



Yeshiva Gedola Lubavitch

Inspection report

The Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI) has been approved by the Secretary of State in the Department for Education to undertake inspections in designated independent schools. In July 2011, BSI was asked by the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) to provide educational oversight of private further education colleges with a clear religious purpose.

Date of inspection: 20th - 22nd November 2012

Lead Inspector: Mr C Schenk

Additional college inspector: Rabbi Dr C Tomlin

Number of students: 48 men

Age range: 16 - 21

Number of boarders aged 16 – 18 years: 31 men

Rosh Hayeshivah: Rabbi I M Hertz

Proprietor: Lubavitch Foundation (UK) Ltd

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The purpose and scope of the inspection

The purpose of the inspection is to provide educational oversight, as required by the UKBA. The scope of this inspection is to determine whether the college meets all the standards set out in the BSI Framework for College Inspections.

Information about the college

Yeshiva Gedola Lubavitch was started in 1982 to educate young men in the Talmud and in Chassidic philosophy as part of the international Lubavitch Yeshivos network. Students attend the college for one, two or three years. At present, there are 39 students aged between 16 and 19. In addition, there are 9 senior students, aged 20 or 21, sent to the college by the Central Tomchei Temimim Yeshiva in New York to assist the other students in their studies and other activities, while continuing with their own education. Just over half the students are from the United States of America. Around a third of them are British and the others come from Canada, South Africa, Italy and Belgium.

The yeshiva states its aims as follows:

- 'to encourage the students to put into practice at all times its ethos which is predicated on a cardinal principal of Judaism: To Love One's Neighbour as One's Self
- to provide an orthodox Jewish education within the framework of the Code of Jewish Law in a conducive atmosphere
- to enable the students to successfully reach the standard required by each course, whilst fostering an enduring delight in, and enthusiasm for, these studies
- to teach a methodology in learning: teaching how to learn
- to foster in the students an understanding that Torah study is not an academic exercise, but an instruction in lifestyle
- to encourage the students to actively participate in outreach programmes within the wider community
- to generally put into practice the subject of their Jewish education.'

Evaluation of the college

The college meets its academic, spiritual, moral and practical aims well. Students speak highly of the warm and welcoming ethos, in which they feel valued as individuals. They reach high standards in their academic work and apply themselves with enthusiasm and commitment, understanding the spiritual and moral purpose of their studies. They value the good subject knowledge of their teachers and the way in which difficult ideas are explained to them clearly. Their moral and spiritual development is excellent, enhanced by the opportunities they are given to participate regularly in outreach programmes. The younger students appreciate the guidance they are given by senior students, who provide very good role models. Students are well cared for and can turn to members of staff, senior students and each other for support both in academic and in personal matters. The college benefits greatly from the support of volunteers, including the administrator and three members of the management committee. The main building provides good accommodation for

learning and the residential accommodation has benefitted from recent refurbishment, though there is still some work to be done to bring it all up to a good level. The college meets all the BSI standards. In order to improve further, the college should consider: completing the outstanding refurbishments as soon as possible, and making some further alterations to residential accommodation; encouraging students to have a more consistent approach to the taking of notes in lectures; tightening up some administrative procedures by keeping more written records; and reviewing key policies to make sure that they are an accurate reflection of the college's own aspirations.

Quality of education provided

The college offers the first three years of a five year American university degree programme. The main subjects of study are the Talmud and Chassidic philosophy, following the Lubavitch tradition. Students can stay for one, two or three years and for each completed year they earn thirty credits that can be used towards Rabbinical ordination at the Central Yeshiva or a bachelor's degree in Religious Studies at another American university. Because the courses follow the same programme as all other colleges in the world-wide Lubavitch Yeshivos network, students can easily transfer from one college to another, and several of the current students have previously studied in other places, including different cities in America, Manchester and Buenos Aires.

On most days, students have three compulsory lectures and there are also one or two optional lectures. On three days a week, students from all three year groups attend a lecture together before morning prayers on *Tanya*, the seminal text in Lubavitch Chassidic philosophy. Just before lunch, there are lectures on the page of the Talmud that the whole college is studying that day. On four days a week, students attend these lectures in their own year group, so that lecturers can provide first year students with more support, and go into the same subject matter in greater depth with second and third years. On a Thursday, the *Rosh Hayeshivah* (head of college) gives the Talmud lecture to all the students. In the evenings, students have further lectures in their individual year groups on Chassidic philosophy, studying different texts that are part of the Lubavitch tradition, and on occasions watching videos or listening to audio tapes.

In between lectures, students learn with their study partners in the main study hall, sometimes going over the subject matter of previous lectures to make sure that they have understood them, but more often preparing for the next lecture so that they have an understanding of the text and can benefit from the discourse they are about to hear. They have different study partners for each subject, so they work with a number of students in their year group and on a Thursday they work with students from other year groups so that older students can help their younger colleagues. On other occasions they may also study with a senior student or a member of staff. Lecturers are always available in the study hall to answer questions and to give help when needed. The paired study sessions are lively and animated as students challenge each other to analyse texts carefully and to follow the often intricate logic of the passages they are studying.

