



**Pears**  
Foundation

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

**FOCUS:  
THE FIRST SEVEN YEARS  
OF THE STUDY**

**LSJS**

London School  
of Jewish Studies

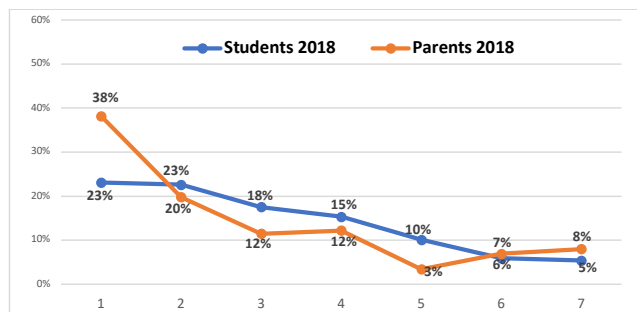
**PaJeS**

Supporting Jewish Schools

# JEWISH SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

We found, overwhelmingly, that students and parents have been pleased with their school choices and most who attended a Jewish school felt that it was a worthwhile experience.

## IS IT WORTHWHILE ATTENDING A JEWISH SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR SEVEN YEARS?



*It's worthwhile attending a Jewish secondary school for seven years*

*It's NOT worthwhile attending a Jewish secondary school for seven years*

Each of our schools has a unique ethos and features, and our families were able to articulate how these features had given them the most satisfaction.

*It's been fantastic, for both of [our children]. And in very different ways and with very different academic skills and abilities it's managed to get the best out of both of them.*

*My Dad's Catholic, my Mum's Jewish. So, there's only so much knowledge that I have. So, it gave J a good grounding...I think possibly what [the school] has helped J to continue to do, is to feel Jewish.*

*They've had a closer relationship I think with their – with the staff... than maybe they would have done at another school. And I honestly believe that the staff know the kids and want to do the best for the kids*

*I think he got a very good education. Academically, it's a high standard.*

*My impression ... is of a very nurturing, lovely, caring school...Compared to my older son's private school.*

In 2011 we started following a cohort of Jewish 11 year-old students as they entered both Jewish and non-Jewish secondary schools. We were interested in finding out about their school choices and experiences, attitudes to Judaism, Jewish identity and affiliation, sense of belonging in Britain, milestones and significant events. We were also interested in finding out about their life choices after school.

As we reach the end of seven years of research, we are able to look back at the opinions and attitudes of our students and their families with regard to their Jewish lives and their schooling.

# JEWISH EDUCATION

The diversity of our schools and their Jewish intake means that there are invariably differing opinions around Jewish education. Where pupils felt that the Jewish education was not in line with their own belief system, this sometimes caused frustration.

*If [the teacher] runs into anything too challenging they'll just go with the classic "oh because G-d says so". They'll debate something that they know they can answer, but anything really difficult they generally try to avoid*

At the same time, a student at the same school had high praise for its Jewish education, even though the teaching didn't align with her own belief system

*I thought he was a really inspirational teacher, even if I didn't agree with the religious beliefs that he held or his explanations. I just thought the way he encouraged us to understand ethics in our own way...he engaged in debate which is sometimes something that isn't there. ...Which is what I really liked, that's why I really enjoyed his JS lessons.*

“

I'VE BEEN VERY PLEASED WITH THE JEWISH EDUCATION MY DAUGHTER GOT. IT WASN'T PERFECT. SHE WON'T REALISE WHAT SHE LEARNT UNTIL SHE NEEDS IT. AND THAT MIGHT BE SOME YEARS DOWN THE PATH....

”

## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH

We were interested in what students feel about being Jewish. We looked at four expressions of what it means to be Jewish – religious, Israel-related, community oriented and universalistic. We found that students' attitudes resemble those of their parents in all four domains.

The majority of families describe themselves as “traditional” – for example, they may keep a kosher home but are less strict out of the home. They do not attend synagogue frequently and they are not fully Shabbat observant. They identify strongly as Jewish and take pride in that identity, although they are more inclined to enjoy family and community engagement with their Judaism than strict religious observance.

