

Jewish Schools and Britain: Emerging from the past, investing in the future

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Introduction

Around one third of all State maintained schools in Britain have a religious character. This amounts to some 6,850 schools out of a total of approximately 21,000 State maintained schools. Unlike the situation in many parts of the world, faith schooling in Britain has a long history of a relationship with, and financial support from the State. This dual system of maintained schools supported by faith organisations that exist alongside schools without a religious character is therefore at the heart of the school system in Britain. Successive British governments have continued to support faith schools to the present day. Within this system, approximately 60% of all Jewish children in the **UK** are educated in Jewish faith schools.

This chapter will review the historical context for the development of **Jewish schools** in the **UK**, explaining how social, cultural, political and demographic changes have affected the framework and content of **Jewish education**. An identification of the current issues and challenges facing Jewish faith schools in twenty-first century Britain will follow, focusing on external influencing factors as well as issues from within the Jewish community.

Historical context

Whilst teaching and learning have been central components of Jewish tradition since earliest times, Jewish day school education has been established in Britain since the Jews were re-admitted to England in 1656 (Romain 1985). Only a small proportion of the general population of the **U.K.** received any formal education at this time, but by

1657 the first two **Jewish schools** were opened. (Black 1998:14). In addition to Jewish religious studies, these schools and the many others that followed taught mathematics, English reading and writing.

The Church of England was also active in providing schools, but because the basic assumptions of Anglican Christianity were taught in these schools, non-Conformists, Catholics and Jews were effectively excluded, and these minority groups began to provide schools for their own young people. In 1732, the Jews Free School was established in London, with a curriculum that emphasized secular subjects as well as traditional Jewish texts and traditions. Education, in the wider community, however, was in a period of decline, failing to meet the challenge of the industrial revolution and unable to respond to the needs of rapidly expanding urban communities. Public debate focussed on the questions of whether education for all was desirable, whether increased provision should be available and controlled by the Church and, what kind of system could cope with many millions of uneducated children? The Christian Sunday School Movement which began in the 1780s, and the National Society, opened schools within easy reach of the Jewish community. But there was great concern that if Jewish children were to attend these schools, they would be at risk of losing their heritage and identity, through compulsory study of Christianity. The threat was too great to be ignored, and by 1850 **Jewish schools** had opened to serve the Jewish population.

In 1851, twelve years after the **government** accepted that schools of a Christian religious nature were eligible for **State funding**, **Jewish schools** were permitted to receive grants in the same way that other **denominational schools** were, provided they agreed to read the scriptures of the Old Testament every day and provided they were also prepared to submit to government inspection (Miller 2001). Their continuation was assured when, in March 1853, the Manchester Jews' School received **State funding**, putting the **Jewish schools** on an equal basis, for the first time, with other **denominational schools** (Wolffe 1994). The proportion of **State funding** at that time was minimal however, until the end of the nineteenth century, by which time it had increased to cover most of the capital and running costs of the schools apart from Jewish education and the maintenance of the building.

It should at this point be noted that the relationship between the State and denominational schools is unique in Britain. In the USA, for example, where historically, Religion and State are separated, there are no **State funded denominational schools** (Schick 2000).

The 1870 Education Act, which paved the way for free and compulsory education in Britain, raised two questions for the Jewish community. Would suitable provision be made for the religious education of Jewish children in the new schools, and would there be safeguards against possible Christian influences? The solution that was reached was that parents would be free to withdraw their children from religious education periods, a situation that remains today. New schools for five to ten year olds, under the control of locally elected school boards, and eligible for **government grants**, were known as Board Schools, and were widely supported by the Jewish population. Not only were these schools modern and well resourced, but the Jewish community could not financially support of a school system of its own.

From the 1880s until the beginning of the First World War, mass immigration of Jews, primarily from Eastern Europe, led the Jewish population in England to rise by some 100,000. This caused the rolls of the **Jewish schools** to increase, as in the case of the Jews Free School, whose pupil numbers rose from 2,500 in 1870 to 4,000 in 1900 (Gartner 1960) as well as an increase in the number of Jewish children attending Board schools. The **Jewish schools** (as with other faith groups) were Voluntary schools, and were distinct from Board schools in that they were run by a private foundation, supported by the State and controlled by local education authorities.

