

## **Antisemitism in schools:** How prevalent is it, and how might it affect parents' decisions about where to educate their children post-October 7?

Dr Carli Lessof

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Data in this report come from the JPR Research Panel, which is 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 this paper, we draw on data collected in June and July 2024 which captures parents' accounts of whether their children have experienced antisemitism at school, in the vicinity of school, or travelling to and from school. The data, gathered as part of the first major study of the UK Jewish population since the October 7 attacks in Israel, explores whether experiences of antisemitism or concerns about it may affect the types of schooling Jewish parents choose for their children.

## / Introduction

Current research shows that there are 136 registered Jewish schools in the UK today, educating around 36,000 Jewish children.<sup>1</sup> About two-thirds of all Jewish children are educated in these schools: almost all *haredi* (strictly orthodox) children learn in Jewish educational settings, as do an estimated 43% of other Jewish children.<sup>2</sup> This represents an extraordinary rise since the 1950s, when there were just over 5,000 Jewish children in Jewish schools; proportional and numerical growth has been particularly strong since the 1990s, although official figures now show a plateauing and even a slight fall in the non-haredi sector.<sup>3</sup>

The rise over time reflects a desire for Jewish education and Jewish social cohesion. A comparative European study, conducted by a JPR/Ipsos team in 2018 for the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, identified three main motivations British Jewish parents had for choosing a Jewish school: wanting their child to have a strong Jewish identity (80% of parents), to have friends with similar values (60%) and to attend a school with high academic standards (40-45%).<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the motivations of parents preferring a non-Jewish ('mainstream') school were: wanting their child to be educated in an environment that is not exclusively Jewish (60%), convenience (e.g. being close to where they live) (35%), and again, attending a school with high academic standards (30%).

<sup>1</sup> These are unpublished estimates based on initial analysis of Schools Census data from 2021/22 to 2023/24. The latest published data can be found in: Horup, B., Lessof, C. and Boyd, J. (2021) *Numbers of Jewish children in Jewish schools: statistical bulletin for 2018/19 to 2021/21*, London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

<sup>2</sup> See: Staetsky, D. and Boyd, J. (2016), *The rise and rise of Jewish schools in the United Kingdom: Numbers, trends and policy issues*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

<sup>3</sup> Horup, Lessof and Boyd (2021), op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Boyd, J. (2023) *A Jewish or a non-Jewish school: What lies behind parents' decisions about how to educate their children?* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

A common thread here is that existing evidence indicates that British Jewish people's school choices have *not* been strongly motivated by concerns about antisemitism, which ranked fifth out of six possible motivators in that study, regardless of whether the chosen school was Jewish or mainstream.<sup>5</sup> However, in light of the October 7 attacks in Israel, the subsequent war in Gaza and the associated rise in antisemitism in the UK, it is important to determine whether this may be changing in any way, both to help determine whether any changes in demand for places in Jewish schools should be anticipated, and to better understand the position of Jews today in multicultural Britain.

We are aware of cases of families requesting transitions to Jewish schools over the past year, both in the UK and elsewhere, but at this stage, we are not able to assess the scale of this phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, unfortunately, only limited data is available about children's experience of antisemitism or, indeed, any form of racism. Some data is available on reported antisemitic incidents,<sup>7</sup> but this provides only a partial picture of the true extent of antisemitism experienced in the UK.<sup>8</sup>

In the absence of comprehensive data, JPR asked members of the JPR Research Panel who were surveyed in June to July 2024 whether they had a school-aged child or children at a Jewish school, a mainstream school or both. Those who answered positively were then asked whether, to their knowledge, their child or children had experienced antisemitism, either at school, in the vicinity of school, or on the journey to and from school.

Parental reports provide an indirect measure of antisemitism, reflecting their understanding of their children's experiences in these different contexts. This perception matters, both because parents feel responsible for protecting their children as far as they are able, and because they play a key role in deciding what kind of school their children will attend.

