

Jewish children in Jewish schools in the UK today

Factsheet

Carli Lessof and Adam Possener

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Certain types of data are essential to understanding how Jewish communities are evolving. These include vital statistics about Jewish births, deaths, marriages and divorces, as well as key information about Jewish institutions, such as membership in synagogues and attendance at Jewish schools. Although currently unfunded, the community statistics programme at JPR exists to capture these data so that they are kept up-to-date to help underpin various aspects of community policy and planning.

/ Introduction

This factsheet summarises some of the fundamental data that currently exist about children enrolled in Jewish schools in the UK, including how rising levels of antisemitism may be affecting Jewish parents' school preferences.

The data is derived from three recent JPR reports:

- **Numbers of Jewish children in Jewish schools:** Statistical bulletin for 2021/22 to 2023/24.¹
- **Antisemitism in schools:** How prevalent is it, and how might it affect parents' decisions about where to educate their children?²
- **A Jewish or a non-Jewish school:** What lies behind parents' decisions about how to educate their children?³

The data here are based on Jewish pupils in registered Jewish schools, as recorded in school census data gathered in England and Scotland by the Department for Education and the Scottish Government, respectively. The census data has been adjusted to account for non-Jewish students enrolled in Jewish schools based on a yearly survey conducted by JPR. Consequently, the figures presented here do not include non-Jewish pupils in Jewish schools; nor do they account for Jewish pupils in non-Jewish schools or, more significantly, children who attend unregistered educational settings.

Other data in this report comes from surveys conducted using the JPR Research Panel, which are designed to gather information from Jewish people aged 16 and over in the UK on a wide range of social and political issues, including aspects of their beliefs, behaviours and preferences. In particular, we draw on the 2024 Current Affairs Survey conducted eight months after the October 7 attacks on Israel and the war in Gaza, in June and July 2024.

¹ See: Lessof, C. and Possener, A. (2025). *Numbers of Jewish children in Jewish schools: Statistical bulletin for 2021/22 to 2023/24*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

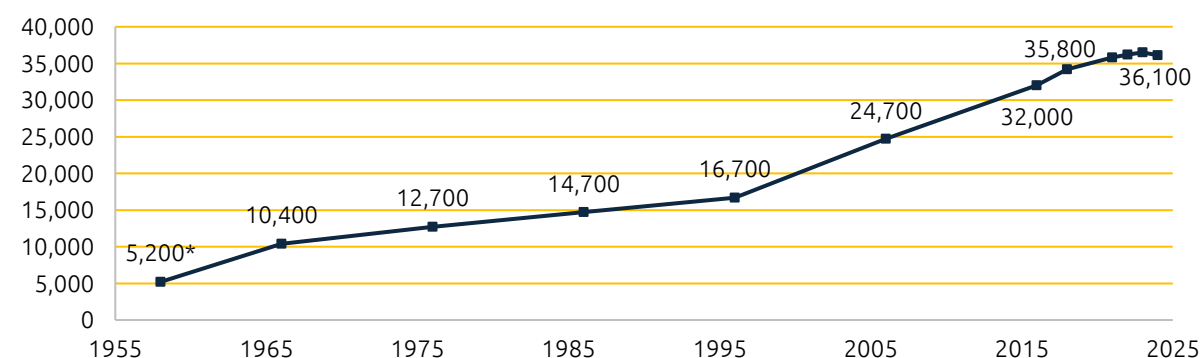
² See: Lessof, C. (2024). *Antisemitism in schools: How prevalent is it, and how might it affect parents' decisions about where to educate their children post-October 7?* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

³ See: Boyd, J. (2023). *A Jewish or a non-Jewish school: What lies behind parent's decisions about how to educate their children?* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

/ Number of Jewish children in Jewish schools

At the start of the academic year 2023/24, JPR identified 136 Jewish schools in the UK, comprising 45 'mainstream' Jewish schools and 91 Strictly Orthodox schools. 36,064 Jewish pupils⁴ attended these Jewish schools, more than double the number found in the mid-1990s.

