THE HACKEN-BLOG

By RABBI PINCHAS HACKENBROCH

I HAVE to admit that if you had asked me a couple of weeks ago about the 'blog' - on the Glasgow Jewish Educational Forum website - I would have had no idea what you were referring to.

However over the last few weeks there has been tremendous activity and interest concerning the future education of our children and this has been reflected in the plethora of comments posted on the Calderwood Lodge blog by parents past and present.

There have been very diverse views expressed on the Blog, yet there is consensus over the significance and integral role that the school plays in our community as the only Jewish school in this area.

I, too, am concerned for the school's future as a parent first and a communal leader second.

Both our sons attend the school and are happy and doing well. We are hoping to send our daughter - we are still waiting to hear if she is accepted!

The question is why do we send our kids to Calderwood and why do we need a Jewish school?

After all, there are many excellent primary schools in the area that have significant numbers of Jewish children attending them.

The answer is that we, as parents, have an overriding responsibility to raise our children to adulthood and to give them an education.

An essential part of that education, as Jewish children, is to give them a solid foundation in their Yiddishkeit.

This is so significant that in the Shema, one of the most important prayers in our liturgy and biblical origin and which we say three times each day, it makes mention of a responsibility on parents to teach their children.

We all want to give our children the very best in life. These formative years are precious as we are preparing our children for adulthood and thus the same way that we want to imbue them with an excellent secular education it is imperative that we are also concerned and ensure that they receive the best Jewish education.
This will invest them with a strong Jewish identity, a sense of purpose and meaning of life and imbue them with the wonderful ethical and moral principles of our rich heritage.

There seems from the comments put on the blog a genuine misunderstanding when it comes to Jewish education.

Many parents are afraid that an excellent Jewish education must mean a trade-off and be to the detriment of giving their children an excellent secular education.

But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact in the government league tables in the UK, the Jewish schools have consistently out-performed their rivals and yet these schools still manage to give their students a top notch Jewish education.

The two should - and can compliment - each other thereby preparing our children for whatever path they may choose.

In Glasgow, unfortunately, there is no secondary Jewish school, so formal Jewish education for many starts and stops at Calderwood.

But by giving the best possible Jewish education we will simply be giving them more options and opportunities for adulthood so that they will feel comfortable walking into any shul and being able to participate and understand the service.

They will have the knowledge of our festivals and ritual and be equipped to pass them on to their own children as well as being able to face the day-to-day myriad of challenges that life throws their way.

Hopefully they will have absorbed into their consciousness the principles of living Judaism to be able to deal with each situation as true ambassadors of our people.

I am not suggesting tampering in any way with the secular curriculum, but finding ways of enhancing and nurturing the Jewish element.

There are many possible ways for achieving this, from extra curricular activities, teaching living Judaism beyond the classroom, to projects that enable greater parental and family involvement.

Strengthening our children's Jewish identity is an investment for them and ourselves for the future and will ensure they have a greater sense who they are and who we are as a people and will ensure our continuation as a nation and people for generations to come.

**Rabbi Hackenbroch moved to Glasgow in 2003. Newton Mearns Synagogue is his first post as a rabbi. A keen footballer, he is former captain of London side North West Neasden. The views in this column are his own.**