

Committee of Inquiry  
King David Schools.

86 Childwell Valley Rd.  
Liverpool 16.  
March 13<sup>th</sup> 1977

Gentlemen,

You ask for opinion and suggestions on Hebrew & Jewish Studies at the Primary School. There are many matters affecting the Jewish atmosphere of the school that disturb me, but I will confine myself to points that I have been able to verify in conversation with my daughter's teachers and other matters I know of nearly from hearing.

One of the reasons that I send my child to a Jewish school is so that she should not have to withdraw her from a non-Jewish assembly & from non-Jewish hymn practice. I imagine then my distress when my daughter

came home from school singing church hymns. I assumed she had learned these from non-Jewish pupils so she assured me that she learned these in "hymn lesson" and sang them in school assembly. I went to inquire at the school, not wishing to base my objection on a child's sayings. The non-Jewish teacher I spoke to agreed that she taught the children these songs chosen for their religious and moral aspects. The headmaster informed me that my song taught or sung in assembly is vetted by me to ensure that there is no chronological content. Unfortunately these songs seem equally to lack any positive Jewish content and I understood that they are taught to children in Church Sunday Schools.

My daughter began school half-way through the year in the January intake and was therefore backward in both Hebrew and English reading by her second year. She was

given extra tuition in English reading in the school's remedial class by a very able and experienced teacher but the school made no attempt to give her remedial lessons in Hebrew reading.

Would it not be possible to arrange for the children to have facilities for Netilat Yadayim before and after Jewish primary schools manage this. The lack of proper Netilat Yadayim raises in my child most undesirable conflicts between school and home. When I insist on the correct traditional hand washing before she eats bread at home she grumbles. I eat bread without washing Netilat Yadayim at school, why can't I at home?

When I go to open evenings and look around the school area to festivals I see very little of anyone's content concerning the festivals in the wall displays.

It is especially upsetting since the school sets so high a standard

of secular education to have to complain about so poor an emphasis on Jewish education and practice in our Jewish community's school.

Yours sincerely

Dina Semons [Mrs]

KING DAVID FOUNDATION  
LIVERPOOL

REPORT  
of the

COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY  
into

MODERN HEBREW AND JEWISH STUDIES

to be received by the

MHJS SUB-COMMITTEE

at its meeting on

20th JUNE, 1977.

A. BACKGROUND

The Modern Hebrew and Jewish Studies (MHJS) in the Schools have grown in a haphazard way since the High School opened in 1957, and since the move was made from Hope Place to the Primary School in 1964, and this has led to difficulties. This was recognised in 1974 when the Foundation set up its MHJS Sub-Committee to (Minutes of 1st Meeting 25th June 1974) "discuss MHJS in both Schools and to make recommendations to the Foundation Committee, Governors and Managers". Unfortunately, because of its large size, and also because it has not met sufficiently frequently for it to allow more than reactions to immediate problems, the Sub-Committee has not been able to make a detailed examination of the current situation. The Meeting of Parents held on 12th October 1976 highlighted the issue and the Committee of Inquiry (CoI) was set up by the Sub-Committee at its meeting on 7th February 1977 to examine MHJS in both Schools and to present a report to the Sub-Committee at its next meeting giving recommendations.

B. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The CoI met on 13th February and adopted for its Inquiry the following Jewish aims for the Schools to produce young people with a sound knowledge of all aspects of their Jewish heritage on which to base their future religious position and their identification with the State of Israel and with Jews around the world. The

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CoI took as its term of reference to examine how fully these aims were being achieved and what recommendations if implemented might help towards their further achievement.

C. SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

A major recommendation of the CoI is that there should be a detailed examination of all MHJS curricula. However the CoI feel that the Jewish emphasis of the Schools must be right, and the future organisation of MHJS must be agreed, if this examination is not to be futile *ab initio*. This report therefore deals only with these two areas, and progress on curriculum will depend on decisions taken on the report by the Sub-Committee.