By 1945, the position of Jewish education in Britain had completely reversed from the early twentieth century. Integration, but not assimilation, with the host community was officially encouraged, and whilst around 80% of Jewish children received some form of Jewish education in the 1950s and 60s, only 20% of these children attended full-time **Jewish schools**. Most Jewish children attended Synagogue classes for two to four hours per week.

By the late 1960s, Jewish education was at a watershed. Then, in 1971, the Chief Rabbi of the United (mainstream orthodox) Synagogue, Lord Jakobovits, launched the Jewish Educational Trust (Sacks 1994) which significantly raised the profile of Jewish Education within the Jewish community.

The picture today

More than forty years later, British Jewish education has developed significantly and the percentage of Jewish children receiving full time Jewish education has more than doubled from the 1975 figures (JLC 2008) The reasons for this resurgence of interest in full time Jewish education, and these can be identified as follows:

- To counteract the prevailing trend of assimilation
- To provide a strong foundation of Jewish learning
- To counteract the perceived influences of wider society
- To provide an academically excellent education in preference to other local options

Alderman (1999) identifies the creation in Britain of a multicultural society, in which ethnic separatism has become respectable, as the process that has most helped the resurgence of distinct Jewish life. He describes a societal controversy between those Jews who believe in a private practice of Judaism and those who believe in the freedom to display it publicly. The community has moved away from the days when Jewish schooling focused on social integration into a wider society. This focus contributed to the assimilation of the Jewish community into British society and as this developed, Judaism increasingly became “private”, part of one’s inner self, confined to Jewish settings, if at all. We now live in a time where “public” displays of Judaism are permitted and this has led to a new lease of life for, and emphasis on, Jewish schooling, and for Jewish life. Those who confined their Judaism to the private realm tended to oppose day-school education and those comfortable with expressing their Jewish identity in public tended to support it (Mendelsson 2012).

It is insufficient to argue that the expansion of the **Jewish school** system was the result of the perception that Jewish schooling prevents assimilation. It is also true, however, that the major stimulus for the remarkable growth of the full time school system was the conviction by Jewish communal and education leaders that the continuity of Jewish life is dependent on the perpetuation of intensive and rich patterns of Jewish education. This is seen as a direct contrast to what is perceived as the failure of the part time system of supplementary **Jewish education** to provide meaningful and enculturating curricula and experiences (Miller 2001).

Continuity of learning is vastly enhanced when the pupils are in the educational setting five days a week and not merely for two hours. Scheindlin observes that whilst much of **Jewish education** in supplementary schools is designed to market religion, rather than to promote a religious understanding of life, the Jewish day school is uniquely placed to work on the child's growing capacity to comprehend the world, effectively ensuring that Judaism will be truly alive within each child (Scheindlin 1999).

Not all parents send their children to Jewish full time schools because they want a vibrant and strong **Jewish education**. A strong values system and a religious ethos suggest security and protection from the harsher aspects of life in twenty first century Britain. Jewish **State** aided schools are seen as a positive alternative to local state schools, both at Primary (elementary) and Secondary (high school) level. It is no doubt that at Secondary level, this change was influenced by the demise of the State grammar (academically selective) school system and the development of the comprehensive system in the 1970s. The 1965 decision of the Labour government in Britain to end selective education by dismantling the Grammar schools led to extensive withdrawal of Jewish children from the non-denominational State schools system (Mendelsson 2012). Where grammar schools were no longer available, and independent, fee-paying schools were financially or academically unrealistic, parents opted for a Jewish comprehensive in preference to its equivalent secular school.

A perception of the Jewish full time schools is that academically they excel beyond the levels achieved in equivalent State non-denominational schools. This mirrors the perception of high achievement in equivalent Church schools (Gibbons and Silva

2007). Whilst it is indeed true that a large proportion of the **Jewish schools** always reach high levels in the performance league tables and that Jewish pupils at all stages in their schooling achieve, on average, above the national average, it should be remembered that the commitment to education from the home environment and the support that it receives from the parents is also high. The emphasis within the family of the importance of achieving as highly as possible academically gives **Jewish schools** a firm foundation for excellence.

It can be seen, therefore, that **Jewish schools** and schooling demonstrate a reaction to the surrounding culture and society. Zeldin (1983) observes many examples of instances in which **Jewish schools** followed trends in wider society, from organisational trends, e.g. open plan and vertical group schooling in the 1970s to curricular trends e.g. the development of initiatives in information technology. They are reactive and not proactive. To historians, education has reflected society's changing needs.

