

FROM JEWISH SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY IMPACT CENTRE

A Methodology for Long-Term Jewish Community Transformation through Professional Management, Academic Excellence, and Jewish Identity Pedagogy

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Aligned with UN SDG #4 - Quality Education for All

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ABSTRACT

Jewish schools and educational programs occupy a unique and largely under-realised position in their communities. This article argues that they can - and must - be transformed into Community Impact Centres (CICs): professionally managed, academically excellent, and Jewishly purposeful institutions that generate measurable, lasting social returns. Drawing on John Kotter's 8-Step Change Management Model and the language of impact investment, and aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #4 (Quality Education for All), this article presents a practical methodology for that transformation. It is written as a companion to the Renaissance presentation of the same name.



PART ONE - THE DIAGNOSIS

The Jewish School at a Crossroads

The Failing Pattern

There is no more important institution in the Jewish world than a school. No synagogue, community centre, or cultural programme reaches children and families with the same frequency, intensity, and developmental consequence as a school. And yet, in too many communities across Europe and beyond, Jewish schools are under-resourced, over-burdened, and under-managed - operating more as communal obligations than as engines of transformation.

Many Jewish schools across Europe and beyond already carry out remarkable work under complex conditions. Dedicated educators, committed boards, and supportive communities have developed programmes that nurture Jewish identity, academic achievement, and communal belonging. The framework proposed in this article does not seek to dismiss these achievements. Rather, it aims to provide a structured way of strengthening and integrating practices that many schools already pursue, enabling them to work more intentionally, strategically, and over the long term

However, a number of recurring structural challenges can be observed across many Jewish schools. Financial sustainability is often fragile, with institutions relying on a relatively small base of philanthropic donors whose support may be episodic rather than strategically aligned with long-term development. Governance structures vary considerably, and in some cases boards oscillate between operational involvement and limited strategic engagement. School leadership can therefore become professionally isolated, without access to the peer networks, professional development, and data systems that high-performing educational organisations typically rely on. Teachers frequently operate under significant constraints, with limited opportunities for coaching or career development. As a result, outcomes — academic, communal, and Jewish — are not always systematically measured or analysed with the rigour that would enable continuous improvement

Meanwhile, the stakes could not be higher. Jewish identity erosion, communal fragmentation, assimilation, demographic decline, and now the disorienting speed of technological transformation - including artificial intelligence - are reshaping how young people form identity, find meaning, and relate to inherited tradition. These are not abstract trends - they are the lived reality of Jewish communities across Europe.

The Jewish school is the most powerful lever for Jewish continuity available to any community. The question is whether communities are willing to pull it with sufficient force, strategy, and investment.

The False Dichotomy

A common, and damaging, assumption runs through conversations about Jewish education: that there is an inherent tension between academic quality and Jewish distinctiveness. Either a school excels academically by conforming to secular standards and marginalising Jewish content, or it deepens Jewish identity at the cost of academic rigour. This is a false choice - and the Community Impact Centre model is premised on its rejection.

The highest-performing Jewish schools in the world - in Melbourne, New York, London, and Jerusalem - demonstrate that academic excellence, Jewish identity formation, and professional management reinforce each other. A school with strong leadership attracts strong teachers. Strong teachers

produce strong learners. Strong learners develop strong identities. Strong identities build strong communities. The virtuous cycle begins with the decision to manage the school like the vital, high-stakes institution that it is.

The Community Impact Centre model makes an additional, counter-intuitive argument: that a Jewish school which achieves genuine academic excellence becomes a magnet for precisely those Jewish families who would not otherwise choose Jewish education. When a school is one of the best schools available - for any family, regardless of Jewish commitment - it draws in the families most at risk of generational disengagement. What begins as a choice for quality education can, over time, become a formative encounter with Jewish identity, community, and belonging. The Jewish tradition has a name for this dynamic: - מתוך שלא לשמה יבוא לשמה - what begins not for its own sake can come, ultimately, to be for its own sake.

