

Victories for special needs parents

► Chaim Zelig

TWO sets of parents of special needs children are celebrating the attainment of secondary school places, thanks to the intervention of consultant Rabbi Michael Bernstein. In the first case a son of Mrs S with special educational needs is attending a mainstream primary school and is due to transfer to secondary school in September. She was devastated when first notified by Barnet Local Authority that they intended to send her son to Totteridge Academy and that they would issue a statement of special educational needs for the son accordingly.

Rabbi Michael Bernstein and his Embee Special Education Consultancy prepared a Notice of Appeal, disputing the local Authority's decision, and lodged it with the Tribunal. At the same time, a dialogue was initiated between Rabbi Bernstein and senior officers of Barnet Children's Services. As a result, Barnet agreed to approve the parents' choice of school and accordingly issued an amended final statement to that effect.

Rabbi Bernstein paid tribute in particular to Michael O'Gorman, Senior Advocacy and Monitoring Manager of Barnet's SEN Performance Team, and to Cecilia Dunne, an officer of the same team, for their understanding of this delicate situation and for their co-operation.

Meanwhile, almost simultaneous with the plight of these parents, parents in Hackney too, Mr & Mrs L, were meeting with a similar situation. Their son is currently attending a primary school and is due for transfer in September to secondary school. The parents had requested that

he be granted a placement in the Darchei Noam Centre of the Menorah Grammar School. The local authority, Hackney, had agreed to this placement, on condition that the parents paid the school fees and also on condition that the LA would limit the level of funding it was prepared to make towards the cost of provision. The parents were shocked when they received a final statement corroborating this.

At this stage Rabbi Bernstein was asked to intervene. He similarly advised the parents that they should lodge an appeal with the SEN Tribunal. Preparations were undertaken to establish written evidence, in particular, to invalidate the local authority's newly declared intention namely, to name Skinners' Academy, in the statement, as the LA's choice of school to which Mr and Mrs L's son should go in September. A dialogue was entered into between Rabbi Bernstein and a senior officer of The Learning Trust in an endeavour to resolve this case. With but a few days left before the hearing date, fixed for this week, the LA notified Rabbi Bernstein that it would indeed meet all the parents' requests and also name the Menorah Grammar School (and Darchei Noam Centre) unconditionally in an amended statement.

This is not the first time that Rabbi Bernstein has met with such magnanimity from Mr Neil Hudson, Head of SEN Assessment & Monitoring of The Learning Trust, LA Hackney. When asked to comment, the parents simply said, 'You cannot imagine what a strain has been removed from us. At long last, we now feel that our son has a chance to succeed educationally.'



Rav Elyokim Schlesinger (left) dancing at the chasunah of his granddaughter in London last Thursday.
PHOTO DUDI BRAUN



My Week

Councillor Abraham Jacobson

I AND my fellow Councillor Dawood Akhoon, together with Pauline Pearce, a disabled black community activist who made the headlines last summer when she was filmed standing up and berating the London rioters, were invited to meet Jasenko Selimovic the Swedish State Secretary to the Minister of Integration. The venue was opposite the Pembury Estate in Hackney which was the heart of the area hit by last August's riots. He was very interested to learn that in the midst of Hackney the Jewish, Muslim and Black communities live peacefully side by side and have integrated into society without assimilation and are able to practise their religion whilst coexisting peacefully with their neighbours. It was also noted that whilst there was rioting just a couple of miles to the North and South, the Stamford Hill kehilla was unaffected. I mentioned that in the UK freedom of religious practice is allowed unlike in Sweden where Shechita has been banned and any meat products must be imported. Issues like these divide communities and cause disunity in the community.

I met later on that day, this time in the House of Lords by the invitation of Baroness Meral Hussein-Ece of Highbury who used to be a Councillor in Hackney. I was joined by fellow Cazenove Ward Cllrs Ian Sharer and Dawood Akhoon. After a brief tour we sat on the terrace and discussed various matters relating to our ethnically diverse ward. Baroness Warsi joined us and we had a frank discussion about the problems we are encountering with Shechita where in the UK the anti-Shechita lobby is once again rearing its ugly head. Both Baroness's Warsi and Ece concurred with ourselves that we do not want any state interference with our method of slaughter which is undertaken by highly trained professional shochetim. It has been proven to be the most humane method causing least distress to the animals unlike the captive bolt system which is forbidden halachically and has been proven on many occasions to cause pain and distress to animals and that this issue affects both Jew and Muslim alike.

The writer is a Lib-Dem councillor with the London Borough of Hackney

Orah illuminates kashrus and tefillah

► Gitel Bloom

TWO popular series – on kashrus and tefillah-have received a most favourable response from the many attending Orah in recent weeks.

The three-week Sunday course on "Kashrus in the Kitchen" tackled questions related to keeping kosher in the 21st century, as well as the practical laws of milk-meat. There was also a hands on demonstration about toiveling keilim.

Rabbi Jeremy Conway of the London Beth Din's Kashrus Division gave a Powerpoint presentation of the fascinating issues and challenges involved in modern food production. Rabbi Dovid Tugendhaft, rav of Nishmas Yisrael, Hendon, dealt with the halochos of milk, meat and parev foods and utensils found and used in a kosher kitchen. Finally, Rabbi Zvi Wanderer discussed the principles and laws about which pots and pans must be immersed in a mikveh prior to their use.

Rabbi Shmuel Kimche, rov of Netzach Yisrael,

Hendon, presented a course on "Tefillah: The Power of Prayer". Topics included the power of a woman's prayer, the structure of the morning tefillah, and what it means standing before G-d to petition for the needs of man.

Other speakers in the past month have included Rabbi Shlomo Farhi, Rabbi Doniel Grunewald, Rabbi Nissan Wilson, Rabbi Rashi Simon and Mr Bobby Hill with topics including reflections on technology, the Queen's Jubilee, and the sin of Korach.

Other Orah activities are the Shabbos Mevorchim seudah shlishis and netball. There is a special programme arranged for the "Three Weeks". Highlights include a series on interpersonal behaviour dealing with negative characteristics such as hatred and envy and inspirational talks lined up for next Sunday, 17th Tammuz and Tisha B'Av.

Orah is a dynamic programme of Torah talks and social activities for post-seminary girls and women in the community. It is a communal project of Hasmonean High School. Its regular Sunday and Wednesday evening events are held at Hasmonean Girls' School.

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