Jewish Schooling and the State

Whilst a proportion of the **Jewish schools** are private institutions, funded by trusts and individuals within the Jewish community, the majority of Jewish primary and secondary schools fall within the **State** sector.

As early as 1944, suggestions had been made by senior civil servants to end state support and funding for denominational schools. To avoid conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities this suggestion was abandoned and in fact, from then until 2011, a succession of government policies raised its subsidy of faith based schools from 50% to 90% of the total running costs (Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving 2005).

To this day, **State funding of Jewish schools** does not cover the Jewish religious education provided. In order to pay for the human and material resources needed to ensure a Jewish, as well as a secular, education of high quality, each school asks for a voluntary financial contribution from each family whose child is a pupil. State schools are not permitted to make any compulsory charges towards the education they provide, which includes contributions towards denominational religious studies.

The sympathies of successive British governments towards the creation of faith based schools have been mixed and financial restriction as well as political opposition has limited the expansion of this state-aided sector. Whilst major political parties shared a view that schools for religious minorities would further separatism, they shared the view that the existing denominational schools – both Christian and Jewish – upheld moral teaching and as important, achieved high academic achievement. In the decade leading up to 1992, only two new Jewish schools were set up, whilst between 1992 and 1999, 12 new Jewish schools were set up (Valins and Kosmin 2003).

The School Standards and Frameworks Act (1998) recognised the existence of established schools of a “religious character” as well as the potential for developing new denominational schools (DfEE 1998). And in 2001, the government White Paper, Schools Achieving Success (DfES 2001), argued for the provision of more faith schools.

Most recently, the government provision for Free Schools in Britain has provided a much faster and easier route for parent and community led initiatives to set up new faith schools. Free Schools were introduced by the government following the 2010 general election, making it possible for parents, teachers, charities and businesses to set up their own schools, and to receive direct funding from the State. Free schools are an extension of the existing Academies programme. The first 24 Free schools opened in autumn 2011.

Free schools are subject to the School Admissions Code of Practice (2012), other than that they are allowed to give priority to founders' children.

Successive governments were challenged from 2001 onwards to reverse their policies towards faith schools. This was in the wake of the Bradford Riots in 2001, prompted by heightened tension between the growing ethnic minorities and the larger, white population of the area, and terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and London 2005. Opinion was divided amongst the British population as to whether faith schools were a good or a bad influence on young people

In 2008, a new initiative, “Accord”, was launched. The aims of this group were to lobby the British **government** to end **State funding** for faith schools and to “operate admissions policies that take no account of pupils’ or their parents’ religion or belief” (Accord 2008). According to Accord, it is only if such policies are implemented that a truly tolerant society will be able to develop, recognising different values and beliefs. The position taken by Accord and others, continues to be robustly challenged by proponents of faith schools.

Therefore, whilst the **government** has not actively encouraged the development of Jewish schools in particular, its’ education policies over recent decades have allowed that development to take place through its legislation for **denominational schools** in general.

Current issues and challenges

The rate of growth of Jewish day schools has far exceeded expectation and the influence of the development of the **Jewish school** phenomenon is felt in varying degrees, and on varying levels, both within and outside the Jewish community. Four of the most pressing issues and challenges within Jewish schooling in the Jewish community are:

- a) **Pluralism**
- b) **Curriculum**
- c) **Capacity**
- d) **Government agenda**

a) Pluralism

In 1999, of the approximately 23,000 children aged 4 to 18 attending Jewish day schools in the UK, a mere 150 attended the one Reform Jewish day school (JPR 2003). In 2015, out of approximately 27,000 children (JLC 2008) who will be attending Jewish day schools, an estimated 2,500 will be in cross communal, **pluralist** Jewish day schools.

Until the 1980s, Jewish religious, cultural and educational life in the UK was relatively denominationally separate. It is estimated that around 75% of the UK’s 280,000 Jews are affiliated to one of the main synagogue Movements. The

mainstream orthodox community is the longest established and approximately 60% of the Jewish community affiliates to it. Until 1980, all the **Jewish schools** in this country were affiliated to the orthodox community. The remaining 40% affiliate to the Reform, Masorti and Liberal streams of Judaism. The children of these non-orthodox communities attended the **Jewish schools**, but the schools all only taught Judaism from an orthodox perspective, a situation that remains to the present day.