The exceptions to this generalisation are the minority of families who are strictly observant.



# NON-JEWISH SCHOOLING

Parents and pupils have overall been very happy with their school choices – both Jewish and non-Jewish. In the non-Jewish schools they tend to value the high standard of education, the good pastoral support and the opportunities to engage with a world outside of the “Jewish bubble”. Many students speak highly of the experience of engaging with multi-culturalism.

In some non-Jewish schools, students are encouraged to express their Judaism through Jewish societies and assemblies.

Families who are interested in a continuing Jewish education have to supplement schooling with lessons outside school.

We found that the social lives of the students in non-Jewish schools were different to those in the Jewish schools. Students attending a Jewish school freely socialise with their schoolmates who often live locally. Those attending non-Jewish schools have found that they have two separate social circles. School friends can be spread out over a large geographical area, making it hard to keep up with one another out of school hours. They therefore tend to have local friends either from primary school, youth movements or synagogue.

*I would say there's a good mix of school friends and out-of-school friends. But there's very little kind of inter-mingling. So, I'll either see school friends or I'll see out-of-school friends. It does feel to me like two very separate groups.*

By the time their children are in the sixth form we found that parents with children in non-Jewish schools are less committed to their children dating only Jewish people and in them being friends with Jewish people.

A parent with sons in non-Jewish schools, states the following:

*Jewish-wise, yes obviously, I would always prefer that my children are with Jewish partners long-term. But you know I'm realistic enough that in this day and age it's not going to happen. I've got three boys; unlikely to get three Jewish daughters-in-law.*

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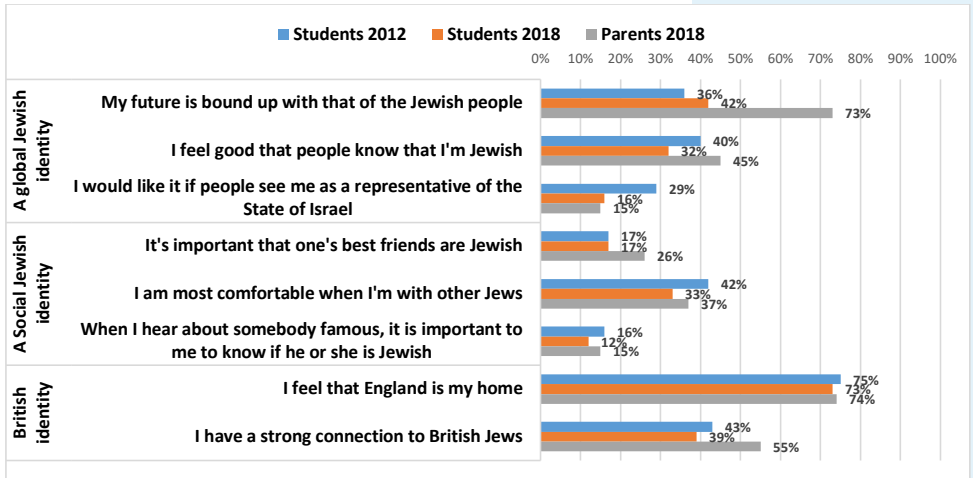
I KNOW THAT WE DIDN'T WANT A JEWISH SCHOOL WHEN I WAS CHOOSING IN YEAR 6, BECAUSE MY PARENTS ARE QUITE AGAINST BEING SOMEWHERE WHERE EVERYONE'S EXACTLY LIKE YOU.

”

# BEING JEWISH AND BRITISH

All of the students – both in Jewish and non-Jewish schools – are happy to navigate between their Jewish and British worlds.

## EXPRESSION OF JEWISH AND BRITISH IDENTITY, AMONG STUDENTS AND PARENTS

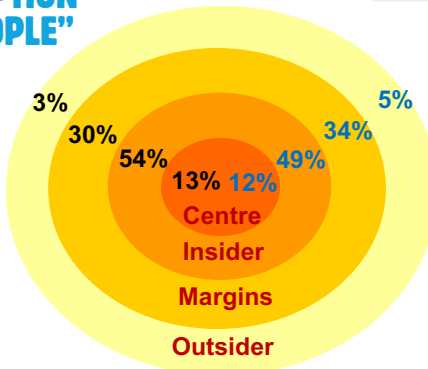


Percentages represent those who chose 'agree' or 'strongly agree' on a 6-point agree/disagree scale.

