

Written Evidence Submitted By the Yeshiva Liaison Committee (YLC) to The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee

January 2025

Introduction

1. The *Yeshiva Liaison Committee (YLC)* was formed during the passage of the Schools Bill 2022 by members of the strictly Orthodox Jewish (henceforth "Charedi") community. It advocates for Yeshivas, particularly those who cater for pupils under the age of 16, communicating with relevant stakeholders and policy makers. It now operates under the auspices of *The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (UOHC)*, the umbrella organisation of Charedi Jewish communities in the United Kingdom.
2. We are submitting evidence due to a grave concern in particular regarding the Bill's section on **Independent Educational Institutions (IEI)**, clause 30-38, which, in wrongly proposing to define Yeshivas as schools will dismantle our communities' distinct religious and educational framework.
3. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill aims to address critical issues related to vulnerable children, which is vitally important. However, it unjustly targets Charedi communities and their Yeshivas, undermining faith commitment and parental rights. As Dr Joseph Mintz, Associate Professor in Education at UCL, observed, "*It's fine to be Jewish in the UK of 2025. As long as you are not too Jewish*". The Charedi voice has been excluded in the Bill's drafting, resulting in a Bill that is based on misinformation and is fundamentally flawed and discriminatory.
4. Yeshivas are not schools but religious spaces to go to, alongside home education. It is simply wrong and as a direct result of a deliberate misinformation campaign that Yeshivas have been classed as schools. They are not. They provide safe, nurturing environments with strong safeguarding measures, where children can thrive spiritually, emotionally, and socially. Far from being at risk, Yeshiva attendees thus benefit from a holistic model that allows home schooling to operate alongside religious activities and pastoral care at Yeshivas. Yeshiva settings have comprehensive safeguarding and health & safety policies in place. Far from being at risk, these settings are safe, foster social development and ensure children remain deeply connected to their religious and community values.
5. The proposed Bill would force Yeshivas to close, as they do not and cannot function as schools, leaving these children without a viable alternative. This would create a serious safeguarding risk. The danger is compounded by the Department for Education's current approach: while it refrains from enforcing action against existing independent faith

schools, it effectively blocks the establishment of new ones. As a result, Charedi families are left with no new schools available for their children.

6. Our main issue is concerning **Independent educational institutions (Clause 30)**. Yeshivas are not Independent Educational Institutions (IEI) and must not be classed as Independent Educational Institutions. Yeshivas work alongside home schooling and the Bill must recognise and support alternative educational models, including those rooted in faith and community values. The Government must consult directly with Charedi leaders and educators to understand their unique educational and communal frameworks.
7. The Charedi communities ask only to live peacefully in accordance with their faith and tradition, alongside home schooling. A fair and inclusive approach to legislation is essential to safeguarding the rights of all citizens.

Independent Educational Institutions (Clauses 30-38)

8. This section of the Bill seeks to expand the regulation of independent educational institutions that provide all or most of a child's education (clauses 30 to 35), so as to class Yeshivas as "schools"; "strengthen Ofsted's powers to investigate unregistered, and therefore illegal, independent schools" (clauses 36 to 37); and amend Ofsted's requirements to report on independent school inspectorates and clarify information. Yeshivas are not schools and thus must be exempt from the provisions of clauses 30-38.
9. Even so, the expanded enforcement powers proposed for Ofsted (clause 36) are alarming. These powers are worryingly like those under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Granting such powers to an Inspectorate that has been shown to be agenda-led, biased, and inadequate is deeply concerning. The Education Select Committee's report, published in January 2024, highlighted significant shortcomings in inspector profiles, training and suitability, with inspectors mostly coming from a primary school background. Inspectors have been shown to lack understanding in inspecting complex and religious settings. There has also been significant complaints about the "tariff", the limited inspector resources required for inspections. The Charedi communities have also reported numerous troubling cases of inspectors' inappropriate conduct in their schools, highlighting Ofsted's complete lack of cultural sensitivity. These issues, combined with insufficient resources and a rigid approach, render Ofsted unfit to inspect out-of-school settings with the necessary fairness and understanding.

Charedi Community Has Been Unfairly, Unjustly Targeted

10. The Education Act 1996 states that parents are responsible for ensuring their child's education, and this must be in line with their religious and philosophical convictions. As a whole plethora of home schooling groups, all unique and with their own set-ups, have noted too, the Bill's emphasis on State oversight erodes this principle, falsely equating

home education with safeguarding risks and failing to recognise the diversity of educational models.

