

Clifton College's Foundation

Since the foundation of Clifton College in 1862, we have always been an inclusive school that prides itself on the differences that make us unique. We have revelled in the fact that whilst our peers embraced classicism we embraced the sciences too, when others stayed the course of being predominantly Christian, Clifton created Polack's House in 1878, home to a vibrant Jewish community at Clifton.

As we look back to Clifton's foundation, if it were not for the foresight of our Jewish founders we would not be the school we are today. In fact, we wouldn't be a school at all. For that we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our founding families for today Clifton is a vibrant school of many faiths that embraces diversity and inclusion. Undoubtedly this has prepared our pupils for life outside our campus within the UK and indeed abroad.

Every independent school in the UK has a proud tradition of its alumni going on to achieve great things. Over the years at Clifton, our Jewish pupils have been at the forefront of achievement and continue to play a significant role in the pride the entire Clifton community feels toward its alumni.

Background

Currently, Clifton has 1181 pupils at the College. Lead by Rabbi Anna Gerrard there are 13 Jewish boys and 15 girls. Of which, 10 are day pupils spread over 8 different day houses, with the remaining 18 being boarders in 7 different boarding houses. These pupils come from 9 different countries.

Today at Clifton, albeit without Polack's House, we have a very strong offering for our Jewish pupils. As has been the case since 1878, there are special activities that take place throughout the daily life of our Jewish pupils that make Clifton unique to any other boarding school. All take place to ensure our Jewish community is well taken care of. These include: the opportunity to study Modern Hebrew from year 7; morning Synagogue services four times a week at the same time as Chapel services; weekly Friday night dinners with traditional Jewish food; the Shabbat blessings and guest speakers and discussion of topical matters; services and festive activities for all Jewish festivals that fall during term time, taking place both in the college's Polack Centre Synagogue and at Bristol's two Synagogues, which are both within walking distance of the college; weekly opportunities for extra-curricular Jewish learning and Jewish cultural experiences; the provision of kosher food for observant Jewish pupils; and the marking of certain Jewish festivals with traditional festive foods for the whole college community.

Rabbi Anna Gerrard, who spearheads Clifton's Jewish programme, came to Clifton in January 2020. Rabbi Anna has truly made great strides connecting with our Jewish pupils and positioning our Jewish offering within Clifton College community. Anna cites that one of Clifton's finest achievements, in recent years, is the Polack Centre which includes:

- A Synagogue with an ark, ner tamid, Torah scrolls, prayers books and other Judaica.
- The Jewish chaplain's office.
- A Jewish library.
- A dedicated space for Jewish learning, Shabbat meals and other Jewish activities to take place.
- A space for Bar/Bat Mitzvah tuition for pupils wishing to celebrate this life cycle event.

Over the years there have been a number of Jewish pupils that have gone on to enjoy successful careers in many different professions. They are inevitably grateful for their grounding and start in life that Clifton gave to them, which also had a bearing on their future prospects. There were very few boarding schools in the UK that provided a learning experience with a Jewish boarding house within a non-Jewish framework. Today there are a considerable number of Jewish day schools,

predominantly in London, but their offering is very different to that of Clifton. The pastoral side, which is mainly experienced after classes finish, is absent for the most part at London day schools. This continues to differentiate Clifton today as it did in the past.

Besides providing a very unique and tailored experience that greatly benefits our Jewish community, Clifton also receives back a richness in experience for all its pupils. The diversity and perspective that is provided by Clifton's Jewish community has continually been a source of pride to the teaching staff and pupil body alike. In so many areas of pupil life our Jewish pupils have excelled, leading Clifton in theatre, sport, academics, debating, leadership, to name a few. It makes all who attend Clifton extremely proud to then witness their achievements after Clifton.

Jewish Life at Clifton

From the moment our Jewish pupils enter Clifton they are met with a plethora of provision that ensure their time at Clifton is an outstanding one. From our very own Rabbi Anna Gerrard to Kosher meals, all needs are met. Clifton continually challenges itself to ensure that all is being done to make the pupils time at Clifton memorable. In fact, whilst the declining numbers of Jewish pupils meant the closure of Polack's House, some will point towards the other ways the Jewish experience at Clifton is protected and even enhanced. Whilst our Jewish pupils no longer reside in the same house, all other familiar activities designed for the Jewish pupils remain the same.