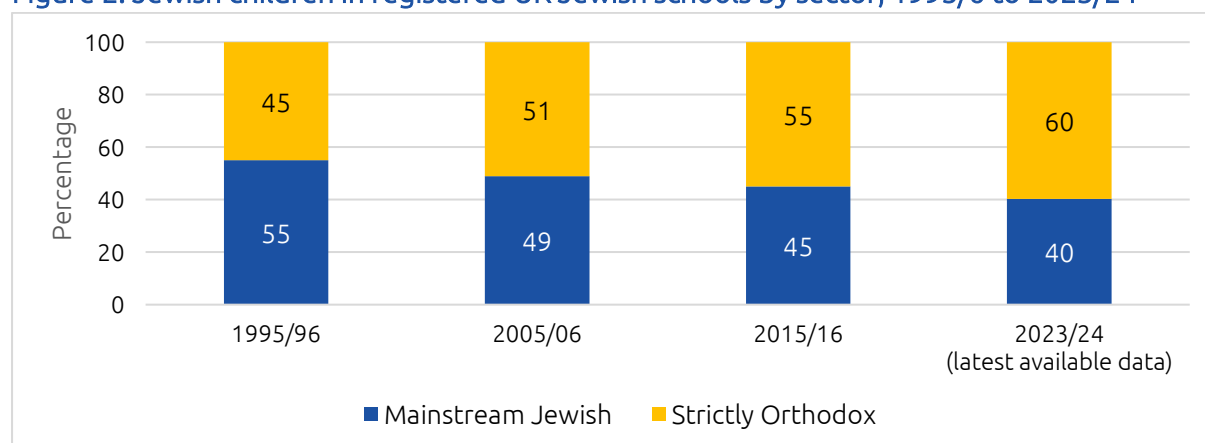
Figure 1. Number of Jewish pupils enrolled in registered Jewish schools in the UK, 1950s-2023/24 (rounded numbers)



Note: * Estimate based on data from 1954-58.

Whilst the mainstream sector has seen a slight decrease in each of the last three years available (2020/21 to 2023/24), the Strictly Orthodox sector has seen a rise over the same three-year period.⁵ Despite this recent decline, there were still over 5,000 more Jewish pupils in mainstream Jewish schools in 2023/24 than in the mid-1990s, an increase of close to 55%. Overall, the balance between mainstream and Strictly Orthodox schools has been stable over the past three years; 60% of Jewish pupils in Jewish schools attend strictly Orthodox schools, and 40% attend mainstream Jewish schools. This is a significant shift since the mid-1990s, when the ratio was 55% mainstream to 45% Strictly Orthodox.⁶

Figure 2. Jewish children in registered UK Jewish schools by sector, 1995/6 to 2023/24



⁴ We estimate that approximately 25% of all Strictly Orthodox children aged 11-15, and approximately 85% of all Strictly Orthodox children aged 16-18 do not appear in official statistics. Together the estimates for children aged 11-15 and 16-18 amount to approximately 6,650 children in unregistered settings.

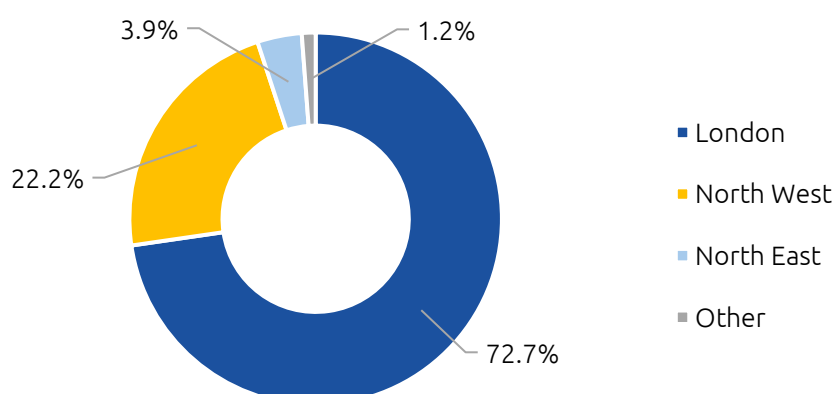
⁵ This conceals a slight decline in 2023/4 that should be understood as a reduction in the number of pupils recorded in registered Strictly Orthodox schools. There was also a decline in the rate of growth in the earlier years.

⁶ Since not all Strictly Orthodox children are included in these statistics, the true balance leans more heavily towards the Strictly Orthodox sector than these numbers suggest.

/ Geography

Almost three-quarters (72.7%) of all Jewish children in Jewish schools are in Greater London and South Hertfordshire (shown collectively as 'London' in Figure 3 below). However, whilst in the mainstream sector 87% of all Jewish pupils are in schools in Greater London or South Hertfordshire, in the Strictly Orthodox sector, London is less dominant, accounting for 63% of Jewish pupils, a decrease from 72% in the mid-90s.