D. PROGRAMME OF WORK

DI. At its meeting on 13th February the CoI decided to seek contributions from

- i) the Religious Advisory Committee (RAC), Rabbi Roberg, Chairman of the RAC, was informed of this and the RAC, together with the Merseyside Association of Jewish Ministers (MAJM), submitted a Memorandum. Following this Rabbi Roberg said that he felt that there would be nothing to add in a meeting between the CoI and the RAC/MAJM. In addition a letter was received from Rev. Katanka.
- ii) the MHJS staff in both Schools. Letters were written to the Headmasters asking that the relevant staff be informed that the CoI would be happy to receive any written comments. The

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JS staff in the High School produced a Memorandum. The CoI undertook the following interviews:

- a) Rabbi Dr. Simons in a preliminary interview on 14th February. Rabbi Simons produced a Summary of Syllabuses and Staff Timetables and a further interview followed on 15th March.
- b) Mrs. Capek on 7th March.
- c) Mr. Beebe on 11th March.
- d) Mr. Weiner on 14th March.
- e) Mr. Savitz on 22nd March.
- iii) the PTA and the PA. Letters were written to the Associations saying that the CoI would welcome letters from parents. This was publicised in the newsletters. Letters were received from Mr. P. Ross, Mr. and Mrs. M. Rothband and Mrs. D. Simons. The PTA and PA held (poorly attended) meetings for parents on 5th May which members of the CoI attended.
- D2. Members of the CoI attended Jewish Assemblies for the 1st three year pupils of the High School.
- D3. Members of the CoI, jogged by comments at the PA meeting for parents on 5th May, interviewed a group of 28 members of the lower and upper sixth forms (54%) of the High School on 17th May.

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#### E. RECOMMENDATIONS

- E1. The CoI were horrified at the lack of liaison between the two Schools which the CoI see as being one unit in respect of Jewish education. This situation must be improved with the initiative coming from the High School as the receiving school.

##### Primary School

- E2. The Jewish emphasis of the School is generally good but at Assemblies every effort should be made to find Jewish melodies for those prayers sung in English whether they be from the Tenach or from wider sources.
- E3. There should be more emphasis on the reading of Hebrew. The Siddur could be used as a text book with a strengthening of knowledge of important prayers and basic Judaism. We appreciate that this calls for more inspired teaching to keep the pupils interested but we have no doubt that an important aim of the Primary School should be to have a large majority of pupils reading well by the time they start the 3rd year Juniors (average age 9½). Following points made during interview, we were delighted to read in a recent PTA newsletter that the cooperation of parents was being sought on this.
- E4. Emphasis on Hebrew as a spoken language should be delayed until the 3rd year Juniors (see item E9 below) when intensive Ivrit B'Ivrit should be introduced.

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- E5. The JS curriculum should be more tightly controlled so that the yearly cycle sees a development and not a repetition of what has gone before.
- E6. There should be some external measure of how successful teaching has been, by taking examinations set by an external organisation such as the Jewish Schools Torah Council and taken by other schools.

##### High School

- E7. The Jewish origin and character of the School should be much more strongly emphasised in various ways including the following
  - i) The Head and Deputy Head must be seen to identify with the Jewish aims of the School and to be ultimately responsible for Jewish activities and for much greater cooperation between the MH and JS Departments.
  - ii) At the meeting with parents of new entrants in the summer (when nearly all the 30 non-King David new entrants are non-Jewish) the efforts of the Jewish Community in founding and maintaining the Schools, and even subsidising secular activities, should be noted with pride, and the determination of the Governors to achieve Jewish as well as secular aims should be emphasised.
  - iii) Every effort should be made by the Head and Deputy Head to communicate to the non-Jewish staff the importance of the Jewish activities,

and the Head at Staff Meetings should have at the top of his agenda a review of Jewish activities over the last period and a discussion of those to come in the next period. The Heads of the MH and JS Departments, with the backing of the Head and Deputy Head, should make every effort to involve non-Jewish staff in the artistic and musical side of Jewish activities. At interview, applicants for posts must be informed of the positive Jewish nature of the School and asked whether they could see any difficulty in working in such a School. We feel that, as a once-for-all exercise, there should be a meeting before the end of the current term at which the Governors would meet the non-Jewish staff and discuss with them the Jewish aims of the School.