With this in mind, we asked our subsample of parents with school-age children whether, in light of events on October 7 and the subsequent war, they would be more or less likely to send their child or children to a Jewish school or a non-Jewish school. Responses to this question are enlightening, although it is important to note that many parents are constrained, either because they live in an area with no Jewish schools, or because their religious convictions mean it is inconceivable for them to choose a school that is not Jewish. These parents have little choice, even if their child is at risk of antisemitism. In practice, all parents are constrained to some extent, not least because concerns about antisemitism may be outweighed by fears of disrupting their child's education if they had to change school.

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<sup>5</sup> The six possible motivators assessed for Jewish schools were: convenience (e.g. close to home, easy to get there); cost (e.g. cheaper than alternatives); academic standards; want my child/ren to have friends with similar values; concerns about my child/ren encountering antisemitism in non-Jewish schools; want my child/ren to have a strong Jewish identity. The six for mainstream schools were: no suitable Jewish school available; convenience (e.g. close to home, easy to get there); cost (e.g. cheaper than the alternative); academic standards; prefer a school environment that is not exclusively Jewish; concern that children in Jewish schools are vulnerable to antisemitism. Both assessments also offered respondents an 'other' option.

<sup>6</sup> Understanding this fully would require ongoing analysis of data from the School Census and regular collection and analysis of applications and allocations data, supplemented where necessary, with data collection from schools.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon-Teller, Y. (2024), '[Antisemitic incidents: January-June 2024](#)', Community Security Trust. This suggests a significant increase in the number of antisemitic incidents from the previous year and a proportional shift towards reports of antisemitism at non-Jewish schools. The interpretation offered by CST is that "when tensions are high in the Middle East, they are exacerbated in the educational spaces that Jewish and non-Jewish teachers and pupils share, with some children directing their feelings of hostility about Israel towards classmates and staff as the most accessible proxy targets."

<sup>8</sup> See: Boyd, J. (2024). *Antisemitism in the aftermath of October 7*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research (forthcoming).

## / Experiences of antisemitism at school, in the vicinity, or when travelling

In order to identify a group of people who could act as informants about children's experiences of antisemitism in school settings, we asked survey respondents aged between 20 and 59,<sup>9</sup> 'Do you currently have any children who are of school-age?', offering the response options: 'Yes, I have a child/children at a Jewish school', 'Yes, I have a child/children at a non-Jewish school' and 'No'. All parents with school-aged children were then asked, 'As far as you are aware, has your child(ren) at a Jewish school/non-Jewish school experienced an antisemitic incident directed at them personally?' Note that the question did not specify a time period, so it will have captured antisemitic incidents that have taken place at any point in the past. Nor did it ask whether this was experienced by one or more children, the number of incidents, the nature of any incidents, or their frequency.

In total, 678 parents reported having a child or children in a Jewish school (n=441) or a mainstream (non-Jewish) school (n=274), including some who reported having children at both (n=37). Because this was a survey of individuals, there was a possibility that two parents from the same household might report antisemitism directed at the same child(ren), leading to double-counting of any antisemitic incidents. To avoid this, the sample used to estimate the prevalence of antisemitism among children is restricted to 503 parents who, we are confident, come from unique households.<sup>10</sup> These 503 parents had a child(ren) in a Jewish school (n=304) or a mainstream school (n=225), and included some who reported having children in both (n=26).<sup>11</sup>

Based on this sample of parents in unique households, a little under a quarter (23%)<sup>12</sup> 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%), with a small number reporting more than one of these. Overall, the level of antisemitism reported by parents appears to be slightly lower among parents with children in Jewish schools (22%) than those in mainstream schools (26%), but this difference is not statistically significant.<sup>13</sup> Averaging across types of schools can be deceptive, however. Figure 1 shows that the experience of antisemitism varies significantly by school type.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jewish students are relatively well protected from antisemitism *within* Jewish schools (reported by 3% of parents), although these figures are slightly higher where parents have no synagogue affiliation (5%, not shown) or are members of Reform, Liberal or Masorti synagogues (7%, not shown), perhaps reflecting a greater mix of teachers, staff and students in Jewish schools which are not Orthodox.

