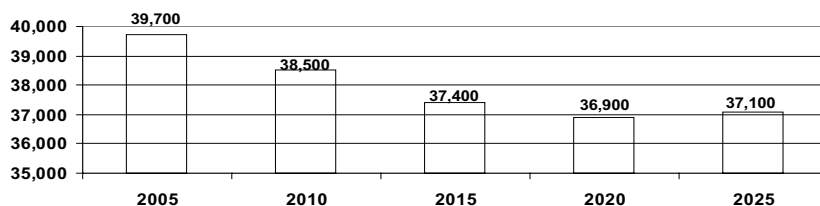
These initiatives were productive, and as studies of Jewish education have shown, Jewish full-time education in the UK has expanded considerably during the past decade (Hart, Schmool & Cohen, 2003; 2007; Valins, Kosmin & Goldberg, 2001). It has developed into an extensive enterprise which currently caters to nearly 27,000 children (58% of Jewish children) and consists of 127 facilities. Additionally, many supporting organizations have been established that work to train teachers, develop curricula, fund new and existing schools and educational ventures, and assist schools in other ways.

At the same time, other changes have occurred in Jewish education: the *cheder*, which was once the predominant form of Jewish education, declined (mainly where Jewish schools have been established); and adult, and family Jewish education and Israel-related activities have flourished. Indeed, the development and expansion of Jewish education has been one of the great achievements of British Jewry.

But we have reached a critical point. A decade and a half on, after considerable investment in Jewish education and substantial growth, the demographic patterns that Jewish schools aim to counter are beginning to influence their own development. In most areas in the UK the community's demographic trajectory, together with its distinctive geographic patterns, are already affecting enrolment in Jewish schools. The number of Jewish school-age children is declining (Figure 2) and some schools are experiencing sharp falls in their intakes (Jewish Leadership Council, 2006).

In response, a number of schools have taken non-Jewish children, a change that has implications for the culture, ethos and curriculum, which in turn may affect the decisions of potential parents of these schools. Others may face closure or amalgamation. At the same time, in some areas, particularly in NW London and Hertfordshire, there is continued demand for places in Jewish schools, a demand that has persistently exceeded supply.

**Figure 2:**  
**Projections of Jewish school aged population (4-17) in the UK**



As the outcomes of the expansion that we have witnessed begin to unfold, it is a particularly opportune time to reflect on some of the major dynamics that Jewish education has experienced during this period: to explore their likely implications, the gaps in provision, and the impediments that may have emerged as a result of the rapid change. It is also essential to find the means and resources to address these. It is particularly important at this point to evaluate the community's educational and communal goals, assess the outcomes of existing educational programs, apply strategic thinking as to the means to meet goals, and consolidate forces all in order to build on the successes to date and to embark on the next stages of educational development.

This paper was written with two aims in mind:

1. To depict both the educational and demographic picture of the community;

2. To examine the implications of these contradictory trends and suggest possible causes of and factors affecting them.

## Methods and Definitions

Since 1992, the Board of Deputies of British Jews has conducted an annual study of Jewish day schools in Britain, focusing on student and staff numbers, and pupil transfers. This paper reviews the data collected from school years 1992/3 to 2003/4.

In the following analyses I have distinguished between three types of schools – Strictly Orthodox, Mainstream Orthodox (hereafter Mainstream) and Progressive – according to (a) the character of the school in terms of educational ethos and policies; and (b) the communities they serve. These are not uniform categories and each incorporates a wide range of practices, philosophies, experience, and intake.

The classification "Strictly Orthodox" is applied to schools specifically established as socialization agents for Modern Orthodox or *Charedi* life that follow a traditional, long-standing, religiously-centred program. Although most of these schools teach secular studies, this may be marginalized in terms of time allocation and coverage. The schools draw their pupils from closely-knit Jewish communities, where all families and individuals follow a distinct life style informed by *Halacha*.