The Survival Trap

There is a third structural problem that compounds the first two: the survival trap. Schools consumed by the pressure to grow enrolment, close budget gaps, and compete with neighbouring institutions have neither the bandwidth nor the financial stability to invest in quality — in any subject, but especially in Jewish studies and Hebrew, which are the first to be squeezed when resources are tight. The paradox is acute: the schools most in need of deepening their Jewish identity offer are the schools least able to afford it. The Community Impact Centre model breaks this cycle by addressing the financial and governance foundations first. A school with a stable institutional base, diversified income, and professional management has the freedom - for the first time — to ask not 'how do we survive?' but 'how do we excel?'

A Changing Landscape

The communities Jewish schools serve are themselves changing rapidly. The relatively homogeneous European Jewish communities of a generation ago have been transformed by successive waves of arrival: Russian-speaking Jews who came in the 1990s and 2000s, Ukrainians displaced by war, and a growing population of Israelis living abroad - often secular, Hebrew-speaking, and bringing a relationship to Jewish identity that is national and cultural rather than religious or diasporic. Internal mobility within the European Union has added further complexity, as Jews move between countries for work and study — driven not only by economic opportunity but increasingly by concerns about rising antisemitism and, in some communities, a hardening of anti-Israel sentiment that makes Jewish life feel less secure. These are communities in motion, layered and less rooted in the shared institutional memory that once gave them coherence. And they operate in a broader social environment shaped by the growing presence of Islam across Europe — a development that carries both real pressures, including heightened security concerns and new forms of social tension, and genuine opportunities for interfaith encounter, coalition-building around shared values, and a renewed Jewish articulacy about identity, faith, and what it means to live as a minority with a distinct civilisational tradition in an increasingly complex continent.

PART TWO - THE VISION**The Three Pillars of the Jewish Community Impact Centre**

Building on insights from educational leadership, the concept of community anchor institutions, and the emerging language of impact investment, this article introduces the Community Impact Centre (CIC) model as a conceptual framework for reimagining the role of Jewish schools within their communities.

In this framework, a Jewish school does not define its community solely as the students currently enrolled between the ages of five and eighteen. Its community encompasses every Jewish person in the city — children in school, families who pass through its doors, alumni across generations, and even those who have not yet found a point of entry into Jewish communal life. The CIC model therefore asks a different question: what can a Jewish school offer to the wider Jewish community, at every stage of life, that no other institution can provide? Adult learning programmes, a community Beit Midrash, family Shabbat experiences, alumni networks, and Israel engagement initiatives are not peripheral activities; they are expressions of the school functioning as a central community institution.

The Community Impact Centre model proposed here rests on three interdependent pillars. These pillars are not optional components from which schools may choose, but elements of a single institutional architecture in which each reinforces the others and all are necessary for the model to function.

Pillar I - Professional Management

A Jewish school that aspires to transform its community must first transform itself. That begins with governance. Boards must shift from passive oversight to strategic stewardship - holding leadership accountable to outcomes, not merely to budgets. Executive leadership must be recruited, supported, and compensated at the level demanded by the institution's mission.

Professional management means strategic planning with measurable Key Performance Indicators. It means financial sustainability built not on annual fundraising anxiety but on a diversified, outcome-linked income model that includes philanthropy, earned income, government partnerships, and impact capital. It means human resource systems that attract and retain talented teachers and administrators - the people who, ultimately, determine every outcome the school produces.

It means, above all, a culture of data. Jewish schools should know, with precision, how their students perform academically against external benchmarks. They should measure family engagement, alumni connection, teacher satisfaction, and financial health. They should track not just what they do - programmes delivered, hours taught, events held - but what changes as a result. This shift, from measuring activity to measuring impact, is the defining intellectual move of the Community Impact Centre model.

Pillar II - Academic Excellence

There is no stronger argument for Jewish day school education than the claim that it produces exceptional learners. And there is no weaker position for a Jewish school than to apologise for its academic standards while asking families to accept a longer school day, a divided curriculum, and a premium tuition.