- iv) Elements of Jewish values should be introduced into as many secular subjects as possible, for example artistic and musical themes could be partly Jewish, cookery could introduce Jewish aspects etc.
- v) Correction for late arrival or non attendance at Jewish Assemblies and Assembly Periods, or for misbehaviour in MH and JS periods, should be as efficiently applied as for other breaches of discipline. We were pleased to learn that, as suggested during interview, the seating arrangement at Assemblies was being modified so as to allow checking of attendance.

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- vi) There should be no need for piano and non-Jewish trimmings at Jewish Assemblies, and Assemblies of the whole School should be completely secularised with perhaps readings from Tenach. We are pleased to note that following discussions at interview that such an Assembly was held on 13th May.

*These actions will show the pupils and teachers and parents that the Jewish aims of the School are respected by those in authority and are not merely incidental to the life of the School.*

- E8. For MJUS the dividing line in emphasis should be the end of the 2nd year. Jewish Assemblies should be limited to the 1st and 2nd years. The Minyan should be revived and 3rd formers encouraged to attend. The Monday Assembly Period for the 3rd form should be integrated into the normal timetable. Preparation for the GCE and CSE examinations in "Religious Ideas of the Bible according to Rabbinic Thought" should begin in the 3rd year with some pupils taking the examination at the end of the 4th year. At this time we see no net advantage in integrating the 4th and 5th form Assembly Periods into the normal timetable. The Minyan should start on time, come what may, so that there should be no difficulty in 4th and 5th formers attending yet turning up to their Assembly Periods on time. Sixth formers, particularly prefects, should attend and help organise Jewish Assemblies and the Minyan.

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- E9. MH in the 1st and 2nd years must be strengthened, and coordinated with that in the last two years of the Primary School (see item E4 above).
- E10. There should be available a CSE Examination in MH similar to that taken by the JFS. The aim must be to have every Jewish pupil leaving with a GCE or CSE qualification in MH and RI.
- E11. The JS curriculum should be modified, both for content so that the material is wider and more relevant, and in structure so that it is not divided into too many compartments. From the 3rd form onwards there should be more emphasis on the philosophy of Judaism to strengthen pupils for the outside world.
- E12. There should be more effort to involve parents, with the Governors meeting parents of Jewish pupils as a group at the end of the 2nd year, and by separate consultation evenings for MJUS as were introduced in the Primary School in 1976.

#### F. IMPLEMENTATION

- F1. We feel that the MJUS Sub-Committee is too large for the detailed discussions on organisation and curriculum which should be its business. The present Sub-Committee should be replaced by a smaller one of two (non Manager or Governor) members of the Foundation Committee, two Managers, two Governors, MJUS staff of the Primary School (Head and two others) and of the High School (Head, Deputy Head, Heads of MH and JS Departments), and one (non Foundation Committee, non

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Manager or Governor) representative from each of the PTA and PA. Officers of the Foundation would be ex-officio members. The new Sub-Committee would have the power to invite outside experts to be present as advisers. The Manager, Governor, PTA and PA representatives would be charged with ensuring that points made by the new Sub-Committee are raised in their respective bodies. There should be regular written reports at each meeting of the Foundation Committee with time for discussions of the contents and of wider aspects of the Jewish life of the Schools outside the terms of reference of the new Sub-Committee.