"Mainstream Orthodox" schools cover a wide range of educational philosophies and practices, all designed to combine Jewish life with modern knowledge. About 40% are state maintained and follow the national curriculum; thus, most of their time is devoted to non-religious studies. Most pupils come from homes where parents are affiliated to Mainstream Orthodox synagogues. Nevertheless, there is significant diversity in terms of pupils' religious practice within each school, ranging from secular families to Modern Orthodox. One or two of these schools take non-Jewish pupils.

There are three primary "Progressive" schools, affiliated to the Reform and Liberal synagogue movements, the first of which was established in 1981. They combine secular studies with their own Jewish studies program and also draw their pupils from families who display a wide range of religious practices.

## Schools and enrolment

The central finding in our study is the substantial increase in the number of Jewish schools. In 1992/3 there were 94 schools and nurseries (age 2-4) offering full-time Jewish education. By 2003/4 the number had risen to 127 facilities, an increase of 35% (Table 1).

**Table 1: Jewish day schools in Britain: 1992/3, 2003/4**

	1992/3	2003/4	Changes 1992/3-2003/4
Nursery	37	33	-4
Primary	21	15	-6
Secondary	16	22	+6
Primary + nursery	12	35	+23
Primary + secondary	5	7	+2
Nursery to secondary		11	+11
Special Educational Needs	3	4	+1
Total	94	127	+33 +35%

Of the newly established schools, 25 were Strictly Orthodox, six Mainstream and two Progressive; 17 were primary schools, 6 were

secondary schools, and 12 schools provided both primary and secondary education (Table 2).

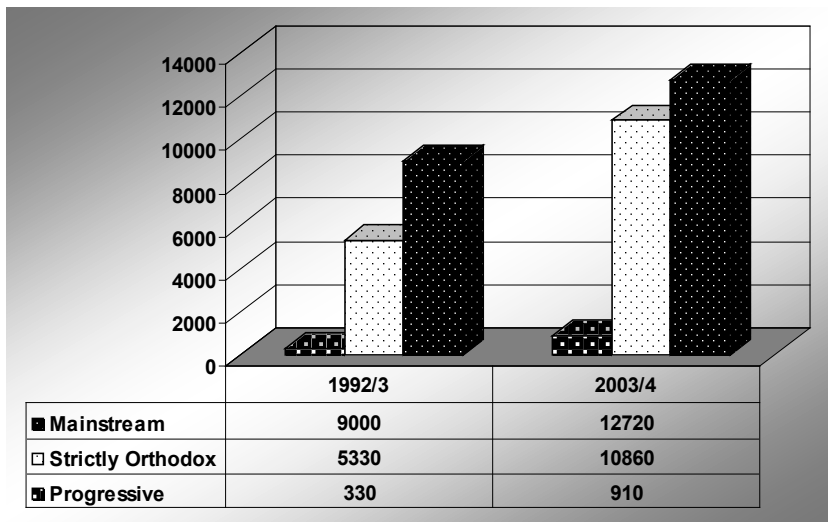
**Table 2:**  
**Jewish day schools in Britain by denomination: 1992/3, 2003/4**

	Mainstream		Strictly Orthodox		Progressive	
	1992/3	2003/4	1992/3	2003/4	1992/3	2003/4
Nursery	23	22	7	4	7	7
Primary	19	7	9	7	1	1
Secondary	7	8	10	13	0	0
Primary + nursery	3	20	1	13	0	2
Primary + secondary	0	0	5	7	0	0
Nursery to secondary	0	0	0	12	0	0
Special Educational Needs	1	2	1	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>