Throughout their schooling the students have consistently regarded themselves as being at the centre or insiders in relation to British society.

## STUDENT SELF-PERCEPTION "AMONG BRITISH PEOPLE"

Thinking of themselves in this way translates into a desire to vote. Across all of the Jewish schools 90% of our participants expressed an intention to vote, compared to an Ipsos MORI poll which showed that 72% of British youngsters voted in 2017.



% of all students 2012  
% of all students 2017

Students were asked to indicate where they considered themselves among British people.

# ISRAEL

By the end of Year 11, most students had been to Israel. Some went with their families, and two thirds went on an organised trip to Israel after their GCSEs. Many, in Jewish schools, also went on a Year 9 trip with their classmates.

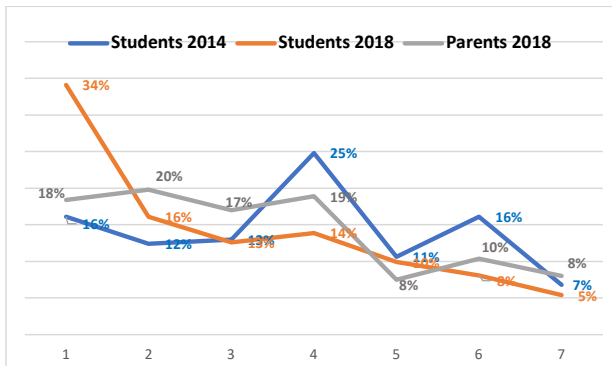
Continued visits to Israel and intensive experiences such as the Year 9 and Year 11 trips are, for the great majority of students, very positive experiences that leave a lasting impression. The more often the students have visited Israel, the more engaged they have become, and the more likely they are to want to spend a gap year there.

The students generally had a more positive attitude to Israel than to many other Jewish issues. For many this was expressed as a feeling of being “at home”. That feeling, coupled with developing maturity, is associated with feeling free to criticise Israel, which is more pronounced among students than parents.



## FREEDOM TO CRITICISE ISRAEL

Jews should be free to criticise Israel



It is NOT appropriate for Jews to criticise Israel

## THE DIFFERENCE MADE BY JEWISH SCHOOLS

Students have a very positive attitude to their Jewishness from having attended Jewish schools. They report that their cultural awareness and their sense of belonging is considerably enhanced by the school. They are self-confident and comfortable in their Jewish identities. Being amongst Jews embeds them in the community. Some feel, however, that while the curriculum helped them become reasonably knowledgeable, in Jewish terms, it has not cultivated in them a strong love for Jewish learning.

# JEWISH LIVES GOING FORWARDS

As students start to live independent lives, both parents and students expect that their Jewish observance will continue to be about the same as it is now.

*Coming back from [University]...I think I'll be wanting to establish the next step of my life with Jewish values. I think they'd probably be the same as I have now...mainly strong family and community identity.*

Some hope that Jewish engagement will increase.

*I would expect him to maintain a level of yiddishkeit no less than he's doing now. I would aspire for him to do more. I'd aspire for him to have internal motivation to want to do more.*

*I hope that I will stay strong in my religion and my beliefs and keep making steps to becoming a better person... Like more Jewish. To an extent.*

Seeing Friday night dinners as central to the expression of Judaism, the vast majority expect to carry on that tradition.

*I think a big part is community, especially family. Doing stuff, like Friday night dinners and festivals and stuff...and just like not actually necessarily Jewish stuff but just having a Jewish family.*



## PART TWO OF THE JEWISH LIVES PROJECT

We are now poised to embark on Part Two of this study as we follow our cohort beyond their school years to explore the Jewish choices that they make in the years to come.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## FIND OUT MORE

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