- F2. The new Sub-Committee would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations. In particular the CoI hope that meetings of the new Sub-Committee at least twice per term will be a means of improving the lack of liaison between the two Schools. The new Sub-Committee would also as its prime task carry out the detailed examination of curriculum which is needed.
- F3. All our comments have been made with the present staff in mind. It is imperative that at both Schools no recruitment or replacement of staff, and no additional or change in allocation of periods or part-time teachers, be made without reference to the new Sub-Committee acting as agent for the Foundation.

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#### G. CONCLUSION

We feel that any difficulties in the Jewish life of the Schools have been compounded by a lack of a clear statement of aims and of a determination to see those aims achieved. We hope that the aims adopted for our Inquiry, and the recommendations we make to see that those aims are more fully realised, are supported and that the implementation of the recommendations leads to generations of young people of whom we can be even more proud.

Frank Gaier  
Richard Polak  
Ian Rabinowitz  
Michael Silverbeck

10.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY by the Jewish Studies  
Staff of the King David High School, June 1977.

Introduction

We are appreciative of the time and effort taken by the Committee of Inquiry (CoI) in collating material, conducting interviews and the preparation of their report. We are sure that they have produced recommendations which they consider to be in the best interest of the two Schools. We have carefully considered this report and wish to make the following observations. Needless to say our comments are not directed personally against the CoI. We have confined our comments to the JS in the High School, and we shall only comment on the Primary School or on MH in the High School insofar as it affects the JS in the High School. (our lettered paragraphs correspond to those of the report).

Composition of Sub-Committee

In a Jewish School, the administration plays a vital part in determining the whole Jewish character and ethos of the establishment. Consequently, members of such an administration (Foundation members, Governors, Managers) cannot be and would not want to be considered as neutral, and obviously have definite views as to what the Jewish character should be. Despite this, however, the composition of this CoI consisted entirely of members of the administration. We are in no way whatsoever suggesting that the CoI members consciously had a bias, but the composition of the CoI should be born in mind. Also the fact that not one member of the CoI is an educationist should also be remembered.

It should also be mentioned that the name of Rabbi Roberg was proposed as a member of this CoI, but was rejected by the administration. Rabbi Roberg is the Rosh Yeshivah and consequently an expert in Jewish education and curricula, and also being independent of the administration, he could have made a valuable contribution to this CoI.

D1 (iii) We have repeatedly commented on the almost total lack of parental interest in Jewish Studies. It is extremely rare indeed for a parent to request an appointment with a JS teacher for a parents' consultation evening.

The response of the parents to this CoI further establishes this point. A total of three parents wrote to this CoI - one from the High School and two from the Primary School (the parents of Hinda Rothbard and Ayelet Simons!) Despite several written reminders, there was only a poorly attended parents' meeting - about 5% of the parents and most of the comments made came from a fraction of those who attended.

If parents are totally disinterested in the Jewish Education of their children, we cannot expect the children to take a better attitude.

E1 We have often made the point regarding the lack of liaison between the two Schools. The only effective solution is to have one Director of Jewish Studies over both Schools - this is the arrangement at the King David Schools in Manchester. Failing that, a full-time Director of Jewish Studies for the Primary School, must be appointed.

E3 The CoI considers that "an important aim of the Primary School should be to have a large majority of pupils reading (Hebrew) well by the time they start the third year Juniors (average age 9½)". We consider this to be totally unacceptable. Insofar as English reading is concerned pupils are already reading well by the age of about 6 and a remedial English reading teacher is already provided for children of 5 who are falling behind with their reading. The Headmaster also regularly hears the children in their English reading. Surely, if a remedial Hebrew reading teacher were to be provided and the same interest taken in Hebrew reading, pupils should then be reading well by about the age of 7.

At present, we are often finding pupils entering the High School who struggle to read Hebrew. We also find that pupils entering the High School lack the most basic Jewish knowledge, such as Festivals, Berachot, etc., and they are not equipped to learn Chumash and Siddur texts.



If pupils of this age (about 11½) have not yet mastered these basic Jewish skills after seven years of study, they will already enter the High School bored with J.S. The boredom may be largely latent at this age, but it is soon manifest when the pupils reach 12-13 years.