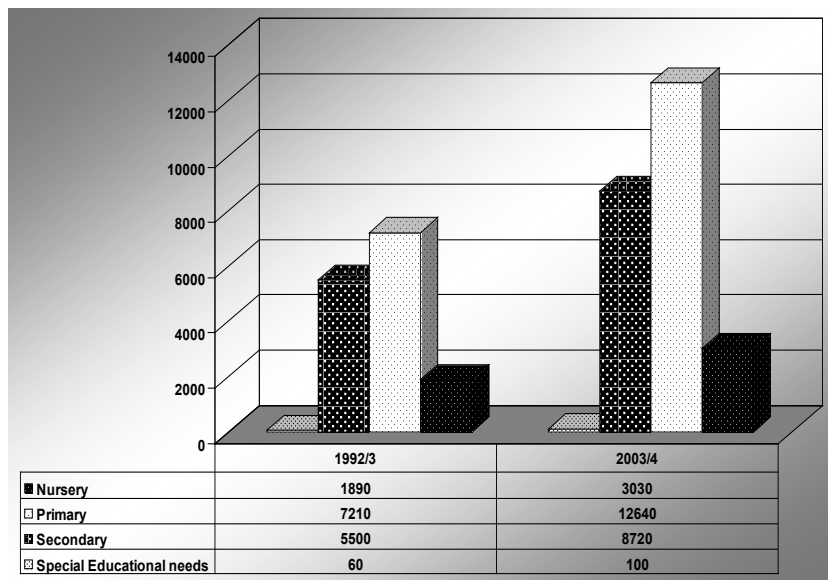
In 1992/3 the number of Jewish children receiving full-time Jewish education was 14,660 and rose to 24,420 in 2003/4, a 66% increase.

Figure 3 shows how these numbers are spread across the community from 1992/3 to 2003/4. The Strictly Orthodox sector more than doubled its numbers, from 5,330 pupils to 10,860. Mainstream numbers increased by 41%, from 9,000 to 12,720) and Progressive schools nearly tripled, from a modest start of one school with 330 pupils in 1992/3 to three schools with 910 pupils in 2003/4.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**





When enrolment data are considered according to the stage of education (Figure 4), growth can be seen at all stages. Nursery enrolment rose 62%, from 1890 to 3030 pupils. Primary school enrolment rose 75%, from 7,210 to 12,640, and secondary schools rose 58%, from 5,500 to 8,720.

## **Geographical distribution**

Only Greater London, Manchester, Liverpool and Gateshead have ever offered Jewish day school at all ages, although there are Jewish primary schools in Leeds, Birmingham, Glasgow and Brighton. In London and Manchester schools are confined to areas of concentrated Jewish population (in North/North-west London, East London and Southwest Hertfordshire on the boundary of the Northwest Greater London community, and to North Manchester). There are no London Jewish schools south of the River Thames and only a primary school in South Manchester.

Greater London pupil enrolment rose from 10,140 in 1992/3 to 17,850 in 2003/4 (a 76% increase), while Manchester rose from 2290 to 4540 (a 89% increase). On the other hand, since 1995 there has been a slight decrease in Jewish children enrolled in Liverpool, Leeds and Glasgow. The distribution and trends reflect both the Strictly Orthodox influence, and the fact that in the 1990s any new Mainstream or Progressive schools were located in those areas of London in which there were prospective pupils.

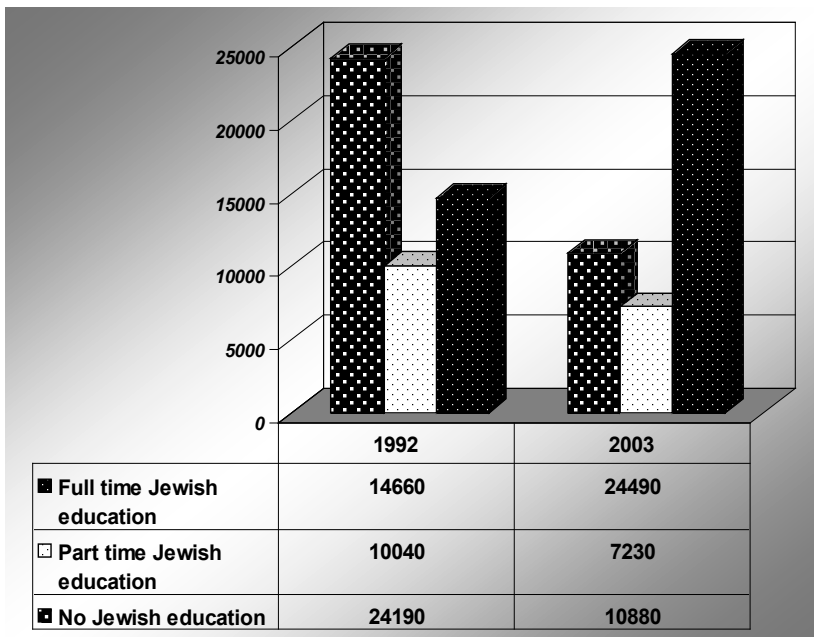
## **Provision and take-up – the demographic perspective**