Academic excellence in the CIC model is not a performance for external inspection. It is a genuine institutional commitment to the belief that every student - regardless of background, prior attainment, or socioeconomic circumstance - is capable of achieving at the highest level. That commitment manifests in rigorous curriculum design informed by educational research, in instructional coaching systems that continuously develop teachers, and in a culture of high expectations that permeates the school from leadership to the classroom.

For primary schools - which constitute the majority of Jewish day schools in the diaspora - academic excellence means strong STEM foundations, early technological and digital fluency, high-level English acquisition, and the cultivation of habits and skills of inquiry and creativity that set children on a trajectory of lifelong learning. Crucially, primary schools educate not only children but families: parental engagement at this stage has a disproportionate impact on both academic outcomes and Jewish identity formation, and the Community Impact Centre at primary level is explicitly a family institution, not only a children's one.

The CIC model takes seriously the 21st-century skills agenda: critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration are not soft supplements to a core curriculum but are embedded within it. In an era of generative AI, the ability to reason, evaluate sources, construct arguments, and think ethically is not merely desirable - it is the irreplaceable human contribution that education exists to develop. Jewish schools are, in fact, exceptionally well-positioned to model this kind of education - the tradition of Talmudic argumentation, chavruta learning, and interpretive debate has always demanded precisely these capacities.

***A Jewish child who leaves school without mastering the language of the modern world is not more Jewish for the lack of it.
Academic excellence is not a compromise of Jewish values - it is an expression of them.***

Pillar III - Jewish Identity Pedagogy

The third pillar is the most distinctively Jewish and the most difficult to measure - which is precisely why it must be measured. Jewish identity formation is not an accident of environment. It is the consequence of deliberate, skilled, pedagogically sophisticated educational practice. A teacher who can awaken in an adolescent a genuine sense of wonder at a Talmudic text, or who can connect a student's personal story to the arc of Jewish history, or who can make Hebrew feel like a living inheritance rather than a dead obligation - that teacher is performing one of the most important acts in Jewish communal life.

Jewish identity pedagogy in the CIC model encompasses the full range of Jewish experience: Torah and rabbinic learning taught with intellectual rigour and personal relevance; Hebrew as a language of both sacred text and living Israeli culture; the Jewish calendar as a framework for meaning and memory; Israel as homeland, partner, and perpetual source of complexity and pride; global Jewish peoplehood as a living network of obligation and belonging.

Crucially, this pedagogy must actively embrace the diversity of the Jewish community it serves. It should encourage participation from across the full spectrum of Jewish identity and practice while promoting inclusive educational approaches that support diverse learners, including students with learning difficulties and neurodevelopmental conditions, ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education for all learners.

The question of Jewish identity in the age of artificial intelligence is not a peripheral concern - it is one of the most urgent questions facing Jewish education today. When machines can generate text, simulate empathy, and produce culture, the distinctiveness of the human being becomes a Jewish question. What does it mean to be created "B'tzelem Elohim" - in the image of God - when the boundary between human consciousness and computational intelligence is increasingly blurred? Jewish tradition has always insisted that learning is not merely information transfer but a relational, embodied, morally charged encounter and dialogue between a teacher and a student, a text and a reader, a person and their community. That insistence is not an obstacle to the AI age - it is the Jewish answer to it. The Community Impact Centre that takes Jewish identity pedagogy seriously is already preparing students for the deepest challenges of the world they are entering.

PART THREE - THE GLOBAL FRAMEWORK

UN Sustainable Development Goal #4 and the Jewish School

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which embeds 17 Sustainable Development Goals that collectively define the aspirations of the international community for human flourishing. SDG #4 - Quality Education for All - is the most directly relevant to the Community Impact Centre model, and its alignment is not incidental. It reflects the fact that the transformation being proposed here is not a parochial Jewish concern. It is a contribution to the global project of building a better world.