The Jewish community in the UK Limmud, which began as a five day, **pluralist**, cross communal residential festival of Jewish learning in 1980 with 80 participants, has grown to become an organisation with two annual residential conferences and many single day events in the UK, attracting approximately 7,000 participants in 2008 (Limmud 2009). Limmud has moved from the edge towards the centre of Jewish events in the UK, and it has been significant in paving the way for other cross communal, **pluralist** initiatives, including the London Jewish Cultural Centre, Jewish Book Week, Jewish Film Festival, and the Jewish Community Centre (JCC). Limmud has also given individuals the experience of the possibilities of **pluralist** Judaism. Limmud was one of the catalysts that made the creation of JCoSS, the first Jewish cross communal secondary school, a possibility, and its' **pluralist** approach to Judaism in practice is very much influenced by Limmud.

Pluralism is a complex idea. As Chief Rabbi Sacks writes, it designates not a solution, but a range of problems (Sacks 1995). Sacks was focusing on the relationship between Jews and the wider society in the UK and suggested that while it is a compelling idea it is not a simple one. He spoke of a “community of communities” (1995: 117). **Pluralism** is an approach to diversity – and the differences between people, ideas, beliefs and practices that sees the existence of and the encounter between people with these differences as positive and necessary, both for the intellectual and spiritual advancement of the individuals involved and for the unfolding creation and repair of a community, society and the world. Within this definition, **pluralism** will exist within boundaries defined by a particular community or society (Robinson 2009).

The common features that make a school a Jewish **pluralist** school are that it will not only accept all types of Jewish children as students, but that it will also cater for all those children in the ethos, the formal and informal curricula of the school. **Pluralist** schools are

not a new concept in the Anglo Jewish world and many pluralist Jewish day schools exist in America, Canada and Australia. Shevitz (2007) names and describes three levels of pluralism to which these schools subscribe. First, demographic pluralism: whilst such schools accept all Jews and will create conditions that most families will feel comfortable with, they do not teach or pay attention to a variety of Jewish perspectives or practices. Second, Shevitz identifies coexistence pluralism, whereby diversity is accepted and taught within the educational curriculum. Third, Shevitz identifies generative pluralism, which incorporates both demographic and coexistent pluralism and attempts to tackle the different and contradictory perspectives through discussion, question and argument. Students are encouraged to articulate their own ideas and this can lead to new individual and communal understandings.

The Jewish pluralist schools are clear about the core pillars of Jewish identity with which they expect students to engage. These are broadly defined norms of practice and belief within which there is room for a widely differentiated range of expressed commitments. The idea of core pillars of Jewish identity implies that while educational success in a pluralist school will include a wide range of student choices regarding *how* certain communal norms will play out in their lives, *whether* these norms should play a role in their lives is not up for debate.

The pluralist Jewish schools in the UK teach from each of the mainstream Jewish perspectives: Orthodox, Masorti, Reform, Liberal and Secular Judaism. Students are expected to enter into the conversation and to show serious engagement with Judaism in any of its forms. A focus is to help to shape the unique Jewish identity of all graduates of the school, encouraging them to engage with a full range of Jewish options.

b) Curriculum

The UK Jewish Schools' Curriculum Partnership (JCP 2006) defines the Jewish curriculum as: "everything the school intends for the Jewish education and the future communal and religious involvement of its pupils". This encompasses far more than inculcating a body of knowledge and skills during specified timetable periods. It embraces the ethos of the school, relationships between people within it, its Jewish practices and the way it recognises, respects, responds to and harnesses individual differences of practice, of involvement and of ability to study.

In State schools in the UK, since the 1988 Education Act (DfE 1988) there has been a National Curriculum, by which all schools must abide. The religious education curriculum in non-denominational schools is determined by guidelines produced by the local education authority to support those with responsibility for the provision of religious education in schools. Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) advise on all Religious Education matters. In Jewish schools, there is no National Curriculum for Jewish religious studies and each school decides for itself the time it devotes, what is covered and the standards the pupils are expected to reach at different stages (JLC 2008). Whilst this does make it difficult to compare standards across these schools, it should provide opportunities for great distinctiveness and creativity.