The picture is not complete without consideration of *chedarim* (part-time synagogue classes), the traditional model of Jewish education in Britain until the last two decades. Data on *chedarim* collected by The Board of Deputies show that the number of classes fell very slightly

from 129 in 1992/3 to 127 in 2003/4, but the number of pupils enrolled declined by 17% from 10,040 to 8310. According to The Board of Deputies demographic (births) data, the *number* of Jewish children aged 3 to 17 decreased by 13% (from 48,890 in 1992/3 to 42,600 in 2003/4) but the *proportion* enrolled in Jewish day schools increased over the period from 30% in 1992/3 to 58% in 2003/4.

Figure 5 depicts the broad picture from 1992/3 to 2003/4, giving the number and proportions of children according to the type of Jewish education they received. The findings establish the shift from part-time Jewish education to full-time, which has been the consequence of the increased availability of Jewish day schools. As Figure 5 shows, the number of children who had no Jewish education fell throughout the 1990s, reflecting the gradual decrease in number of school-age children.

**Figure 5**



Among the factors responsible for school enrolment are the number of children to fill places and the alternatives available. As Jewish schools are available only in areas of Jewish concentration, almost one-third of Jewish children do not have the option of full-time Jewish education.

The picture is further complicated by the ways in which Jewish schools are established and funded. Most Mainstream and Progressive schools in the UK are State-maintained schools (Voluntary-Aided) and are therefore dependent on government endorsement and funding. Thus, if numbers and demand are not assured, communities may not be successful in making a case for a Jewish State-maintained school. In contrast, the Strictly Orthodox sector tends to open small privately funded schools when and where numbers warrant.

It is also essential to distinguish between the demographic characteristics of the Strictly Orthodox sector and the Mainstream and Progressive groupings, since these have significant bearing on the demand for schools. While the Strictly Orthodox demographic patterns are characterized by early marriage and large families, the Mainstream and Progressive sectors are more acculturated, and seem to follow the typical Western demographic patterns: later marriages, a later start to having a family, and smaller completed families (Schmool & Cohen, 1998). Consequently, the number of Strictly Orthodox children aged 3-17 rose from 4,830 in 1992/3 to 10,860 in 2003/4, an increase of 124%, while during the same period, the number of children in the Mainstream and Progressive sectors of the community fell by 14% from 36,900 to 31,740.

As a result of these contrasting patterns, the proportion of Strictly Orthodox children in the entire Jewish school-age population rose from 11% in 1992/3 to 25% in 2003/4, and the Strictly Orthodox share of enrolment in Jewish day schools rose from 38% in 1992/3 to 44% in 2003/4. At the same time, the Mainstream proportion

of Jewish school-age children fell from 89% in 1992/3 to 75% in 2003/4 while Mainstream enrolment rose from 21% of Mainstream school children to 43% (of a smaller population group).

Take-up rates vary between primary (ages 5 to 10) and secondary (ages 11 to 17) levels. Whereas 34% of 5-10 year olds were attending Jewish primary schools in 1992/3, only 27% of 11-17 year olds were then in Jewish secondary schools. By 2003/4 the proportions had risen to 64% for the primary level to 45% for the secondary level.

