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on the Jewish story

**JEWISH LIVES:  
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY  
TO EXPLORE CHANGING  
LIVES OF JEWISH  
SECONDARY SCHOOL  
STUDENTS AND THEIR  
FAMILIES**

**FOCUS:  
SCHOOL CHOICE**

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## JEWISH LIVES FOCUS: SCHOOL CHOICE

**F**or the first time in the history of Jewish schooling in the UK, researchers are following the Jewish lives of children who entered one of seven Jewish secondary schools at a particular moment in time. More than 1,000 families are participating in a study that aims to explore the changing Jewish lives of families during the seven years their children spend in secondary school, and possibly beyond.

This publication focuses on what we have learned from parent surveys and interviews about secondary school choice. We have been able to explore how and why Jewish families in the UK make their secondary school choices, a topic that can pre-occupy them for several years before their child actually makes the transition from primary school to secondary school.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Our sample is taken from the Year 7 cohort (2011–12) in Jewish secondary schools in the UK. The families participating in this research come from the mainstream Jewish community i.e. from modern Orthodox, Masorti, Reform, Liberal, traditional and secular homes.

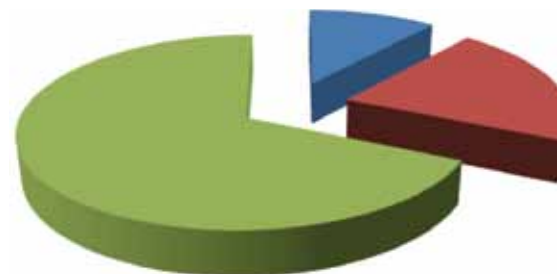
Participating families were first surveyed in the summer prior to their children beginning secondary school. Follow-up interviews were then conducted with a large sample of parents.



### RESPONSE RATES

- **486** complete survey responses from Jewish family units who had applied for enrolment in Year 7 at participating Jewish schools in 2011
- **394** complete survey responses from family units whose child started a Jewish school, constituting 41% of total enrolment at these schools
- **92** complete survey responses from family units whose child started a non-Jewish school. (We do not know what proportion of Jewish families at non-Jewish schools this is)
- **89** interviews with families enrolled at the seven schools
- **50** families who were offered places at a Jewish secondary school but who chose to go to a non-Jewish school
- **12** families who did not apply to a Jewish secondary school

### RESPONDENTS WITH CHILDREN IN NON-JEWISH SCHOOLS



Numbers of respondents, and as a rounded percentage of the non-Jewish school sample

Selective non-Jewish state (10)	11%
Non-selective non-Jewish state (19)	21%
Non-Jewish private/independent (63)	68%

### FROM THE PARENT SURVEY

#### WHO GOES TO WHICH SCHOOLS?

- The greatest differences between respondents whose children attend Jewish schools and respondents whose children attend non-Jewish schools are in relation to levels of household income and, to a smaller degree, in levels of education
- There are no major differences between the Jewish and non-Jewish school samples in terms of parents' Jewish denomination or in terms of the measures of Jewish communal, national and religious engagement we have developed
- Overall, more than 70% of those with children in Jewish schools reported visiting Israel at least three times
- A third of the respondents from Jewish schools reported that their children had attended non-Jewish primary schools

#### WHAT DO PARENTS LOOK FOR WHEN THEY CHOOSE JEWISH SCHOOLS?

- Parents have three broad types of considerations:
  - Jewish educational concerns
  - general educational concerns
  - instrumental/practical concerns
- No matter which school their child attends, parents consistently attribute the highest importance to general educational concerns
- From parents' perspective, the quality of general education in secondary school is more important than anything else
- We found that parents have a particular image in terms of a school's strengths and weaknesses. Often, characteristics that are perceived by some parents as strengths, are seen by others as weaknesses

**INTERPRETING PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES**

- There were only very small differences between the priorities of parents whose children took up places at Jewish schools and those whose children did not
- Those who can afford access to the best possible education for their child seek out such opportunities
- No significant difference was found between parents whose children attended a Jewish or a non-Jewish primary school in relation to general aspirations. Those parents whose children had attended a Jewish primary school attributed significantly greater importance to social and academic outcomes than those whose children attended non-Jewish primary schools
- Whatever the degree of parents' Jewish engagement, respondents overall placed greater importance on general academic aspirations than on Jewish social or academic aspirations

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF SCHOOLING, FROM PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE**

- There is great consistency in patterns of parents' expectations for both their children's lives and their own, although, parents expect greater changes in their children's Jewish lives than in their own
- Parents who report medium levels of Jewish engagement express a greater expectation of change than those who report either low or high levels of Jewish engagement for their children's Jewish lives and their own
- The most highly engaged families do not expect that their children will learn as much at school about what it means to be Jewish as they will from home
- The burden of expectation on schools comes most from families expressing a moderate level of engagement where parents have strong Jewish aspirations for their child but who may have fewer Jewish social and cultural resources at home to support the Jewish development they want



The following pages explain some of these points.

**SELECTING A SECONDARY SCHOOL**

When selecting a secondary school for your child, how important to your decision were the following factors?

JEWISH EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS	GENERAL EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS	INSTRUMENTAL CONCERNS
Balance of Jewish education and secular academics	Academic track record	Convenience
Strong Jewish education	Warm community environment	Cost
Jewish ethos	Superior option compared with other local alternatives	
	Physical safety/security of your child	

Qualitative research (interviews with samples of between 10 and 15 parents from each Jewish school and more than 50 further interviews with parents whose children did not enrol in Jewish schools) confirms the patterns identified by the parent survey in relation to parental priorities. The quote to the right is typical of many responses, indicating that from the parents' perspective, the quality of general education was more important than anything else.