All mainstream Jewish schools would broadly agree with the following ultimate aims for Jewish education for all graduates, including those with differing needs of all ages, abilities and religious adherence:

- a) a personal commitment to and involvement with Jewish practice, ethics, tradition and culture and a motivation for lifelong learning;
- b) an understanding of Jewish belief, heritage, practices and values;
- c) a familiarity with classical and modern Hebrew; a knowledge of selected classical (Biblical and Rabbinic) texts; a knowledge of the main Jewish prayers and rituals;
- d) an identification with, and understanding of, the background of the Jewish people and their history throughout the world; knowledge, understanding and love for the land of Israel, and the commitment and skills to play a responsible part in the Jewish and wider community;

However, Heads of Jewish studies and their staff need help and support to realise these aims in practice, and this is being provided by various initiatives. First, the pluralist schools have developed their own curricula, with the help of the Head of Jewish studies in one of the pluralist primary schools, and also the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The central orthodox schools are supported by The Jewish Curriculum Partnership. Rather than defining a programme of teaching, this developing

curriculum for 5 to 18 year-olds appears in the form of levels of attainment for specific topics or aspects of **Jewish education**. This set of suggested attainments must not be regarded as exhaustive but as a minimum expectation of what all pupils should attain, that must be extended for some pupils and deepened for others, and upon which further aspects of **Jewish education** may be built. Given an ethos in the school that encourages involvement with Judaism, Jews and Jewish life, history and culture, it is possible to identify and provide extensions of the curriculum to meet the individual needs and interests of pupils, parents and the community. There are also links between this Jewish **curriculum** and the pupils' general studies, for example, study of Victorian England in the History curriculum to include study of notable Jewish Victorians and their contribution to life in Britain.

The teaching of both biblical and modern Hebrew has always been challenging for schools and where there are some models of excellence, the majority of schools find it problematic. In this area of the **curriculum**, the JCP is leading a cross communal initiative, to develop exciting and relevant support processes across all the mainstream primary schools, both **pluralist** and orthodox. From 2010, all State primary schools in Britain have been required to teach a foreign language, presenting an exciting opportunity for concerted planning to strengthen Hebrew language teaching. It is a challenge to proponents of **Jewish education** that that some schools have not chosen Hebrew language as their foreign language, deciding rather to allocate these extra resources to strengthening the secular **curriculum** and teaching French or Spanish instead.

c) Capacity

Any curriculum is less successful if teachers are not developed to use its full potential (JLC 2008). Two aspects of this issue are evident. First, an adequate supply of high quality Jewish studies teachers and heads of departments is the key to improving Jewish knowledge and skills for students, and, second, the lack of trained and professionally qualified Jewish studies and Hebrew teachers is a long-standing issue.

First, supply: the demand for replacement and new teachers is actually quite small each year, and most schools have a relatively low attrition rate of teachers. Many teachers in mainstream **Jewish schools** are trained via the Jewish Teacher Training

Partnership (JTTP) programmes, which take both university graduates and non-graduates and train them. They qualify as both general and Jewish studies teachers and the main challenge is to retain enough of these graduates as Jewish studies and Hebrew teachers. Most often, the graduates of these programmes prefer to teach general subjects, citing the reason that there is a perceived lack of status of Jewish studies specialist teachers, particularly in primary schools (JLC 2008). **Pluralist** primary schools address this issue by expecting their general class teachers to teach Jewish studies as well. The challenge there is that not all general studies teachers have a strong or confident enough knowledge base in Jewish studies or Hebrew to be able to teach Jewish studies in an inspiring way.

In addition to school-based teacher training programmes provided by the JTTP, both the orthodox and non-orthodox sectors of the community have been trying to address the issue of developing a cadre of post graduate Jewish educators. Three Masters' Degrees in **Jewish Education** currently exist, and to date there are fifty or more graduates of those programmes. Community resources are not employed to the best of their advantage here. The curricula of all three courses are extremely similar and yet the courses exist, for political/religious reasons, completely separately. However, these Masters' degrees are producing cohorts of Jewish educators who have studied to an advanced level.

d) Government agenda

The British **government's** Department for Education and the Office for Standards in Education insist on adherence to education rules and Acts, in exactly the same way as for non-denominational State schools.

Three areas which impact on Jewish schools are:

a) Curriculum

b) Admissions policies

c) Inspection

a) Curriculum

As early as 1897, Dewey wrote that schools must represent life. He gives an educationalist's rationale for making available real-world contexts through which certain kinds of concepts and knowledge are transferred to the student.

Whilst the phenomenon of a large increase in the number of children attending Jewish schools has begun to address the challenge of assimilation, Jewish children now face the challenge of separation from the wider community. This manifests itself in two ways: firstly in terms of how Jewish children connect to the wider community and secondly how the wider community connects to the Jewish population.