This variation reflects both the different birth patterns within the community and the differing expectations parents have of primary and secondary education. It also relates to the provision of Jewish secondary schooling. Only two Mainstream secondary schools were established over the period and Mainstream Jewish secondary education is less available than primary. However, secondary Mainstream schools may not have been established, simply because of differing parental attitudes toward, and demand for, primary and secondary Jewish schools.

The critical question therefore for Mainstream Jewry is whether or not an increased supply of secondary school places would promote higher take-up, as it seems to have done for primary.

## **The changing role of Jewish education**

Jewish education today faces multiple challenges: it aims to impart Jewish principles and traditions to pupils, to support the young as they develop a sense of Jewish identity, and to promote communal ties. When Jewish communities were more isolated, Jews were strongly socialized into patterns essential for meaningful Jewish life both at home and in the community. Today Jews are more acculturated and thus this informal socialization into Judaism and Jewish life has become weaker, with religious practice and communal life being increasingly mediated through formal education.

Indeed, as the Chief Rabbi argues, Jewish schooling has become a major strategy for Jewish continuity (Sacks, 1993; 1994). For the past 15 years communal leaders in Britain and elsewhere associated themselves with a view of Jewish education as a corrective and worked consistently for its expansion. They campaigned for change, raised communal awareness of the part that Jewish education should play in community revival, and strongly advocated a program of day schools.

The historical absence of Jewish day schools had meant that most families had no access to them and, in the then-prevailing socio-cultural climate, even where available many parents – especially Mainstream and Progressive British Jewry – perceived the Jewish day school as too isolating. Consequently, most of today's parents had no personal experience of Jewish day schools. The increase in Mainstream and Progressive enrolment indicates a generation of parents more willing to accept Jewish schools, at least at the primary level.

The question is: why this attitudinal change? Why has the Jewish school become a recognised option? I suggest the shift is a response from certain parents to a weakening of Jewish identity, the accompanying loss of communal affiliation, and the decline in religious practice – all noted widely in British Jewry. This group is searching for ways to maintain and cultivate their children's identities and have turned to the Jewish school for reinforcement. As the Jewish Educational Development Trust report *Securing our Future* (1992) argued: 'Jewish education has not only to reinforce the positive influence of the home but often to replace it as the main vehicle of communal survival'. Those in British Jewry who feel unable to provide their children with the more traditional Jewish socialization delivered by their own parents may regard Jewish full-time education as the best means of ensuring their children's sense

of Jewish identity and appreciation of their heritage. Once in the Jewish day school system, parents' understanding of community and religion is reinforced through their children's education.

The growing interest in Jewish education thus brings together different currents of communal thinking. At a leadership level, interest has been stimulated by awareness of the implications of Jewish demography. For a noticeable number of parents, disillusion with their own Jewish education, and recognition of the force of day school education in establishing Jewish identity, has driven their demand for Jewish day schools. For others, who are among the more orthodox within the Mainstream community, there is an ideological commitment to Jewish education parallel to that within the Strictly Orthodox sector.

## **Multiculturalism**

While it is appealing to view renewed parental interest in Jewish education solely in Jewish communal terms, the changes must also be located in the British context where there has been a shift recently to multiculturalism. This ethos legitimizes cultural heterogeneity, maintaining that individuals and groups can simultaneously hold their ethnic affiliation and develop national loyalties within a national space (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998).

In the British educational arena, multiculturalism has been translated into policies aimed at enabling and encouraging minority communities to cultivate their own culture and establish ethnic communities and organizations.

The Education Act 2002 sought to balance statutory social requirements with faith communities' needs, and looked to bring more faith schools under the umbrella of the state where they can be regulated and monitored (DfES, 2002). Nevertheless, these schools have attracted continual criticism, particularly in the wake of 9/11.

Their opponents are concerned that the state may be nurturing intolerance, religious fundamentalism, and the ghettoization of society.