Figure 3. Geographical distribution of Jewish pupils in registered Jewish schools, UK, 2023/24

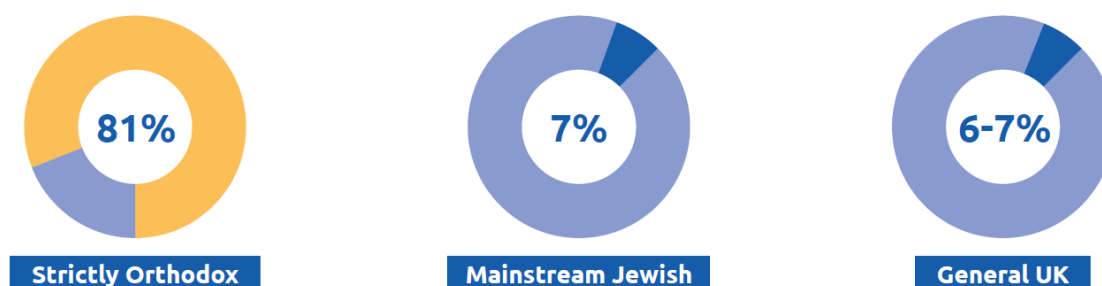


The area with the next largest Jewish pupil population is the North West, which comprises just over one-fifth of the total (22.2%), mainly in Greater Manchester, which has seen growth in the numbers of children attending schools providing for Strictly Orthodox children. This is in contrast to a decline seen in the number of children registered in schools in London in both mainstream and Strictly Orthodox schools. The North East region constitutes 3.9% of Jewish children in Jewish schools and relates exclusively to Gateshead, one of the key centres of the Strictly Orthodox community. The remaining schools, classified as 'Other', are in Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow and Westcliff.

/ Private schools vs state schools

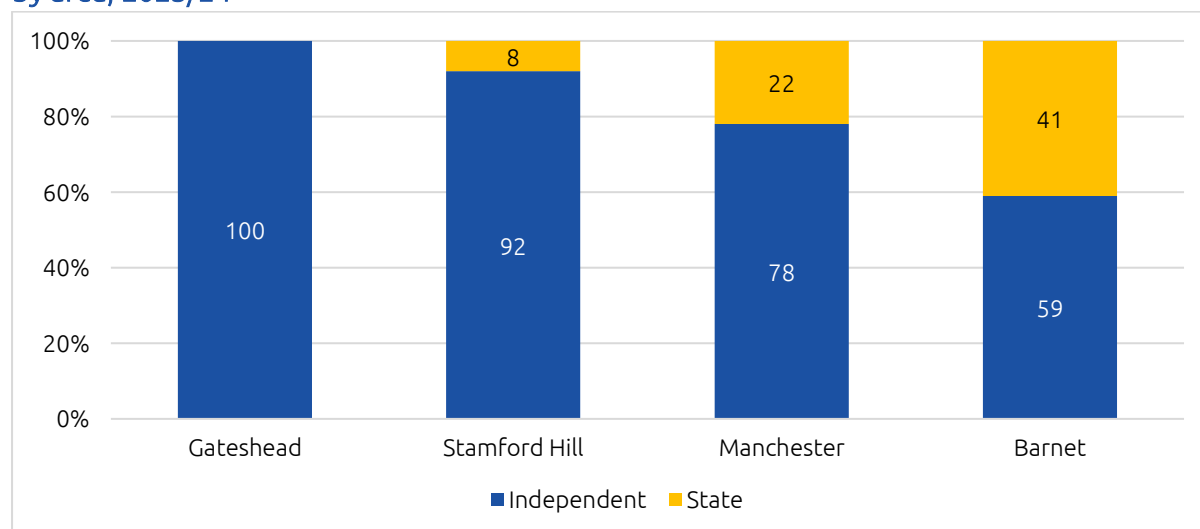
Of the 45 Jewish mainstream schools at the start of the 2023/24 academic year, just five were independent (private) schools; four of these were primary schools, while one school catered to both primary and secondary age children. In contrast, of the 91 registered Strictly Orthodox schools, 76 were independent schools, comprising 28 primary, 15 secondary, and 33 schools that cover both primary and secondary age children. These account for 81% of all pupils in registered Strictly Orthodox schools, in contrast to 7% of mainstream Jewish schools.

Figure 6. Percentage of pupils in registered state and independent schools, 2023/24



The proportion attending independent schools varies widely across the major Strictly Orthodox areas: in Gateshead, there is no state provision, so 100% of children attend private Strictly Orthodox schools; in Stamford Hill, 92% of children attending a Jewish school do so in private schools; in Manchester, it is 78%; and in Barnet, 59%. No new Strictly Orthodox state schools have opened in the UK since 2014, although one school became state-aided in 2016.