Since the foundation of Clifton, our Jewish pupils have made a telling contribution to the school. Clifton is still that rarity that provides a boarding school experience available to Jewish pupils who want to enjoy pastoral activities, but also want to be part of a school that encourages and facilitates their needs within the parameters of a broader offering.

FAQs - answered by Rabbi Anna Gerrard

Do we have our own synagogue?

Yes - when Polack's House was closed in 2005, the Judaica was moved to the Polack Centre, which is situated above the main reception in The Upper School. The Polack Centre includes:

- A synagogue with an ark, ner tamid, Torah scrolls, prayers books and other Judaica.
- The Jewish chaplain's office.
- A Jewish library.
- Space for Jewish learning, Shabbat meals and other Jewish activities to take place.

What does Clifton do to welcome its Jewish community?

- Provision of Kosher or Kosher-Style food in BSK.
- Morning Synagogue services four days a week.
- Weekly Friday Night Dinners.
- Services and activities for the Jewish festivals.
- Opportunities for Jewish learning.
- The opportunity to study Modern Hebrew from year 7.
- Marking the Jewish festivals in whole school assemblies in the Pre-Prep, Prep and Upper school.
- Jewish Chaplain available to support Jewish pupils and advise on matters of Jewish welfare and anti-Semitism.
- Collaboration with two local Jewish communities.
- Support more observant pupils who wish to observe Shabbat and the Jewish festivals.
- Support of pupils with Jewish heritage who want to reconnect to their Jewish identity.
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah tuition for pupils wishing to celebrate this life cycle event.

How many Jewish pupils have attended Clifton?

- 891 but record only goes to 1920.

Where do our Jewish pupils come from?

- Day pupils from Bristol area.
- UK boarders mainly from London area.
- Overseas boarders, particularly from FSU, Western Europe and USA.

How do we select the best candidates?

- Same entry requirements/process as other pupils.

What does Clifton offer that Jewish schools cannot?

- Integration within a culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse school community.
- The benefits of an independent school education - smaller class sizes, excellent facilities, broad range of subject choices, high educational achievement, excellent sports and music programmes, broad range of extra-curricular opportunities.

What is the breakdown of boys and girls?

- Approx. 50/50.

Is there anything that we cannot offer that other Jewish day or boarding schools do?

- There are no Jewish boarding schools.

- Very Orthodox Jewish boarding schools offer strictly kosher food, an emphasis on Jewish learning and lots of time dedicated to that, plus time off for all the Jewish festivals.
- Some Jewish schools offer Israeli dancing club, participation in cross-communal events (in London), access to a wide range of visiting Rabbis and Jewish Educators, and dedicated Jewish Education classes.

Why is it important to ensure that numbers grow?

- This is our heritage - every independent school has its USPs and serving the Jewish community of the UK beyond is one of Clifton's USPs and has been since 1878. The programme can only run if we have the critical mass of pupils to justify its existence and the employment of a dedicated member of staff. If the numbers fall too low then the programme would have to close and this would be a great loss for Clifton and a great loss for the Jewish community - since it is the only boarding school in the country to offer a full Jewish life programme and it is the only school in the South West to offer a Jewish provision.

How do our Jewish pupils add to life at Clifton?

- Important part of its heritage and its diversity - sharing their culture with others through assemblies and festival celebrations.

Are there any other schools that provide a similar offering?

- No - there are a few boarding schools that have links with the local Jewish community in their area and provide some degree of Jewish life through them - but this is invariably an Orthodox community. We are the only non-Jewish school (day or boarding, state or private) offering an in-house Jewish Life programme and the only one offering a pluralist Jewish programme that supports Orthodox, Progressive, traditional, cultural and secular Jewish pupils.

What has been the fallout to our offering without Polack's House?

- I do not believe there has been any fallout in terms of recruitment since Jewish families were no longer looking for isolated living accommodation. However, there is no longer the opportunity for Jewish pupils to easily refrain from Saturday lessons and there is also no option of Jewish learning within the timetable.