E7 We cannot agree more that the Jewish origin and character of the School should be much more strongly emphasised. (A French assistant was in the School for nearly half a year before she realised it was a Jewish School!) It is bad enough when a pupil sees one thing at home and another at School. It is far worse when they learn one thing in their JS lessons and see the opposite in the running of the School, and this just makes a complete mockery of the JS lessons in the School.

i.) It is extremely important that the Jewish Staff, particularly those at the top, must, both in the activities of the School and in their own practice both inside and at least publicly outside the School, show that Jewish observances are not just for "JS teachers" but also apply to the "masses".

With regard to "much greater co-operation between the MH and JS departments", it should be remembered that there are two ways of approaching the teaching of MH. One is that it is taught in a religious way as "Lashon Kodesh" by Orthodox teachers - co-operation is then possible with JS. The other is when it is taught as just "another language" with no regard to the Orthodoxy of the teachers and the sanctity of the language. Sadly, in our School, the latter method prevails making a "much greater co-operation" impossible.

iii.) This communication "to the non-Jewish Staff (of) the importance of the Jewish activities" is extremely important and if this were done the comments made at Staff Association meetings and in the Staff-room would be minimised or even eliminated.

iv) We completely agree that Jewish values should be introduced into as many secular subjects as possible and we would be happy to assist the secular staff to implement this.

vi.) It goes without saying that Assemblies of the whole School (which are about 60% Jewish, 40% non-Jewish) should be completely secularised. Jewish pupils do not go to a Jewish School to sing Church hymns or to take part in "Mixed worship".

E8. The Statement "For MHJS the dividing line in emphasis should be the end of the 2nd year" is not clear. If it means increasing the time devoted to MH at the expense of JS, then this is totally unacceptable to us. At present, the time devoted to JS decreases with each successive academic year, whereas the time for MH remains constant in the first three years and then radically increases in the 4th year. If one wishes to increase the time devoted to MH then it must be done at the expense of a secular subject. If one is concerned with JS, one does not decrease the time devoted to it - on the contrary it should be increased.

We are quite amazed at the suggestion that Jewish Assemblies should be limited to the 1st and 2nd years. The Ministers have repeatedly expressed concern that there are no Jewish Assemblies from the 4th year upwards, and that as a consequence pupils are no longer laying Tephillin and davening. Now the CoI are suggesting that Assemblies for the 3rd year should cease! Another point is that if Jewish Assemblies were limited to the first two years, for most of each academic year, there would not be a Minyan in these Assemblies.

We welcome the recommendation that the 3rd form Assembly period should be integrated into the normal timetable, and hope this will be in operation from this September.

The CoI state that they "can see no net advantage in integrating the 4th and 5th form Assembly periods into the normal timetable". Unfortunately they do not give any indication of how they arrived at this conclusion. However, we can only reiterate what we have stated on numerous occasions in the past; that having these subjects before the official start of the school day lowers their dignity and prestige and hence the respect pupils accord to them.

It also causes great problems with regard to lateness and absenteeism, they occupy time when there should be senior Jewish Assemblies, and they have been responsible for the collapse of the early Minyan. Three years ago, the JS sub-committee recommended as a compromise the integration of two of these five periods in both the 4th and 5th years, and the Chairman of Governors wrote a letter in May 1975 in which he described such an integration as "a reasonable indeed unanswerable request" and gave a written commitment that two such periods in both the 4th and 5th years would be integrated in September 1975. However, every commitment and undertaking that has been given in this matter has yet to be implemented.