11. The Government should “*respect the rights of parents to educate their children in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions*” (*European Convention on Human Rights, Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, Paris, 20 March 1952, Article 2). Education is indeed legally suitable if it prepares children for life within their community.
12. Any attempt to curtail these rights therefore raises serious concerns about a potential breach of fundamental human rights, particularly the *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, as protected under UK and international law. Targeting such a small, peaceful minority in this way is both unnecessary and deeply concerning.
13. The Government’s *European Convention on Human Rights Memorandum* admits that the Bill could “*particularly prejudice*” Orthodox Jewish parents and Yeshivas. The Memorandum does not mention any other faith group or religious setting or indeed any other out-of-school setting and thus must be considered a breach of the *European Convention on Human Rights, Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*.
14. No effort has been made to consult Charedi communities or validate claims of safeguarding risks. Rather the Bill has been drafted solely based on deliberate misinformation circulated by agenda-led, anti-faith groups. This Bill, and particularly clauses 30-38, singles out our community based on a lack of understanding of Yeshivas, which operate for attendees alongside their home schooling arrangements and where attendees benefit at settings that focus on prayer, contemplation, and spiritual guidance all under robust safeguarding and supervision. We struggle to understand why the Bill singles out our community. A small number of young men attend Yeshivas alongside their home schooling, benefiting from settings that focus on prayer, contemplation, and spiritual guidance, all under robust safeguarding and supervision.
15. The Bill relies on false narratives propagated by ideologically motivated anti-faith groups, such as Nahamu, the National Secular Society (NSS), and Humanists UK, who have lobbied for years against Yeshivas, fuelled far more to campaign against “*religious power*” and for “*secular reforms*” than for child welfare. This has led to a gross misrepresentation and an unjust exclusion of Charedi perspectives.

Misunderstanding Home Education with Yeshiva Attendance

16. In general, home education takes many forms, from online schools and overseas programmes to flexible, parent-led models free from the national curriculum or current

ideological trends. It often includes multi-family skill-sharing groups, small specialist services, and clubs for subjects like astronomy, music, or arts and crafts.

17. In Charedi communities, home schooling alongside Yeshiva attendance contributes to our children's upbringing rooted in a stable three-pronged framework: homes, synagogues, and Yeshivas. This model, once common in all communities across the UK, is deliberate and enduring, with Yeshivas, some of the oldest learning institutions, remaining vital in instilling values and shaping our youth and our community. They are deeply rooted in our community's way of life and play a vital role in our religious and cultural identity.

What Are Yeshivas?

18. There is no one type of establishment that is referred to as a Yeshiva, there are different types, with attendees coming together for a certain amount of time each day for inspiration and religious practice, alongside home-schooling arrangements.

19. Yeshivas operate with robust safeguarding measures, providing safe, supportive environments where attendees thrive through structured prayer and religious guidance, socialisation, access to mentors, pastoral care, peer-to-peer interaction, friendship opportunities, and a sense of community. Home schooling is supplemented by Yeshiva attendance solving many of the pressing issues around "missing children" and provides holistically for their children in many respects.

20. Yeshiva attendees typically leave Yeshiva having gained fluency in multiple languages, such as English, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish, and have developed strong analytical thinking through legal reasoning. They become part of a remarkably strong communal and economic framework, with the skills they attained enabling them to engage in a range of professional and business roles across sectors.

21. Charedi communities view Yeshiva attendance as character-forming, with the engagement with traditional Jewish legal texts being inherently important. Yeshivas have been central to Charedi communities and individuals, instilling values of productivity and lifelong learning, and, much like Classical education in the past, is seen as not simply as a means for future employment, unlike how secondary and University education has been perceived and challenged in recent decades. Global concerns regarding smartphones, as well as in the UK itself, with an amendment proposed to "ban mobile telephones and other devices in schools" are almost entirely absent in both Charedi schools and Yeshivas (Dr Joseph Mintz; Professor Jonathan Haidt). These are values from which wider society could benefit if it chose to learn from our educational systems rather than seek to dismantle them.

Recommendations for Action

22. First, we urge the Government to consult directly with Charedi leaders and educators, through the Yeshiva Liaison Committee (YLC), to understand their unique educational and communal frameworks. Then the Bill must reject the false definition of Yeshivas and must recognise and support alternative models, including those rooted in faith and community values.

23. We would propose the following amendment to Clause 92(4):

(4)(d) Faith institutions [or other out-of-school settings] that provide for its attendees flexibility or sufficient breaks during school hours to enable elective home schooling, shall be exempt from being classified under the scope of an independent educational institution.

A “faith institution” refers to a setting operated by or on behalf of a recognised religious community or as defined by the Equality Act 2010, which primarily provides spiritual guidance, prayer, or religious instruction consistent with the tenets of that faith, rather than structured academic education.

24. This would allow our Charedi communities to continue to maintain religious activities at Yeshivas alongside home schooling. Our Yeshivas have been the cornerstone of our community, instilling values of productivity, lifelong learning, family, community and service. These are principles from which wider society could benefit. It is disheartening to see harmful misinformation intent on undermining us and our communities. The core question is whether our society truly values diversity and faith groups or aims to enforce uniformity in the name of safeguarding and education. We have been unable to voice our concerns in what was a rushed launching of the Bill this past December. It is vital that agenda-led pressure groups that have circulated misinformation are rejected and we urge you to listen to us now.