The school enrolment data presented here suggest that by promoting Jewish continuity through day school education, the Jewish community has taken advantage of this general process. The establishment of Jewish day schools, which are supported by governmental departments and agencies, supports wider governmental goals. The expansion of Jewish education should thus be viewed as part of legitimating cultural difference. A social climate that underlines the voluntary nature of religious identification and simultaneously respects and encourages ethnic affiliation and identification has given unique opportunities to British Jewry.

## **The educational marketplace**

The Education Reform Act 1988 brought changes in curriculum, organization, funding and registration arrangements to Jewish days schools (DfES, 1988). At the same time the Act established new relationships among Local Education Authorities, parents and the DfES, and promoted a powerful ideology of consumerism in education (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1996). Free-market mechanisms were introduced into state education in the form of parental choice, and at the same time the funding system was reformed so that money attached to the number of pupils enrolled.

Consumption in today's society is a pivotal means for reinventing or preserving self-identity: individuals increasingly capitalize on their possessions to confirm their individual and social identities. As multicultural ideology has developed, individuals have recognised that consuming certain goods or services symbolizes their identities and affiliations. Choosing Jewish education may be considered part of this process, since opting for religious or culturally oriented education seems to fit well with both consumerist and multicultural ideas.

Moreover, British research findings revealed that this consumerist ideology was gradually becoming a fundamental middle-class educational ethos (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1996). More and more, particularly middle-class parents have become preoccupied with the pay-offs of their children's education and are demanding the same standards and effectiveness from state institutions that they perceive as operating in private schools. The socio-economic structure of British Jewry is such that a majority of Jewish families with children of school age fall into this group. They expect from Jewish schools services which are distinct, stimulating, and offer real proof of academic success. The modern British Jewish school incorporates many of the characteristics associated with private schools: small classes, modern equipment, well-trained teachers, extra-curricular activities, parental involvement and more; their academic achievements are in line with those of independent privately funded schools in the country.

This is underlined by the educational league tables published annually by the DfES since 1995. These have consistently shown that Jewish state-maintained and private schools, both at primary and secondary level, score significantly higher, on average, than state schools in their locality and all state-maintained schools in England, on all types of national examinations (Valins et al., 2001). These publicly acknowledged success rates may help explain the recent growth in participation in Jewish schools across Britain. For many parents, choosing a Jewish school signifies a 'good choice' in educational and social terms, and not simply a concern for Jewish matters.

## **Discussion**

The education patterns described here must be set in a community context. The 2001 population censuses indicate that British Jewry numbers approximately 280,000, an ageing and decreasing



population that is consolidating itself along a religious as well as geographical divide.

Residentially and institutionally, British Jewry is overwhelmingly a London Jewry: some two-thirds of British Jews live in London. London provides a full Jewish life and is big enough to ensure that the educational needs of large numbers of young Jews can be met. Consequently, we have already witnessed among the Mainstream and Progressive sectors of the community a geographical movement from the smaller communities into London. This movement both accelerates the deterioration of Jewish educational organizations in small communities and creates a demand for places in Jewish schools in London that cannot be met. This contradictory picture means that despite communal efforts and parental demand for Jewish schooling, the existing structures are failing to accommodate the communal needs.

The demographic challenge that schools and the Jewish community face today is indeed of enormous consequence. As seen in this paper, in response to this challenge, during the past two decades the community has invested massively in Jewish education, and has seen a substantial expansion in the demand for Jewish schools and enrolment. These investments have now fostered a momentum in Jewish education. However, at the same time, these developments have created an imbalanced educational market where some families are still unable to gain access to Jewish schools.

The community can now build on the cumulative effects of these investments to think more systematically, and perhaps creatively, regarding how to address the current situation, to review and reassess the current achievements, and to identify and address the gaps and impediments that emerged during this period. These steps are needed in order to make the most of these valuable educational resources and ensure that their potential to generate lasting positive impact on students' lives is fully brought into play.

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