

Children and Wellbeing Bill Briefing Note February 2025

The Children and Wellbeing Bill introduces significant reforms that have tremendous potential for good as well as presenting challenges for the Jewish community.

Curriculum Flexibility

Academies and state-funded schools will be required to follow the National Curriculum in core subjects to ensure consistency in education standards. The exact details will come from the Curriculum Review which we are engaging with. We have pointed out to government that our Jewish schools currently operate with a degree of curriculum flexibility to incorporate Jewish studies and remain among the top performing schools in the country. Schools may need to assess how these changes will impact their timetables and whether there will be any effect on their unique ethos and educational priorities. The implementation of these changes is expected to take place soon after the Bill's enactment, leaving limited time for adjustments.

Financial and Administrative Pressures

There are a number of relatively smaller policy changes that will place an extra financial or administrative burden on schools. These include the requirement for primary schools to provide a 30-minute free breakfast clubs. While the aim is commendable, the practicalities of staffing, funding, and dietary considerations for kosher food will need to be addressed. The full rollout is expected within a year of the Bill's passage. There has been much in the Press about the application of statutory pay and conditions to all teachers in the state sector and an amendment to the Bill has been laid to clarify that this is merely to impose a floor as opposed to creating a ceiling and inhibit flexibility in remuneration. This is expected to take effect after statutory consultation and no earlier than September 2026.

There will also be a revised process for considering and approving new schools, with a pause on opening new academies. The government recently restated their commitment to ensuring that new schools have the ability to set 100% faith based admissions policies despite the reduction of routes into the state sector.

Requirement for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

The Bill introduces a requirement for all teachers to obtain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) before taking on a full-time teaching role. This marks a significant shift from the existing situation, where schools have been able to employ teachers without formal QTS, often relying on experienced educators from within the community who follow alternative training pathways. This new requirement could create recruitment and retention challenges as schools will need to explore pathways for their current staff to obtain QTS accreditation.

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Supporting Jewish Schools

Enhanced Safeguarding Responsibilities

Schools will be required to participate in Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) and comply with stricter safeguarding measures, including mandatory data sharing with local authorities. Although the main burden of these measures will rest with the Local Authorities, the Bill seeks to cement regional co-operation between all stakeholders involved in safeguarding children. The exact duties on schools will be clarified over the coming years but it is likely to impose additional administrative burdens in addition to increased DSL training. Full implementation of MACPTs is expected by 2027, providing some time for preparation.

Registration and Oversight of Yeshivas

Educational institutions that provide most or all of a child's education must now register and comply with safeguarding standards. Ofsted will have the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and enforce penalties for non-compliance. These measures aim to close regulatory loopholes but will not impact registered schools. The rollout will occur soon after the Bill becomes law and the government will provide transitional guidance to support institutions through the changes.

Increased Ofsted Powers

The Bill suggests Ofsted will be granted enhanced oversight of registered schools, leading to stricter assessments of leadership, governance, and safeguarding and clarity that non-compliance could result in fines. However, it is not clear whether these are new powers or merely being noted legislatively. We are in close communication with Ofsted to work this out and update you properly at the next stage of the Bill and once the current Ofsted consultation has concluded.

We are engaging with government to convey the impact of the Bill on Jewish schools and be involved in the implementation work. We will continue to monitor developments and provide updates to support schools in navigating these changes effectively.