TARGET	SDG 4 COMMITMENT	CIC RESPONSE
4.1	Ensure quality primary and secondary education with relevant learning outcomes for all	<i>Academic excellence pillar: rigorous, benchmarked, measurable attainment for every student</i>
4.3	Ensure equal access to quality vocational, higher, and lifelong learning	<i>CIC as a community learning hub - open to families, alumni, and the wider community across generations, partnering with communal and academic institutions to ensure lifelong learning</i>
4.5	Eliminate disparities; ensure equal access for all, including vulnerable populations.	<i>Inclusive and diverse Jewish identity pedagogy welcomes all; inclusion is a measured impact indicator, not an afterthought</i>
4.7	Education for sustainable development, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity	<i>Jewish identity formation cultivates global peoplehood, civic responsibility, and intergenerational connection.</i>

The SDG framework matters to the Community Impact Centre model for three practical reasons. First, it provides a globally recognised language through which the school's work can be communicated to government bodies, international foundations, and cross-sector partners who may not speak the language of Jewish education but do speak the language of sustainable development. Second, it offers a set of measurable targets against which the school's academic and social outcomes can be benchmarked - making SROI calculations more robust and more credible. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it situates the Jewish school's mission within the broadest possible moral horizon: the flourishing of humanity.

A Jewish school that can demonstrate, with data, that it is contributing to SDG 4.1 (academic quality), 4.3 (lifelong learning), 4.5 (inclusion), and 4.7 (global citizenship and cultural appreciation) is not merely a Jewish institution. It is a global civic actor - and should be funded, respected, and resourced as one.

PART FOUR - THE LANGUAGE OF IMPACT INVESTMENT

From Cost Centre to Value Generator

Perhaps the most consequential reframing the Community Impact Centre model proposes is this: a Jewish school is not a cost. It is an investment. More precisely, it is an impact investment - a deployment of financial and human capital that is expected to generate measurable social returns alongside any financial ones.

This reframing changes everything. It changes how schools approach their donors - from asking for charitable support to offering an investment opportunity with demonstrable returns. It changes how boards set strategy - from managing a deficit to designing a value-creation model. It changes how leaders talk to their communities - from appealing to obligation to making a compelling case for impact. And it changes how schools measure themselves - from counting inputs to demonstrating outcomes.

The Theory of Change

The foundational tool of impact investment language is the Theory of Change - a rigorous, evidence-informed account of how a set of inputs and activities produces specific outcomes and, ultimately, lasting social impact.

For a Jewish Community Impact Centre, the Theory of Change can be illustrated through the relationship between key inputs and activities and the broader outcomes and impacts they collectively aim to generate; the elements listed are indicative and not intended as one-to-one correspondences.

INPUTS & ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES & IMPACT
Professional staff & leadership	Strong Jewish identity formed
Philanthropic & blended capital	Academic achievement above benchmarks
Excellence-driven curriculum	Community cohesion & belonging
Jewish identity programmes	Lifelong Jewish engagement
Family & community engagement	Alumni as community contributors
Data systems & governance	Jewish community vitality for generations

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework asks a deceptively simple question: for every unit of capital invested in this institution, how much social value is generated? In the context of a Jewish Community Impact Centre, SROI analysis might ask: what is the lifetime communal value of a graduate who is strongly Jewish-identified, academically equipped, and civically engaged? What is the cost - to the community, to the next generation - of a graduate who is not?

While SROI calculations in education are complex and context-dependent, they are not impossible - and they are increasingly expected by sophisticated philanthropists, foundations, and government funders. A school that can demonstrate that investment in Jewish education generates returns in Jewish engagement, communal leadership, philanthropic giving, and reduced social cost is a school that has learned to speak the language of the capital markets - and to do so in service of the Jewish future.

The question is not 'can we afford to invest in this school?' The question is: 'can we afford not to?'

Blended Finance and the Jewish School

Impact investment in education rarely means a single source of capital. The Community Impact Centre model advocates for blended finance - the strategic combination of philanthropic grants, social investment, government funding, earned income, and community bonds to create a robust, multi-source financial base. Each capital source has different risk tolerance, time horizons, and return expectations. Philanthropic capital, patient and values-driven, is best deployed for innovation and capacity-building. Government funding, rule-bound and democratic, is best accessed through demonstrated academic and social outcomes. Social investment - whether through impact bonds, outcome-linked loans, or community share issues - demands the kind of measurable impact framework that the CIC model is designed to produce.