The teaching is good. Lecturers have considerable knowledge of the subject matter and prepare their lectures well so that they are able to explain difficult ideas in a clear and accessible way. In most lectures, there is lively interaction between the lecturer and the students, with lecturers asking questions to check on their students' understanding, and with students confidently making points based on their preparatory study. In particular, the third year lectures, where there is a small enough number for everyone to sit around a table, are more like seminars with stimulating discussion and debate. In the weekly Talmud lecture given by the *Rosh Hayeshivah* to all the students, they are required to take notes, which are afterwards collected in. However, in other lectures it is rare for students to take notes. The college should consider adopting a more consistent approach, encouraging students to take notes when appropriate.

Senior students are specially selected for their maturity and good character to be *sliuchim* (emissaries) of the Lubavitch Movement. They are in their final or penultimate year of study and are expected to continue with their own studies in a largely independent way. They are not required to attend lectures, though many opt to do so from time to time. The college encourages them to show initiative. For example, one senior student organises a daily optional study group that is systematically going through a codification of Jewish law, fulfilling a religious obligation to do so.

In response to a questionnaire sent out as part of the inspection, students unanimously agreed that their work is assessed regularly and thoroughly and that they are given clear information about their progress. They have short, written tests on the Talmud every week as well as regular assessments in Chassidic philosophy. Their attitudes to learning are very positive and they keep up their concentration well throughout a long day that starts at half past seven in the morning and goes on until nine thirty at night.

Spiritual and moral development of students

The provision for the spiritual and moral development of the students is excellent. Students develop their self-knowledge through well-structured days devoted to religious study and prayer that provide them with genuine opportunities for reflection and self-improvement. They grow in self-esteem through producing a weekly newsletter that is distributed to the wider public and a yearly publication of original Torah insights. They lead prayer services both at the college and communal synagogues. During outreach activities that take place on Friday afternoons and Jewish festivals, students interact with the public and spread the teachings of Torah and Chassidic philosophy. Every Sabbath, a different student delivers a Chassidic discourse to the whole college and some speak in local synagogues during the traditional third meal. Students deliver optional weekly presentations on the Messiah and Redemption that are well-attended. They organise and build a float for the annual Lag Ba'Omer parade, and run activities for festivals, especially Purim and Chanukah. On Shavuot all members of the college walk to Edgware where they celebrate together with the community. These activities help all students grow in confidence as do the paired and independent learning sessions that take place in the study hall at different times during the day.

Students gain a keen understanding of morality through the curriculum and frequent discussions with staff. They often listen to audio tapes or watch videos that focus on moral issues. They also learn about moral issues during Talmud lessons. For example, during a lesson observed there was much discussion about not causing harm or pain to animals.

Students behave very responsibly and the highest standards of behaviour are expected at all times. They take their learning and religious duties very seriously; they are devout and fully committed to Orthodox Judaism and the Lubavitch Movement. Students obey the law as a matter of religious principle. They treat everyone with respect as is evident in their dealings with all college staff on a daily basis and the general public during outreach activities.

Welfare, health and safety of students

Students are looked after very well in this small and caring college. Two members of staff have particular roles in pastoral care as *mashpi'im* (mentors). They explain their roles as part of the induction process when students first arrive and encourage them to seek help and advice when they need it. However, they are also pro-active in picking up any difficulties that students may have so that they can be given support at an early stage. Students report that all members of staff are approachable to help with both personal and academic problems. In addition, the senior students play a valuable role in giving support and encouragement, and the students themselves look out for and after each other. As one student commented, reflecting the views of many, 'I feel that I actually count as an individual'.

In response to the British Accreditation Council (BAC) report of February 2010, the college tightened up and formalised its health and safety procedures, employing an outside consultant to give advice and support. There are now effective procedures in place, though it would be timely to review the written health and safety policy, as well as the child protection policy, to reflect more accurately the college's own priorities and procedures.

One member of staff has first aid qualifications, and has undergone further training as part of his volunteer role with the London Ambulance Service. In addition, many students have had first aid training when they have worked on summer camps as part of the outreach programme. There is a doctors' surgery within a short walk of the college and in emergencies the community rapid-response paramedic service (*Hatzola*) can be summoned. Two of the senior students are 'dorm counsellors' with particular responsibility as first point of contact if a student falls ill during the night. Appropriate records are kept of the rare instances of accidents: only three are recorded over the last twelve months.