A criticism of **Jewish schools** is that they do not prepare their pupils for life in the wider world. Contrary to this is the claim by Jewish educators that a secure foundation in Judaism enables pupils to live in the outside world with confidence. This debate is not confined to the Jewish community and is reflected by a wider educational debate on the purpose and outcome of faith schools in liberal society, see for example Cairns, Garner and Lawton (2005).

The rationale for the British **government** to focus on community cohesion is a sociological and political one, in the aftermath of the terror attacks of 9/11/2001, 7/7/2005 and the riots in Northern towns of England in 2001 (Cantle report 2001). But government interest in faith based communities and schools is reflected in the development of public policy since the mid 1980s, and cannot be exclusively focussed on 2001 and beyond (recorded, and reflected on, amongst others by Weller 2005, Worley 2005, Gilroy 1993, Bourdieu 1985).

Community cohesion has been defined in terms of promoting greater knowledge, respect and contact between various sections of the community, and establishing a greater sense of citizenship (Pearce 2004). The emphasis here is on understanding about, as well as having contact with, the wider community, beyond the individual school.

Within the **Jewish education** community in the UK, it is generally accepted that the meaning attributed to "belonging" is a multi faceted issue. Many Jewish educators today would argue that, in order to feel able to "belong" to the local and wider

community, children first must be securely rooted within their own, Jewish, community. Proponents of Jewish day schools argue that Jewish schooling should develop school leavers who are “secure and knowledgeable in their own Jewish identity” (Miller and Shire 2002). In addition, it is generally accepted by mainstream Jewish day schools that Jewish day schools “should encourage their pupils to engage with, and contribute to, the wider society” (JLC 2008), although this is interpreted in different ways in different schools.

Jewish schools in Britain, have not, until the twenty first century, had to address issues such as teaching about other religions, working with non-Jewish children from other local schools, or engaging with the local and wider non-Jewish, as well as Jewish, community. There was no **government** requirement to do so, and the majority of the Jewish schools saw no need to include this in their curricula.

In Britain, since 2002, citizenship education has been compulsory for all Secondary school (11-18 years) pupils, and recommended for inclusion in Primary schools (DfES 2002). The Citizenship Framework (QCA 2002) has provided a number of key areas to explore through the formal and informal **curriculum** in schools. These include: human rights, social justice and inclusion, sustainability, interdependence and conflict resolution, values and diversity. This framework offers faith based schools the opportunity to explore wider issues and to encourage students to see themselves not just as members of their own religious community but also as citizens of the world, aware of the wider issues and challenges of global interdependence and responsibility. Since the launch of the Citizenship Framework in 2002, the Qualifications and **Curriculum** Authority (QCA 2000) has provided information and resources to help teachers and their students learn about themselves, society and their impact on, and role within, the wider world.

The provision of Citizenship education, within the National **Curriculum**, did not, however, go far enough in reflecting the reality of living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society. Placing Citizenship education within the National **Curriculum** for England and Wales led instead to an emphasis on the acquisition of theory and knowledge, and of testing and assessment, rather than of exploration and engagement. In addition, because the school day was already crowded, many schools interpreted

this duty to teach Citizenship in a laissez-faire way, relegating lessons to twenty minutes or less during weekly Personal, Social and Health education sessions. The **government** response to this reality was to increase its commitment to the practices and principles of this challenge by promoting formal and informal relationships both within school communities and between schools and the wider community in which they are situated. The **government** view, echoed by Goldring (2009), has been that by promoting these relationships, learning will be enhanced through a shared understanding of each other.

In 2006, the leaders of faith communities in the UK published a joint statement which gave an assurance to the **government** and parents that faith schools will promote community cohesion, “welcoming the duty imposed on the governing bodies of all maintained schools in the Education and **Inspections** Act 2006” (Faith in the System 2006). The British Government encourages the teaching of the tenets of Christianity and the five other major religions represented in the UK: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. It sets out guidelines and national standards for religious education for pupils from four to sixteen.