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<sup>9</sup> The limit was due to survey constraints though some parents of school-aged children may sit outside this range.

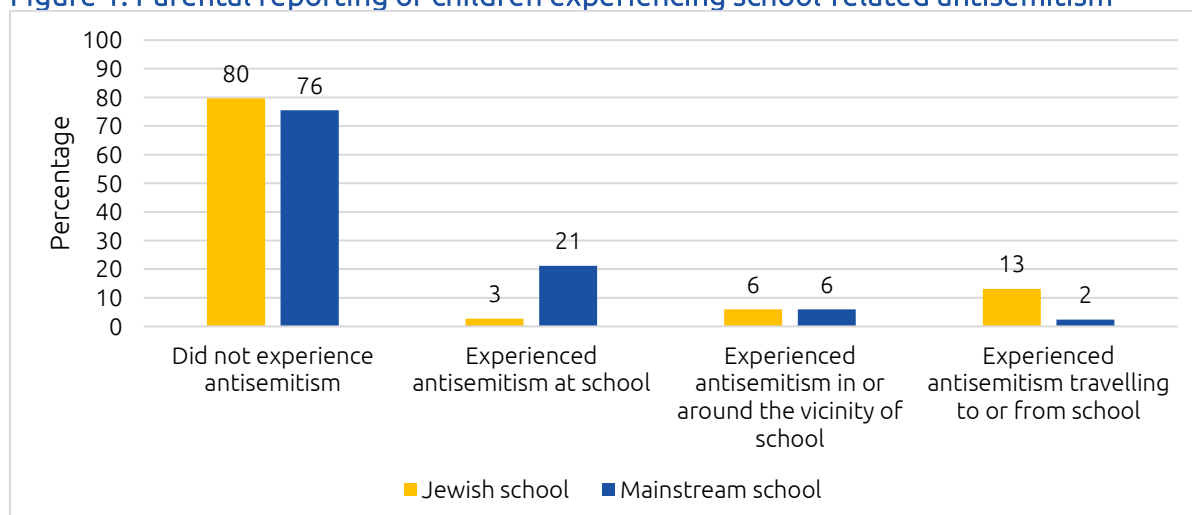
<sup>10</sup> Given additional time and resource, we would weight to this sub-sample, but in practice, the estimates do not appear to be sensitive to different approaches.

<sup>11</sup> In theory, it would be possible to use weighted percentages based on these figures to update our estimates of the proportion of parents with children in Jewish schools, with children in non-Jewish schools and with children in both, but we caution against this, until we have the resource to triangulate with other data sources.

<sup>12</sup> This is based on unique households but is very similar based on all parents' reports (22%).

<sup>13</sup> The difference might have been statistically significant if the sample were larger.

Figure 1. Parental reporting of children experiencing school-related antisemitism



Question: *As far as you are aware, has your child(ren) at a Jewish/non-Jewish school experienced an antisemitic incident directed at them personally?* Sample is based on unique households of parents with children in Jewish schools (n=304) and mainstream schools (n=225). Multiple responses are possible so the figures do not sum to 100.

In contrast, Jewish children in mainstream schools are significantly more likely to experience antisemitism *within* school (reported by 21% of parents) and are much less likely to experience it *travelling* to and from school (2%). This is likely due to the fact that the teachers, staff and students will be diverse; indeed, as previously noted, one of the main reasons that parents choose mainstream schools is that they want their children to be exposed to religious and cultural diversity. In comparison, Jewish children wearing standard school uniforms are less likely to be identifiable as Jewish outside of school.