The health and safety consultant has also advised on fire safety and confirmed that in his opinion fire precautions are satisfactory. Checks on fire alarms, emergency lighting and fire extinguishers are carried out weekly, monthly or annually as appropriate, and any deficiencies are acted upon promptly. Fire drills are carried out at least twice a year and on the last drill, shortly before the inspection, the building was evacuated in less than 60 seconds. Drills are carried out at various times in the

day, but have not taken place late at night or very early in the morning, though it would be advisable for this to happen from time to time.

There are very thorough procedures for checking up on attendance and punctuality and the rare cases of unexplained absences are followed up promptly and effectively, with a view to finding and dealing with the underlying causes. The administrator, who works in a voluntary capacity and plays an important role in the processing of applications for admission, communicates efficiently with UKBA when necessary.

Effectiveness and suitability of proprietors and staff

A management committee was set up in 2006 and official meetings take place three or four times a year. In between meetings, three members of the committee, including the chair, give a great deal of their time to college matters and are in touch with senior staff and students every week. The expertise of these three volunteers, with business and professional backgrounds, is of great value to the college. One of them played a very full part in responding to the BAC accreditation report, successfully rectifying deficiencies, and in preparing meticulously for this inspection.

Senior staff members meet informally throughout each day to discuss any situation that arises with regard to students' welfare, progress and well-being. Issues are dealt with effectively and expediently. There is a strong sense of collective responsibility amongst staff and all work well together to ensure that students receive the support that they need.

Staff turnover is very low; when vacancies arise, positions are offered to suitable applicants. The college's recruitment procedures ensure that all members of staff have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. Further prudent enquiries are made although they are not always properly recorded.

Premises and accommodation

The main building of the college provides good accommodation for teaching and learning. There is a large study hall where all the students can comfortably learn together. The study hall is lined with books for use during lectures and paired study sessions. In addition, the college has a well-stocked and organised reference library that includes books related to the Talmud and to *halacha* (Jewish law) as well as commentaries on the Torah and a good selection of Chassidic texts. There is also a smaller study hall above the main one which has a library of English books on Jewish themes, from which students can borrow for recreational reading. The two study halls and the library provide suitable spaces for lectures when the students divide into the three year groups.

The residential accommodation on the first floor of the main building and in two flats has recently been renovated to a good standard, but the college is aware that the accommodation for senior students on the second floor is in need of refurbishment. There are suitable numbers of toilets, wash-basins and showers in the flats, allowing students reasonable privacy. In the main building, however, although there are sufficient toilets and wash-basins on the first floor, the only showers are in the *mikva*

(ritual bath) area on the ground floor. The *mikva* was recently refurbished to a good standard. The showers and changing room are cleaned regularly. However, the five showers are not divided into cubicles. The college recognises that this does not afford sufficient privacy to boarders and intends to put in partitions as soon as is practicable.

The buildings are generally well maintained and there are systems for dorm counsellors, students and staff to report any matters that need attention. However, this is all done by word of mouth and it would be sensible to have a maintenance book to ensure that everything is suitably recorded and dealt with promptly.

Students are responsible for their own laundry, but the facilities are limited to one washing machine and one dryer, housed in a shed just outside the main building. The college acknowledges the difficulties that this causes, particularly for students in the flats, and intends to equip the flats with washing machines and dryers.

The college kitchen was inspected by local environmental health officers in December 2011 and several matters were identified as needing attention. These have now all been rectified bringing the standard of food hygiene up to a satisfactory level. Students have three substantial meals a day. Breakfast is prepared on site. Lunch and dinner are brought in from a local caterer and reheated by two students who have had some training in food hygiene. They check and record the temperatures of the fridge and freezer. They also use a probe to check the temperature of the food they have reheated, but do not record this, though it would be advisable to do so. While the food is ample in quantity, the college should consider increasing choice and variety, for example by having fresh fruit available.

The main building is immediately adjacent to a pleasant park that has football pitches and tennis courts, enabling students to have some exercise during their morning and afternoon breaks. In addition, they are able to swim from time to time at the Lubavitch Centre in Stamford Hill.

Provision of information and manner in which complaints are handled

The college prospectus is clear and up to date. Together with the student handbook, it is given to students during the induction that takes place at the beginning of the year. Students are also made aware of the complaints procedure and given a copy of it. To date, no formal complaints have been received.

Conclusion

The college meets all the BSI standards. If the college wishes BSI to continue to exercise educational oversight, it should apply for BSI to carry out health checks annually, or at such intervals as BSI, in consultation with UKBA, may determine. Unless major changes occur, a full re-inspection will be needed after four years. However, if there are major changes, the full re-inspection may need to be brought forward.

Health check in 2013

BSI carried out a health check by asking the college to fill in a questionnaire, which was followed up by a telephone discussion with a member of the management committee on 16th December 2013. The questionnaire and the discussion show that no major changes have taken place and strongly indicate that the strengths noted in the inspection report have been sustained. The college has considered the report carefully and has made a number of improvements in response to issues raised in it. The college has passed its health check for 2013 and no further action is required. A further health check will take place in 2014.