



The cousins Harry Assayag and Lydia Seager were among the sixth-formers at King David High School

Comprehensive takes all the right lessons from grammars

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Education Correspondent

The King David High School in Manchester was rated outstanding in every category during its last Ofsted inspection, with the pupils' "thirst for knowledge" and teachers' high expectations highlighted for particular praise.

Its ethos and results could lead to the assumption that the school is a grammar, like many others in the area, but instead it is one of England's highest performing comprehensives.

The Jewish orthodox academy achieved 15.1 per cent of A levels at A* and almost 80 per cent at A* to B, on results day yesterday.

Three school-leavers are going to Oxford or Cambridge with many others heading for Russell Group universities this year.

Despite its comprehensive intake, King David has better results than many selective and independent schools. In the early 1990s, expectations and results used to be incredibly low and it was threatened with closure.

Joshua Rowe, chairman of gov-

ernors, said the school had been failing when he took the post 26 years ago, with few parents choosing it for their children.

"It was self-perpetuating because the school was failing, so every child who came here felt like a failure and the results were a failure. The first thing we did was advise parents and the community that we were going to transform the school, and import the best of the grammar school and independent school system.

"We wanted high aspiration rather than a sense of 'that can't be done'. We told all the teachers what we intended to do. The majority left — half within the first year and all but three others after that.

"We introduced streams within the school, similar to a grammar school but without the cut off at 11. Some children mature at 12 or 13 and go on to get firsts at university. We put children at the heart of the school, similar to a customer-focused approach in a business."

Results started to climb during the 1990s and have been consist-

ently high since the end of that decade.

Mr Rowe said the success was down to a tremendous relationship between teachers and pupils, and an ethos which pushed a hunger for learning. Children were respectful but not in awe of anything, he added.

He criticised Theresa May's reported plans to allow new grammar schools to open, describing it as divisive. "It will cream off the most academic pupils and thus lower standards in all other schools. The way to achieve this is by importing grammar school ethos and standards into every comprehensive school.

"In practice, what this means is raising the levels of aspiration and expectation, setting and streaming pupils so that they are taught with pupils of similar ability — and that this is done in such a way that pupils' lot is not cast at age 11 but that they can move up the system, throughout their school years — and operating a zero tolerance policy for disruptive pupils so that they do not disturb those who wish to learn."