Figure 7. Percentage of Strictly Orthodox pupils in registered state and independent schools by area, 2023/24



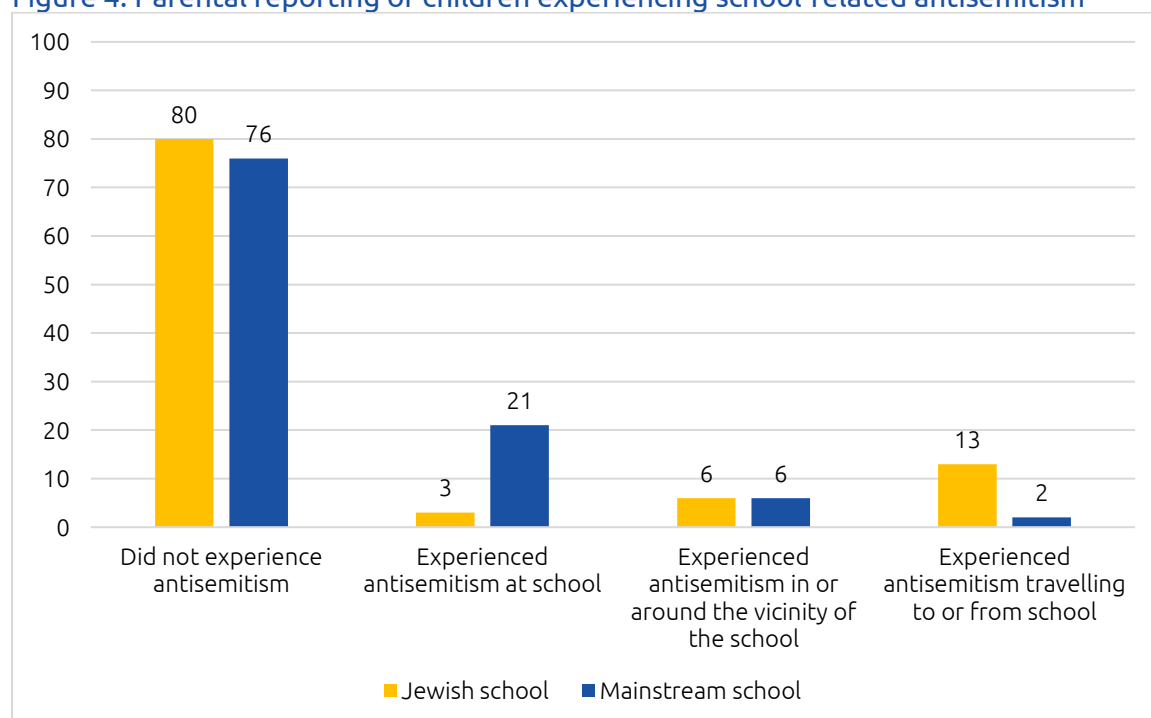
Strictly Orthodox schools are far more likely to be in the independent sector, but they differ significantly from private schools nationally. It will take time to understand how registration trends are affected by economic policy changes such as the introduction of VAT on school fees, the removal of business rates relief, the increase in the national minimum wage and employer National Insurance contributions, as well as any shifts in educational policy.

/ Antisemitism in schools following the October 7 attacks

A little under a quarter (23%) of British Jewish parents surveyed eight months after the October 7 attacks on Israel and in the context of the war in Gaza, reported that their child or children had experienced antisemitism at school (12%), in the vicinity of school (6%) or travelling to or from school (9%).

Parents of children at a Jewish school are more likely to report that their children experienced antisemitism while travelling to or from school (13%) than at school (3%). In comparison, those with children at mainstream schools are more likely to report their children experienced antisemitism at school (21%) than travelling to/from it (2%).

Figure 4. Parental reporting of children experiencing school-related antisemitism



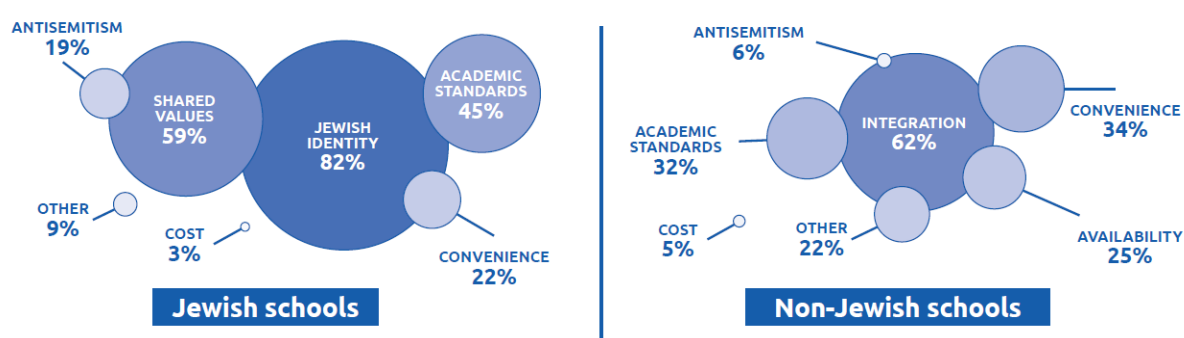
Note: Multiple responses are possible, so the figures do not sum to 100.

