

Review of antisemitism in schools and colleges in England by Sir David Bell,

21 October 2026

The review

On 21 October 2026, there was published in the UK a review of antisemitism in schools and colleges in England by Sir David Bell, a former permanent secretary at the Department for Education. He was asked by the then government of Sir Keir Starmer in March 2026 to lead a review into how schools and colleges in England (“colleges” here meaning further education colleges for 16- to 19-year-olds, not universities) identify, prevent and respond to antisemitism.

The report recognised that Jewish students in England are encountering increased levels of antisemitism in schools, both casual and overt. This is a clear safeguarding issue. The review found that one in five young people surveyed had experienced or witnessed antisemitism, rising to almost three in five among Jewish respondents. Roughly half of incidents went unreported, often because pupils did not believe they would be taken seriously.

A particular concern of the report is antisemitism arising out of attitudes to Israel, reporting as follows:

“In contemporary contexts, antisemitism can manifest through attitudes towards Israel. Depending on the circumstances, examples could include when criticism of actions by the Israeli state crosses into applying double standards, denying Jewish people’s right to self-determination altogether, or holding all Jews collectively responsible for Israel’s actions. This reflects older patterns of collective blame and ‘othering’”.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (“IHRA”) working definition of antisemitism, adopted by the UK government in 2016, makes clear that criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Its illustrative examples of antisemitism include denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination (for example by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour), applying double standards to Israel, and holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the State of Israel.

Recommendations

The report of Sir David Bell makes 27 recommendations including the following:

1. The Secretary of State for education should encourage all schools or colleges to adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism.
2. The Department for Education should commission a dedicated antisemitism training package for school and college leaders and safeguarding leads, and encourage leaders to integrate understanding of antisemitism within safeguarding, equalities and anti-racism training.
3. Schools and colleges should ensure staff understand contemporary antisemitism linked to Israel/Palestine and conspiracy tropes.
4. The Department for Education should strengthen Keeping children safe in education, England’s statutory safeguarding guidance for schools and colleges, making clear that antisemitism is a distinct safeguarding risk and not just a part of general bullying.
5. There should be peer reporting, anonymous disclosure routes and a system for recording antisemitic incidents.
6. Holocaust education should be strengthened including marking Holocaust Memorial day, whilst at the same time teaching about modern Jewish life.

The UK government accepts all of the recommendations

The government through Lucy Powell, the Education Secretary has accepted all 27 recommendations and stated to the House of Commons on 21 October the following:

“Sir David has published this seminal review exposing the shocking scale of antisemitism in British society and how that is reflected across education... all children and teachers should be able to go to school or college free from fear... collectively we have a duty to educate this generation and the next on what antisemitism is, on why it is wrong and what happens when it takes hold in society... this generational challenge belongs to us all.”

Concluding remarks

Whilst the Education Secretary’s remarks are welcome, the report reveals an endemic antisemitic culture which has been growing. Jewish schoolchildren have become objects of vilification as both Jews and Zionists. Instead of children being insulated against this hatred and schools being safe places, the report shows how the hatred has permeated to many schools in England.

Whilst the recommendations are welcome, their effectiveness will be limited without more being done at all levels to address this hatred. We urge the government and government ministers to ensure that all public statements, parliamentary debates, school education programmes and even public protests focussed on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict do not further inflame the current highly volatile atmosphere.

Sir Clive Freedman: Chair of the UK Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists

Adam Taub: Educator and entrepreneur

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