Our initial analysis suggests that in mainstream schools the characteristic most closely associated with experiencing higher levels of antisemitism is the parent's *financial situation*. The sample sizes we are working with are small so we cannot confirm that our findings are statistically significant, but it is striking to see that two-fifths of parents who said they were finding it 'quite difficult' or 'very difficult' to get by<sup>14</sup> reported that their child or children had been subject to some form of antisemitism at school, compared to one-fifth in wealthier economic categories. What is statistically significant is that a quarter (27%) of pupils from the most disadvantaged homes had experienced antisemitism in the vicinity of school compared to less than one in twenty (4%) in other economic categories, and one in ten (11%) had experienced antisemitism travelling to and from school compared to 2% in other economic categories. It is likely that children from poorer backgrounds attend more disadvantaged state schools, live in more disadvantaged areas, and/or have parents who are less able to shield them through economic means, for example, by providing safe transport to or from school. All of these factors may be associated with experiencing higher levels of antisemitism.

A key to unlocking the issues faced by more economically disadvantaged parents with children in mainstream schools, may be found in comments made spontaneously by some parents when asked whether they would have made a different choice of school following October 7. A number of parents reported that they would still choose to send their child to a mainstream school, but they would choose the school carefully, citing, for example, strong school management and the importance of having a number of other Jewish children attending the school. It is very likely that parents who choose mainstream schools consider how sympathetic that school will be towards Jewish pupils, but parents from more disadvantaged backgrounds may be more constrained in their choices.

<sup>14</sup> The question posed was: *Thinking about your economic wellbeing, how well would you say you are managing financially these days?* [Response options: Living comfortably; Doing alright; Just about getting by; Finding it quite difficult; Finding it very difficult].

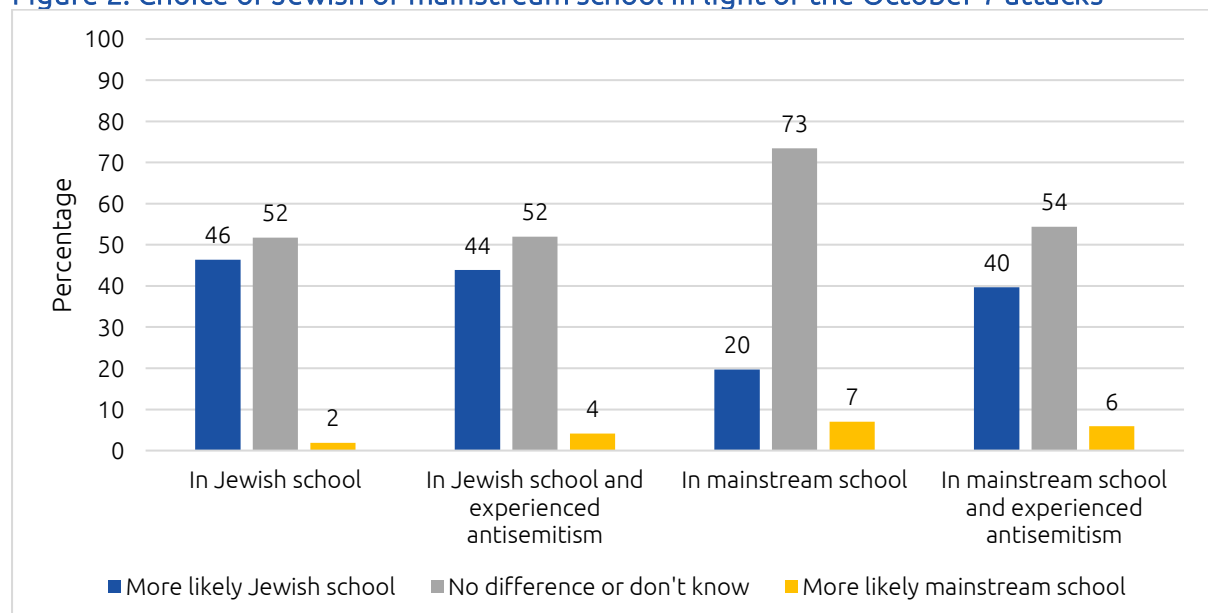
## / Choice of school in light of October 7

Has the October 7 attack on Israel, its war with Hamas in Gaza and the related spike in reported antisemitic incidents affected Jewish parents' decisions about the type of school their children should attend? This question has a range of policy implications that are both specific (e.g. will demand for places in Jewish schools increase?) and general (e.g. will increased antisemitism and fear of antisemitism lead to greater community retrenchment and isolation of the Jewish community?)

