

Ultra-Orthodox schools still use corporal punishment, say campaigners

Posted: Wed, 13th Jan 2016

A charity and support group for former Ultra-Orthodox Jews has warned the Government that corporal punishment is widely used in unregistered Orthodox schools.

In a submission on the regulation of "out-of-school education settings" which provide more than six hours of education per week, the GesherEU support network [said](#) that "corporal punishment is still in use in a number of the yeshivot and unregistered ultra-Orthodox primary schools." The group said up to 5,500 pupils could be studying in such settings.

One former pupil quoted in the consultation response reported that "hitting children was part of [the] routine; I personally was hit almost on a daily basis."

Proposals set out by the Government include plans to ensure that corporal punishment is not a practice adopted in out-of-school settings – a move welcomed by the National Secular Society.

In 2011 the NSS called on the Government to implement the recommendations of an independent report on physical punishment and extend the ban on physical punishment in schools and other children's settings to supplementary schools.

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said: "Corporal punishment of children breaches their fundamental rights to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity. Its legality in out-of-school educational settings breaches their right to equal protection under the law. The lack of progress on this issue has given us cause for concern, especially in light of the well-documented evidence of abuse of children in out-of-school settings, including madrassas and yeshiva. Like GesherEU, we're keen to see children in such settings adequately safeguarded."

In addition to concerns about corporal punishment and poor hygiene standards at Orthodox schools, GesherEU made strong criticisms of the teaching at such institutions.

The group cited anonymous testimony from a former pupil of one Orthodox school, who said that "no secular studies were taught at all" during long school days from 8 until 6, and classes would "sit all day long and study religious texts."

GesherEU said that schools were failing their pupils: "In many cases they do not even teach them to speak English or simple arithmetic. They teach in Yiddish and Yiddish is spoken at home. Many young men leave with almost no ability to speak English. We have to support young men in particular that do not have one GCSE to their name, cannot get a job, and have no skills to manage their lives."

An emergency inspection of one strict Charedi school recently [reported](#) that the careers advice "focuses only on steering boys towards continuing with their academic studies in religious institutions."

The inspectorate was criticised by GesherEU for failing to challenge registered Charedi schools which "teach only in Yiddish, indoctrinate the young children and fail to teach the basics."

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