This is likely due to children being relatively protected from negative attitudes within Jewish schools given their relative homogeneity, while in mainstream schools the teacher, staff and student populations will be diverse in terms of backgrounds and opinions. Indeed, as we'll describe in the following section, one of the main reasons that parents choose mainstream non-Jewish schools is that they want their children to be exposed to religious and cultural diversity. In contrast, Jewish students travelling home from school in standard school uniforms are less likely to be identifiable as Jewish, and thus less likely to experience antisemitism outside of school, in comparison to children who attend Jewish schools and travel to and from sites that are known to have Jewish children and who wear school uniform or other physical markers that will identify them.

/ What lies behind parents' decisions about how to educate their Jewish children?

A report published by JPR in September 2023 drew on data from the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) – a major study of Jewish people's perceptions and experiences of antisemitism in multiple EU countries conducted by a JPR-Ipsos team. When British Jewish parents with children in Jewish schools were asked about their reasons for opting for Jewish schooling, about four in five of them pointed to a desire for their child to develop a strong Jewish identity as a motivator. This was followed by a desire for their children to have friends with similar values (59%), and the quality of academic standards available in their chosen Jewish school (45%). Only one in five of them mentioned concern that their child/ren might encounter antisemitism in a non-Jewish school as a reason for sending their children to a Jewish school, and only 3% of them cited the cost of Jewish schooling as a motive (i.e. that Jewish schooling was cheaper than the alternative/s).

Figure 5. Main reasons for choosing a Jewish or non-Jewish school



Note: Numbers sum to more than 100% as respondents were allowed to provide multiple answers

Six in ten parents who had chosen to send their Jewish child or children to a *non-Jewish* school mentioned 'integration' as a reason for their decision, meaning they actively preferred a non-Jewish school environment for their children to give them a broader cultural and educational experience. Convenience (34%), academic standards (32%) and availability (25%) were the next key reasons for choosing a non-Jewish school, and 5% cited cost as a factor – i.e. that the non-Jewish school they chose was a cheaper option than Jewish schooling. Only 6% mentioned concern that their child/ren might be more vulnerable to antisemitism attending a Jewish school as a key factor in their choice. It is possible that these priorities may have shifted somewhat since the October 7, 2023, attacks in Israel, although new data would need to be gathered to determine whether or not this is the case.

However, recent data from the 2024 Current Affairs Survey, following the October 7 attacks and the war in Gaza provide us with some possible clues. One in five parents with children in non-Jewish schools said they would be more likely now to send their children to a Jewish school given the choice again. This proportion doubles (40%) for parents whose children have experienced antisemitism in, around or travelling to or from their mainstream school. Still, three-quarters (73%) of Jewish parents with children in non-Jewish schools said that the October 7 attacks and the war in Gaza would not affect their choice about where to educate their children. Jewish parents with children in Jewish schools were about twice as likely to say these events would affect their school choices, with 46% saying they would be even more likely to opt for Jewish schooling now, reinforcing their decision.

/ About the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is a London-based research organisation, consultancy, and think tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and across Europe by conducting research and informing policy development in dialogue with those best placed to positively influence Jewish life.

/ Authors

Dr Carli Lessof is a Senior Research Fellow at JPR with responsibility for the JPR Research Panel and community statistics programme. She has an MA in Applied Social Research from Manchester University and a PhD in statistics from the University of Southampton. Over her career, Carli has developed and delivered several complex, longitudinal surveys at NatCen Social Research and Kantar Public, and carried out research and evaluation in Government (DWP, NAO) and academia (LSE, University of Essex).

Adam Possener is a JPR Student Fellow and recently completed his MRes in Music and Anthropology at University College London. During his fellowship, Adam carried out a survey to estimate the prevalence of non-Jewish pupils in Jewish schools, collated and analysed data from the School Censuses, and remodelled the JPR database to provide trend data.