With the proviso that some parents are constrained by school availability or religious necessity, parents were asked: 'If you were deciding where to send your child(ren) to school now, would the October 7 attacks on Israel and the war in Gaza have any bearing on what type of school you would choose?'<sup>15</sup> Parents could respond by saying they were much more likely to choose a Jewish school, somewhat more likely to choose a Jewish school, somewhat more likely to choose a non-Jewish school, much more likely to choose a non-Jewish school, or that it would have no bearing on their choice.<sup>16</sup>

As seen in Figure 2, the majority of parents would not revise their decision about where to send their children to school, perhaps because many factors and constraints affect school choice. Nevertheless, the impact of the October 7 attacks on Israel and the war in Gaza appears to have reinforced the conviction of many parents with children in Jewish schools that this is the safest environment for them. Just over half (52%) said that the attacks on Israel and the war in Gaza would not affect their decision, but almost all remaining parents (46%) said they would be much more likely (32%) or somewhat more likely (14%) to send their child to a Jewish school. Only a tiny minority of families said they would be more likely to send their child to a mainstream school (2%). The figures are similar for the subset of parents whose child or children have experienced antisemitism, although the size of the group who would now consider a mainstream school is slightly larger.

**Figure 2. Choice of Jewish or mainstream school in light of the October 7 attacks**



Question: *If you were making the decision about where to send your child(ren) to school now, would the October 7th attacks on Israel and the war in Gaza have any bearing on what type of school you would choose?* The blue and yellow bars combine 'Much more likely' and 'Somewhat more likely'. The sample is based on all parents with children in Jewish schools (n=441) and those whose child(ren) experienced antisemitism (n=99), all parents with children in mainstream schools (n=274) and those whose child(ren) experienced antisemitism (n=71).

<sup>15</sup> Since each parent's viewpoint may differ, we base this part of the report on all 678 individual respondents.

<sup>16</sup> A number of parents entered 'other' and had their responses recoded, leaving a small number of 'don't knows'.

The picture is somewhat different for parents with children in mainstream schools. Most (73%) report that the October 7 attacks on Israel and the war in Gaza would not have any bearing on the type of school they would choose for their child. A minority (7%) said that they would be more likely (mainly somewhat more likely) to choose a mainstream school, and this was the case even for those whose children had experienced antisemitism (6%). However, a larger proportion than this, one-fifth (20%), reported being more likely to choose a Jewish school (8% much more likely, 12% somewhat more likely). Perhaps more telling is the fact that the proportion of parents of children at mainstream schools who would be more likely to choose a Jewish school is almost double (40%) among those who also report that their children had experienced antisemitism, with approximately equal proportions of these being much more likely or somewhat more likely to choose a Jewish school. Although these figures are low relative to the reinforced commitment of parents who would normally choose mainstream schools, it might lead to a rise in applications for Jewish schools in the future. At the same time, it is important to remember that parents take many factors into account when choosing schools, and the question posed was hypothetical and asked at a single point in time, approximately eight months after the war began. In order to understand whether this will translate into a shift in practice, it would be necessary to track childrens' experiences of antisemitism and changing parental preferences over time. It would also be essential to monitor applications and allocations to Jewish schools regularly. This has been examined intermittently but dedicated resource is needed to track this on a regular basis.<sup>17</sup>

There is some variation in parents' preferences. Although the sample sizes are too small to draw firm conclusions, parents who said they have become much more attached to Israel since October 7 appear to be more inclined to send their child/ren to a Jewish school, while parents who said they have become much less attached to Israel appear to be more inclined to send their child/ren to a mainstream school. Although further evidence is needed, this supports the idea that when making choices about schools, parents may be considering exposure to attitudes to Israel – both overtly negative and overtly positive – as well as issues related to antisemitism.

