



# OFSTED'S HOSTILE INSPECTIONS OF JEWISH SCHOOLS

## **Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls School (2018)**

Yesodey Hatorah is a Strictly Orthodox Jewish School for girls aged 11-16.

Formerly an independent school, it became Voluntary Aided in 2005, in a new building opened by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In 2007 it was named as the most effective school in the country in the 'value added' measure for English, Maths and Science.

Ofsted Inspection reports have been very positive: outstanding in every category in 2006 and Good overall in 2014 (Outstanding for behaviour and safety).<sup>1</sup>

The school was inspected on 6 March.

On 9 March, the Guardian ran an article: "*Jewish school removed 'homosexual' mentions from GCSE textbook*"<sup>2</sup>. Strictly Orthodox ideals of modesty mean that the school redacts textbooks so that references to sex are not shown. This included removing mentions of "homosexuals" in passages about the Holocaust in a GCSE History textbook. The textbook's title is "Understanding the Modern World".

On the same day, Humanists UK published a similar article on their own website containing the same photographs as the Guardian, but with additional photos not shown in the Guardian. Humanists UK is a long-term critic of the school.

Humanists UK called on Ofsted to investigate the situation at the school.

A few days later, Ofsted inspectors returned to the school.

The report has still not been published.

## Reaction

Major commentators across the political spectrum have criticised Ofsted's handling of Yesodey Hatorah:

- Giles Fraser, who supports the redefinition of marriage, wrote an article on the Unherd website after visiting the school himself.<sup>3</sup>

*"As I wandered around the corridors, the atmosphere was quiet and studious, calm even. None of the girl's school lockers was locked, despite containing their valuables. Stealing is unheard of here. Even the local Sainsbury's waives the usual two at a time rule for schoolchildren when it comes to Yesoday Hatorah girls. The girls know to stand respectfully as visitors enter the room, and they listen to their teachers. A few years after opening the new building, the school was the top of the Department of Education's league table for value-added student progress..."*

*Modesty is an important virtue for the Haredim and that is reflected in their dress – no trousers for women, white shirts and black coats for the men – and also in their desire to protect their children from what they see as early sexualisation. And that means, for example, that the school redacts GCSE textbooks so that references to sex are not shown. It was one of these textbooks that got picked up by the secular campaigning organisation Humanists UK, who then complained to Ofsted..."*

*The Ofsted inspectors obviously came with a fixed agenda, they wanted to talk to the girls about sex. And those who told me about it were obviously made to feel extremely uncomfortable by the questions. Three girls complained to the Principal and he told them to explain that to the inspectors. They did – but that only made matters worse, and invited further interrogation. They were very upset by the whole process. 'This felt like an attack,' one of them said, 'because under no circumstances did we want to discuss things that we were brought up our entire lives not to discuss.'*

*And their parents were furious. 'Our daughters came home severely shaken after a day of inspection where inspectors have attempted to force alien concepts onto our children' one parent wrote. 'an alien discussion with our girls of their private bodies and of intimate relationships with strangers ... serves to undermine our beliefs in every possible way.'*

*The reactions of the staff were little different. They all agreed that the inspectors were wholly uninterested in the quality of teaching – it was the Jewish values bit they had come to inspect."*

- Charles Moore wrote in his Telegraph column:<sup>4</sup>

*“Last month, Ofsted descended on the Yesodey Hatorah girls’ school in Stamford Hill, north London. The school has always been rated “good” by the inspectorate. Its results put it in the top 2 per cent of the country for maths and the top 10 per cent for English. There is no disciplinary problem either. The Haredic Jewish community from which the pupils come is almost completely free from gang violence, drugs and teenage pregnancy. If all schools maintained Yesodey Hatorah’s standards of conduct, there would be virtually no teenage crime in the country.*

*The inspectors do not seem interested in this, however. What they want to know about is sex. They worry that the pupils are not taught about sex. It is alleged - though also denied - that they stopped girls in the corridors and asked them intrusive questions about things like internet dating sites. They raided the library, and discovered that some of the books have passages about sex blacked out. They are angry that the girls are not taught about homosexuality.”*

- Times columnist Melanie Phillips wrote in the Jewish Chronicle:<sup>5</sup>

*“Yesodey Hatorah is a Charedi girls’ school in Stamford Hill with excellent academic results. Recently, it was inspected by Ofsted. According to the school, the inspectors had one thing on their minds: the school’s approach to sex education on which they questioned pupils.*

*But Yesodey Hatorah doesn’t have sex education because this is contrary to the Charedi value of extreme modesty...*

*A number of orthodox schools have been given a bad inspectors’ report because they don’t teach about gay relationships.”*

### **Vishnitz Girls School (2017)**

Vishnitz Girls School is a Strictly Orthodox Jewish School serving girls aged three to ten.

An inspection was carried out on 10 May 2017 with the report published on 16 June 2017.

The report contained lots of extremely positive comments; the only negative finding was:

*“Pupils are not taught explicitly about issues such as sexual orientation. This restricts spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and does not take account of differing lifestyles. As a result, pupils are not able to gain a full understanding of fundamental British values...*

*[Teachers] do not teach pupils about all the protected characteristics, particularly those*

*relating to gender re-assignment and sexual orientation. This means that pupils have a limited understanding of the different lifestyles and partnerships that individuals may choose in present-day society.”*

The report acknowledged: *‘The school’s culture is, however, clearly focused on teaching pupils to respect everybody, regardless of beliefs and lifestyle.’*

The school was found to be in breach of multiple Independent School Standards, meaning the Department for Education could take regulatory action against it – including ultimately closing the school.

### **Secret changes to the report**

Ofsted faced [criticism in the press](#). By February 2018, the wording of the published report had been quietly changed, with no acknowledgement of the revision on Ofsted’s website. We are not aware that the school was informed of the change. The quotes above have been replaced with:

*“The school’s culture is clearly focused on teaching pupils to respect everyone. However, the school’s leaders are still not paying enough regard to developing pupils’ tolerance and understanding of people with protected characteristics. The requirements for this standard are not met.”*

This change is clearly to disguise the agenda Ofsted’s inspectors had. The only issue they found with Vishnitz was that it did not cover transgenderism and homosexuality.

More detail on Vishnitz is available [here](#).

### **Earlier inspections (2014)**

There were a number of hostile inspections of Jewish Orthodox schools in 2014, reported in the [Guardian](#).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/133599>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/mar/09/yesodey-hatorah-jewish-girls-school-north-london-homosexual-references-textbook>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unherd.com/2018/03/ofsted-secularists-bidding/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/04/06/battle-equality-religion-must-religion-always-lose/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thejc.com/comment/columnists/charedi-schools-extremism-melanie-phillips-ofsted-louise-casey-1.461467>