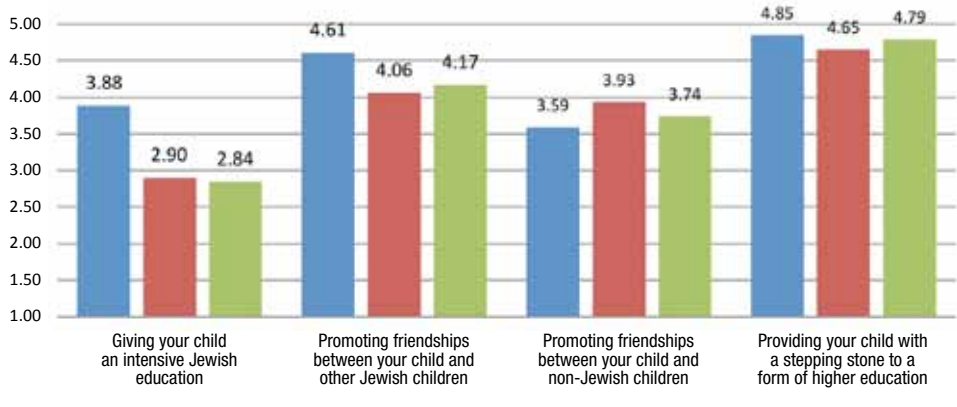
“

WE WOULD NOT HAVE CHOSEN A JEWISH SCHOOL IF IT COULDN'T DELIVER. AGAIN, MUCH LIKE [OUR PRIMARY SCHOOL], WE'D HEARD THAT [THIS PARTICULAR JEWISH SCHOOL] WAS A PHENOMENAL SCHOOL ACADEMICALLY, AND THE JEWISH THING IS NICE

”

Parent, Jewish school

## THE INFLUENCE OF DENOMINATION ON CHOICE OF SCHOOL



General academic aspirations and even general social aspirations seem to be only marginally correlated with degrees of Jewish engagement. This indicates that fundamentally, the most efficacious strategy to increasing enrolment in Jewish schools will be to demonstrate as compellingly as possible, their competitiveness with the best non-Jewish private schools.

For the moment, for those who seek the best possible education for their children in non-Jewish schools, Jewish schools serve as a kind of 'safety-net' if parents can't afford or their children can't fulfil the entry requirements at selective non-Jewish schools.

While at first glance these findings may seem counterintuitive, in that the most highly engaged do not expect that their children's schooling will lead to changes in their Jewish lives, we think that these findings confirm a central conclusion of the qualitative research: that the most Jewishly engaged families do not seem to expect that children will learn as much at school about what it means to be Jewish as they will from home. The burden of expectation on schools comes most from families expressing moderate level of engagement where parents retain strong Jewish aspirations for their child but where there may be fewer Jewish social and cultural resources at home to support the Jewish development they desire.

■ Orthodox  
 ■ Masorti, Reform and Liberal  
 ■ Secular and Just Jewish

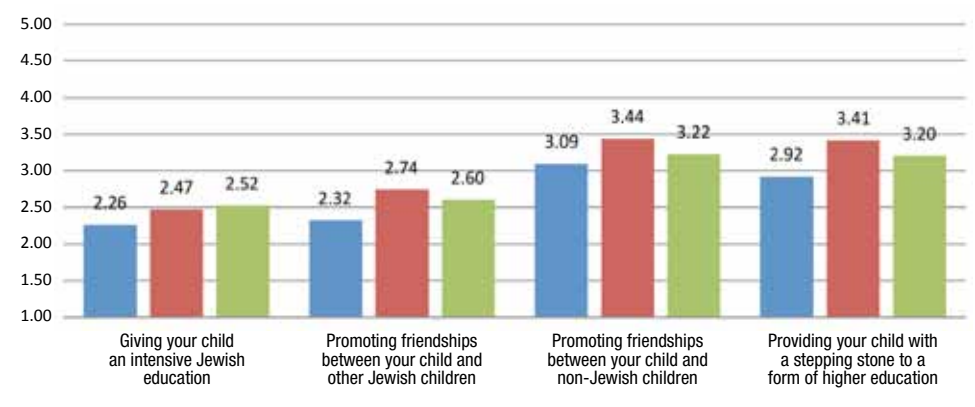
1.00 Not at all important  
 2.00 Not very important  
 3.00 Neither unimportant nor important  
 4.00 Quite important  
 5.00 Extremely important

“ HAD HE NOT BEEN ABLE TO GET INTO HIS TWO FIRST [PRIVATE/ SELECTIVE] CHOICES, WE WOULD HAVE SENT HIM [TO A JEWISH SCHOOL]

”

Parent, non-Jewish school

## EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILDREN BY ENGAGEMENT



We looked at parents' current Jewish engagement, distinguishing between high, medium and low levels. For example, high engagement would describe frequent synagogue goers or who celebrate Shabbat almost every week and whose children participate in youth programmes regularly. Medium engagement describes members of synagogues who sometimes participate in Jewish practice at home and in the community. Low engagement describes families who are not members of synagogues, and whose children are not involved in Jewish Youth programmes.

■ Low  
 ■ Medium  
 ■ High

1.00 Not at all important  
 2.00 Not very important  
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 4.00 Quite important  
 5.00 Extremely important



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Dr. Alex Pomson, Rosov Consulting

Data: Dr. Hagit HaCohen Wolf  
Additional support: Michelle Terret  
Pamphlet editorial support: Karen Scott

## FIND OUT MORE

For further information from Dr. Helena Miller please email [helena.miller@ujia.org](mailto:helena.miller@ujia.org)



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