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<sup>17</sup> Staetsky, D. and Boyd, J. (2017), [Will my child get a place? An assessment of supply and demand of Jewish secondary school places in London and surrounding areas](#). London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research; Staetsky, D. (2019), [Projections of demand for places in state-funded mainstream Jewish secondary schools in London: An update](#). London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

## / Conclusions

Around one-quarter of parents report that their child or children have experienced antisemitism at school, in the vicinity of school or travelling to and from school. Children attending Jewish schools are more likely to experience antisemitism travelling to and from school, particularly if they are Orthodox or Haredi. Continued monitoring of this phenomenon is important to determine whether this is becoming more commonplace over time.

Children attending mainstream schools are more likely to experience antisemitism *at* school, and children attending mainstream schools from the most disadvantaged backgrounds appear to be the most vulnerable. A repeated comment from parents who send their children to mainstream schools is the importance of choosing a school carefully: one with strong school management to contend with any antisemitism and, where possible, a sizeable Jewish student population. However, many parents, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, are constrained in the choices they can make. Additional research to understand the experiences of children within mainstream schools, particularly in more disadvantaged households, would be worthwhile.

The figures presented in this report are indicative. It was not possible for us to collect information about the nature, severity, frequency or impact of any antisemitic incidents, or to measure antisemitism in a specific window of time. Nor can we compare experiences before and after the October 7 attacks, as we do not have time series data that would allow us to track trends. This argues for further resources to understand antisemitism experienced at the school level and on an ongoing basis.

At this time, we do not have evidence that would suggest antisemitism has moved up the ranks of drivers influencing parents' choices about the schools they would prefer for their children. However, the research suggests such a shift could occur if significant proportions of children continue to experience antisemitism in mainstream schools. One-fifth of parents whose children attended a mainstream school said that the events of October 7 and their repercussions might make them more likely to choose a Jewish school if they were deciding now, and this rises to two-fifths for those who reported their children had experienced antisemitism. It is too soon, however, to see whether this will translate into an increase in demand for school places in Jewish schools as new cohorts of parents make these choices. Although the numbers are small, there is also an indication that a small proportion of parents whose children attend Jewish schools and have experienced antisemitism, as well as parents who feel less attached to Israel as a result of the war in Gaza, may be less inclined to choose Jewish schools.

These different factors may lead to changes in school preferences within Jewish families, an issue which has caused challenges in the past when demand for places has exceeded supply. Further research is needed to track experiences of antisemitism, in particular among school children and students, in a way that captures the nuanced differences that may have significant policy implications for the Jewish community.



## **/ Methodological note**

The JPR UK Jewish Population Research Panel is designed to explore the attitudes and experiences of Jews in the UK on a variety of issues. It contains over 12,000 individuals who are UK residents aged 16 or above who self-identify as Jewish. The data presented in this report are based on 4,641 individuals who responded to a JPR Panel Survey conducted between June 14 and July 14 2024. The survey was completed online, by computer, smartphone or tablet and in a handful of cases, by telephone. The questionnaire was developed by JPR, drawing on a range of existing surveys. It was programmed in-house using Forsta software. The survey data were cleaned and weighted to adjust for the age, sex and geographical distribution of the Jewish population based on the 2021 Census, and on information about Jewish denomination based on a combination of administrative and JPR survey data. Statistical analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS.

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## / 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. Web: [www.jpr.org.uk](http://www.jpr.org.uk).

## / Author

**Dr Carli Lessof** is a Senior Research Fellow at JPR with responsibility for JPR's community statistics programme, online research panel, and monitoring and evaluation. She has an MA in Applied Social Research from Manchester University and a PhD from Department of Statistics, University of Southampton. Over her career, Carli has developed and delivered a range of 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).