The Jewish community in Britain has interpreted this duty in a variety of ways, in particular, when it comes to the duty to teach about world faiths. Teaching it varies quite widely from school to school, in terms of the content of this **curriculum** and the time allotted to it in the school week. Teachers, pupils and their parents may visit schools and the places of worship of other faiths, to learn from, as well as to learn about their neighbours. They may have partnership projects with non-**Jewish schools** in other parts of the UK or overseas. They may have **curriculum** projects with schools of other faiths, or no faith, and many Jewish schools take part in music, arts and sports events with non-**Jewish schools**.

b) Admissions policies

The issue of **admissions** has been a particular challenge to all faith schools in Britain, not only the Jewish ones. In October 2006 the British Government backed an amendment to the Education and **Inspections** Bill that would have forced faith schools to give 25 per cent of their places to pupils of other or no faith. This measure was intended to promote community cohesion (DCSF 2006). Whilst it would initially have

affected only new schools, there was justifiable anxiety amongst all faith schools that this measure would soon after be applied to already existing schools. The Board of Deputies of British Jews, in conjunction with other faith groups, co-ordinated a collective call to oppose this sudden call for quotas. The proposal was withdrawn later the same month and the 2006 Education and **Inspections** Act continued to allow faith schools to give priority to applications from pupils within their own faith. Although the faith schools won this particular battle, it is likely that the relationship between faith schools and the State will continue to be a prominent political issue in the coming years.

Additional challenges have been recently faced by all mainstream **Jewish schools** who have had to change their **admissions** criteria to comply with the UK Supreme Court ruling, made in 2009, which now makes it unlawful for **Jewish schools** to give priority to children who are born Jewish. In practice, **admission** to **Jewish schools** is now seen as a matter of faith and not one of ethnicity. To gain entry to a **Jewish school**, families have to show evidence of adherence to the faith (Synagogue attendance, for example) and not merely birth. This brings **Jewish schools'** entry requirements in line with other faiths, but raises interesting questions regarding the definition and relationship between terms such as “faith”, “religion” and “culture”.

The issue of **admissions** is further complicated by the changing demography of the Jewish population in Britain. **Jewish Schools** in parts of Britain where there are declining Jewish populations are unable to maintain their pupil numbers without accepting non-Jewish children. This provides challenges – how do you integrate these two populations and continue to maintain a strong Jewish ethos and **curriculum**? Even in areas such as Greater London, with its large Jewish population of approximately 200,000 people, there is concern about school enrolment numbers in certain parts of London, particularly as projected over the next ten years. This is exacerbated by the development of an increasing number of Jewish **Free schools**, mentioned earlier in this chapter, which are opening with little regard to demography or community policy. The Jewish Leadership Council Report (2008) suggests that the pool of Jewish children will decline by between 15 and 20 per cent in the next ten years. In order to address that decline and keep **Jewish schools** fully enrolled with Jewish students, the

report observes that between 70-80 per cent of Jewish children would need to enrol in Jewish schools, a figure much higher than the current rate of between 50-60 per cent.

c) Inspection

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) provides a national schools' inspection service for all State schools in Britain. Whilst Ofsted inspect all secular provision for education, there is a statutory requirement in Britain that schools also have their denominational religious education assessed. In response to this requirement, Pikuach was set up in 1996 by the Jewish community to provide Jewish schools with a framework and structure for evaluating Jewish education provision in schools. This framework parallels Ofsted's framework, in an attempt to ensure that the status of Pikuach inspections, and therefore the status of Jewish education in schools is at a similar level to that of Ofsted. To date, Pikuach has carried out more than 80 inspections, evaluating schools according to their own aims and goals. This individualistic approach has been necessary because within the Jewish community there is no absolute aim or expected standard of Jewish education. Reports on Pikuach inspections (Miller 2003, 2007, 2011) have shown that accountability through inspection has benefited the schools.

Whilst, on the whole, schools achieve well against the standards they set themselves, three areas highlighted for development in 2003 and 2007, namely the teaching of reading and writing biblical Hebrew, assessment and marking in Jewish Studies and Special Educational Needs, are ongoing issues in 2011. Schools have been inspected every three to five years and, with virtually no exception, schools do show development in the areas identified during their previous inspection.

There are challenges for Pikuach. For example, as developments in Ofsted evolve, Pikuach must respond internally with its own developments. In 2006, Ofsted radically revised their method of inspection to focus on a self evaluation process for schools, supported by external inspection against the judgements of the school themselves. Consequently, Pikuach re-organised its framework and inspection process to parallel Ofsted's requirements (Pikuach 2006). Two further major framework revisions by Ofsted again caused Pikuach to revise its' framework accordingly (Pikuach 2009, 2011).