The Jewish school that has built its Theory of Change, established its measurement systems, published its SROI results, and demonstrated consistent outcomes is a school that can attract all three. That is the financial architecture of the Community Impact Centre - not dependency on a handful of generous donors, but a capital ecosystem built on demonstrated impact.

PART FIVE - THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT JOURNEY

Kotter's 8 Steps Applied to Jewish Education

The transformation of a Jewish school into a Community Impact Centre is not an administrative reform. It is a cultural revolution - and cultural revolutions require disciplined leadership, sustained momentum, and a clear model for navigating the inevitable resistance that accompanies fundamental change. John Kotter's 8-Step Change Management Model, developed over decades of research into organisational transformation, provides precisely that architecture.

#	KOTTER'S STEP	APPLICATION TO THE JEWISH CIC
1	Create Urgency	Commission a Community Needs Assessment. Present data on Jewish identity erosion, communal fragmentation, and the cost of educational underperformance. Ask: What is the future of this community if this institution does not transform?
2	Build the Coalition	Assemble a Guiding Coalition - philanthropists, communal leaders, educators, and families - framed not as a committee but as a community of impact investors with a shared stake in outcomes.
3	Form the Vision	Co-develop the Jewish CIC vision through structured workshops. Define the community outcomes the school will invest in: Jewish identity, academic excellence, and communal belonging. Build the Theory of Change.
4	Communicate the Vision	Translate outcomes into a compelling narrative for every stakeholder group - donors, teachers, parents, students. Every communication reinforces the same outcomes language.
5	Remove Barriers	Identify and dismantle structural, cultural, and financial blockers. Upgrade governance, invest in leadership development, and deploy capital to close infrastructure and staffing gaps.
6	Generate Quick Wins	Launch one or two flagship community impact programmes. Measure outcomes with rigour. Publish results as an Impact Report to build donor and community confidence.
7	Sustain Momentum	Expand the model. Deepen outcome-linked partnerships with philanthropic foundations, government bodies, and community organisations. Attract long-term capital commitments.
8	Institutionalise Change	Rewrite governance documents, strategic plans, and the school's public identity to permanently reflect the CIC model. The school no longer 'does' impact - it is an impact institution.

The Three Phases

Kotter's eight steps map onto three broad phases that characterise the arc of transformation for a Jewish Community Impact Centre:

Phase 1 - Ignite (Steps 1–3): Build the Burning Platform

The first phase is about creating the conditions for change - establishing the moral and intellectual urgency that makes transformation feel not merely desirable but necessary. This is the moment for honest data: about Jewish identity trends, about academic outcomes, about the school's financial trajectory. It is the moment to tell the community what is truly at stake.

The Guiding Coalition formed in this phase is not a traditional school board. It is a community of impact investors - people who understand that the school's outcomes are their outcomes, that its failures are their failures, and that its transformation is the most important communal project they will participate in. The Theory of Change produced in this phase becomes the foundation of every strategic decision that follows.

Phase 2 - Enable (Steps 4–5): Clear the Path

The second phase is about dismantling the obstacles that stand between the school's current reality and its articulated vision. These obstacles are structural (outdated governance, inadequate data systems, underfunded staff), cultural (low expectations, resistance to accountability, fear of change), and financial (dependency on a narrow donor base, lack of outcome-linked investment).

Communication in this phase is not announcement - it is invitation. Every stakeholder must see themselves in the school's vision and understand their role in its realisation. Funders must hear the investment case. Teachers must hear the professional development commitment. Families must hear the community building promise. The Guiding Coalition's credibility depends on its ability to speak all these languages simultaneously.

Phase 3 - Embed (Steps 6–8): Lock In the Change

The third phase is about continuity and stability. It begins with quick wins - deliberately selected, carefully measured, and broadly communicated achievements that demonstrate the new model works. A community learning programme open to the whole community. An Excellence Track that produces remarkable academic results. A family engagement programme that transforms the school's relationship with its parent body. These wins build the momentum and credibility that sustain the transformation through its difficult middle period.