The report omits the reasons for the early Minyan collapsing. For a number of years this Minyan began each morning at about 8.15am. and finished at about 8.45am. on a non-laining day and about 8.55am. on a laining day. This Minyan was gaining in strength and in the period January 1975-July 1976 it was very rare for there to be a day without a Minyan. However, these Assembly periods which began at about 9am. in 1971 gradually started earlier and earlier so that by 1976 they were beginning at 8.45am. As one can see, these lessons were then encroaching on the service, and pupils attending the Minyan were getting into trouble from the MH Staff, and there was even a case of a boy being detained! As a consequence, pupils stopped coming to this Minyan and this led to its collapse. Repeated warnings had been given (Memorandum from Rabbi Simons June 1975, RAC Minutes 7.4.76, JSSA Minutes 6.4.76) that this would cause the collapse of the Minyan, but no heed was taken by the administration.

We would be only too happy to see this Minyan start again, but from previous experience to begin at 8.00am. would be unsuccessful, and therefore any pupil arriving late at an Assembly lesson after attending the Minyan would have to have immunity from punishment. The statement "The Minyan should start on time, come what may ....." is ridiculous - one cannot conduct a service without a Minyan!

The suggestion that preparations for SK O-level and CSE should begin in the 3rd year has been discussed in the past and rejected by both the JS Staff, and this JS sub-committee. Amongst the reasons given were that it would mean cutting out other Jewish topics in the third year, and that pupils are not sufficiently mature to answer such a paper in the 4th year, and it would lead to a lack of interest in JS in the 5th year. It should also be mentioned here that in order to enable pupils to take MH O-level in the 4th year, the previous Director of Jewish Studies gave some JS periods to the MH department (an arrangement which he later regretted). It should be made clear that if SK O-level/CSE were to be taken in the 4th year, these periods would have to be taken in the 4th year, these periods would have to be taken back from the MH department.

B11. There are at present courses in Mussar (Jewish Philosophy). However, the best Jewish philosophy to give pupils is not in the classroom but the strengthening of the Jewish atmosphere in the School. It is no good teaching pupils laws of Kashrut or prayer if School trips will be arranged which involve non-kosher food or pupils are told that there is no time for davening on a trip. How can we justify to the pupils the importance of Tephillin if the School gives no opportunity to put them on from the 4th year upwards (and according to the recommendations of the CoI from the 3rd year upwards)? How can we explain to the pupils that we are the only Jewish High School without Minchah in the daily timetable? Minchah has to be held in the afternoon break and pupils who wish to attend must sacrifice this breaktime daily. Why are the JS Staff the only Staff who attend? Why should we have to fight for time on Festive days to be allocated to Festival activities? Let the pupils see that a School can be run with a true and sincere Jewish atmosphere and you will then "strengthen pupils for the outside world".

F1. We agree that this MEJS sub-committee is too large. We notice however that in the recommended new composition, representative(s) of the RAC have been totally excluded. This seems to conform with the policy of excluding any Ministers from the Governing Bodies of the School and the various other sub-committees and meetings. This is in complete variance with all other denominational Schools (Jewish, Catholic, Church of England) and even a number of County Schools which have ministerial representation. Even written suggestions and requests which have been deliberated and put forward by the RAC are not even acknowledged, let alone answered.

F2. The report states that "the new sub-committee would also, as its prime task, carry out the detailed examination of curriculum which is needed". In our view, this is unprofessional. With the greatest of respect to the layman who give up their time to the School, they are not educationalists and do not have the qualifications or knowledge to perform a "detailed examination of curriculum". (How would the sub-committee like it if non-medical people were to decide on what medical treatment to give them, or would they like to live in a house designed by non-architects, or would they like to be defended in court using a brief written by a non-lawyer?) The point made that "The new sub-committee would have the power to invite outside experts to be present as advisers" is far too vague. What sort of outside experts would be invited? Would they be observant Jews? Would invitations be extended regularly or would it be just a theoretical idea? Who would have the final word on curricula, the experts or the laymen?

#### Conclusion

All these comments have been given in a spirit of observation and constructive criticism of the CoI report, and we trust they will be accepted as such. We ask that this document be read together with the CoI report at the meeting of the MEJS sub-committee.