Pikuach has remained a cross-communal initiative since its inception in 1996. The practical issues of training Jewish educators to become Pikuach inspectors and the sensitivities needed for one agency dealing with a very wide range of Jewish schools across a diverse Jewish community are significant. Pikuach has shown that it is possible for **Jewish education** to transcend religious-political differences. Schools are able to choose inspectors who are religiously acceptable to their populations, but all the inspector training and discussion is done cross-communally, under the auspices of the UJIA and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, both non-denominational Jewish organisations in Britain.

Ofsted **inspections** cause schools to look at themselves self-critically and identify areas for development, as does Pikuach.. Key issues are areas targeted for improvement and form the basis of the school's action plan. Since 1999, as a direct result of the first Pikuach **inspections**, the Jewish community has put into place several new teacher-training and development initiatives to address the need for a work force that was more professional and better trained, namely the curriculum and teacher development initiatives described earlier in this chapter. In addition, in 2006, a system of school improvement partners was developed, specifically to support Jewish schools in the development of Jewish education, paralleling the role of the secular school improvement partners implemented by local education authorities in Britain.

Shifting purposes

Different streams of the Jewish community have had different objectives for their children's **Jewish education**. I have shown in this chapter how this has resulted in a Jewish schooling system which has no national Jewish studies curriculum and where each school is inspected not against a national benchmark of standards but against the stated aims of each individual school.

For the strictly orthodox sector, the objectives and purposes have been, and are, very clear. The primary consideration has always been a **curriculum** focussed on Torah learning, emphasising intensive Jewish Studies. The families welcomed into those schools already adhere to orthodox practice and lifestyle. Graduates of those

programmes would be expected both to have a deep knowledge base of Judaism and Hebrew and to adhere to an orthodox practice and life style. The majority of graduates of those schools fulfil those aims.

For the mainstream and pluralist sectors, the objectives and purposes are also clear. The primary consideration is on academic excellence within a Jewish ethos. Jewish studies and Hebrew are present, and are taught with serious regard, but are not the predominant factor. A significant challenge in these schools is that the families welcomed into these schools come from a very wide range of Jewish backgrounds. In the mainstream orthodox schools, whatever their background, the ethos and practice of the school is orthodox and the curriculum reflects that. In the pluralist schools, the ethos and practice of the school is to acknowledge and reflect the diversity of the school population. Consequently the curriculum covers a broad range of views of Judaism and Jewish practice.

In 2011, the first longitudinal study began of children entering Jewish secondary schools in the UK (Miller and Pomson 2012). This research seeks to understand the school's significance in the Jewish lives of the families whose children are enrolled in the school. The cohort who entered year seven in September 2011 (11-12 year olds) will be followed through their secondary school lives and beyond. Two control groups – a) families who applied to a Jewish school, but chose to send their child to non-Jewish schools and b) families who did not apply for Jewish schools – will be surveyed and interviewed at the same intervals. In total almost 600 families are taking part in this project, representing 43% of those approached at the start. This project represents a unique opportunity to gather and analyse data that can help understand the school's significance in the lives of students, their families and the wider community, as well as help with policy and planning for the short and medium term future.

The three sets of parents rate the general qualities of schools and their own general academic aspirations more highly than their Jewish concerns (and in almost the same order of significance). Cultivating a strong Jewish identity, as well as relationships with other Jews, is more important than developing Jewish knowledge or learning. The Jewish values of those respondents with children in non-Jewish schools are

almost indistinguishable from those with children in **Jewish schools**. They share the same intensity of concern about these matters.

To summarise, the purpose of **Jewish education** in the mainstream Jewish community appears to be a means of sustaining and deepening Jewish identification.

Conclusion

The development of **Jewish schools** in Britain has been a complex journey related to cultural, sociological, political and demographic forces. These forces overlap with each other, which is why it is not possible to write a chapter such as this in a straightforward, linear fashion. Issues such as the multicultural nature of Britain, **government** influences and impact and the history and infrastructure of the British Jewish community all intertwine to both explain the past and understand the present. We can show the intended outcomes of the investment of the Jewish community in current Jewish schooling initiatives, and we can predict their impact. But this chapter is primarily a snapshot in time, explaining the present through a variety of lenses. The reader is invited to take the challenges and opportunities presented here and relate them to their own contexts, for it is by learning about the other that we better understand ourselves.

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