The final steps are about ensuring that the transformation outlasts its champions. Governance documents must encode the CIC mission. Performance management systems must hold leadership accountable to the right outcomes. The school's public narrative - its brand, its communications, its fundraising - must speak the language of impact, not charity. When the CIC model is embedded in the school's DNA, the transformation is complete.

PART SIX - MEASUREMENT & LONG-TERM IMPACT

What Gets Measured, Gets Funded. What Gets Funded, Endures.

The Community Impact Centre model demands rigour in measurement. Not because measurement is an end in itself, but because it is the mechanism by which impact is made visible - to funders, to communities, to the school's own leadership - and because visibility is the prerequisite for accountability, for learning, and for growth.

The Jewish CIC measures performance across four domains, each mapped to a set of concrete indicators:

DOMAIN	KEY INDICATORS
Academic Excellence	Academic attainment vs. national/regional benchmarks · Learning gap reduction · University placement rates · Teacher quality and retention scores
Jewish Identity & Continuity	Annual Jewish identity index (student & family survey) · Hebrew language proficiency · Israel engagement and connection rates · Post-school Jewish community affiliation
Community Cohesion	Family engagement depth and frequency · Intergenerational connection index · Alumni community participation rates · Cross-denominational inclusion metrics
Institutional Health	Financial sustainability score · Staff satisfaction and retention · Governance quality rating · Philanthropic capital attracted per annum

The rhythm of measurement follows a three-tier cadence: quarterly dashboards for operational monitoring; an annual Jewish CIC Impact Report, published for the community and funders; and a triennial independent SROI evaluation that provides the rigorous external validation increasingly demanded by sophisticated philanthropic investors.

PART SEVEN - THE IMPERATIVE

An Investment the Jewish Community Cannot Afford Not to Make

The transformation of Jewish schools into Community Impact Centres is not simply a programme or organisational reform. It is a way of clarifying the fundamental purpose of the school within Jewish communal life. It is the decision - made deliberately, collectively, and with full understanding of what is at stake - that the Jewish community will invest in its future with the same seriousness, professionalism, and strategic intent that the world's most effective organisations bring to their most important work.

This is not an argument against tradition, or against the deeply Jewish instinct to do good out of obligation rather than calculation. It is an argument that tradition deserves better stewardship. That the sacred work of transmitting Jewish identity, Jewish learning, and Jewish belonging to the next generation deserves to be done with excellence - managerially, academically, and pedagogically.

The Renaissance methodology presented here is a framework, not a formula. Many Jewish schools already engage in elements of what is described in this model - strengthening Jewish identity, investing in academic excellence, and serving their wider communities. The purpose of the framework is not to replace this work, but to help schools pursue it more intentionally and systematically, moving from valuable activity to clearly articulated impact.

Every community is different. Every school has its own history, culture, and challenges. But the principles that underpin the Community Impact Centre model are universal: manage with rigour; teach with excellence; form identity with intention; measure what matters; and communicate the value of what you are building to every stakeholder who has a role in building it with you.

A Jewish school that excels academically, forms a strong Jewish identity, and serves its community with professional excellence is the most powerful investment a Jewish community can make. The future of that community is being built in its classrooms, right now.

The first step is not complicated. It is simply this: name the urgency. Gather the stakeholders, look honestly at the data, and ask together - what is this school capable of becoming? And what will we do, starting now, to help it get there?

About the Author & Organisation

Ofer Glanz is a senior strategic consultant and programme leader in Jewish education, leading the Renaissance Hub - a coalition of international foundations, powered by Paidea focused on transforming Jewish educator training in Europe - in collaboration with LSJS, Paidea, Or-ZSE, and partner Jewish Studies departments across Europe. He manages a philanthropic foundation focused on Jewish education in Israel, specialises in strategic planning and Jewish identity education, and publishes reflections on Jewish thought.

Renaissance - Jewish Education in Europe is a coalition of international foundations dedicated to the renewal and professional transformation of Jewish education across the European continent.

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