

AKIVA SCHOOL

Inspection report

LEA	Barnet
Inspection dates	10—12 September 2008/ 10—12 Ellul 5768
Reporting inspector	Angela Gluck
Team inspector	Esther Colman

This inspection was carried out under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School	Primary	School address	The Sternberg Centre for Judaism
School category	Voluntary aided		The Manor House
Age range of pupils	4—11		80 East End Road
			London N3 2SY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8349 4980
Number on roll	294		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Jon Epstein
Date of previous inspection	None	Headteacher	Susy Stone

© Pikuach copyright 2006

Website: www.bod.org.uk

This document has been modified from the *Every child matters: framework for the inspection of schools in England from September 2005* with their permission.

It may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

Description of the school

Akiva School defines itself as a Progressive Jewish school, which serves the local community in northwest London and has a higher than average socio-economic profile. Independent for 25 years, the school is a popular choice for Liberal, Reform, Masorti and some Orthodox parents. The roll has expanded, with slightly more boys than girls, and the school now offers two classes of intake in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. Pupils are drawn from the breadth of the attainment range, with a high proportion of high attaining pupils. Most pupils' education is well supported at home.

The school is uniquely sited within a complex of several Jewish institutions. The site includes a rabbinical college, an educational resource centre, a synagogue, a mikveh, memorial sites and a biblical garden. This location provides all members of the school community with a rich Jewish environment for learning and living.

The school underwent three major developments in the year prior to this inspection: it changed status from an independent to a voluntary aided school in September 2007; it moved to purpose built accommodation, within the same Jewish complex, in January 2008; and a new headteacher took up post in September 2008, a week before the inspection.

As well as teaching Jewish Studies as a discrete subject, the school also strives to integrate Jewish education across the curriculum. Pupils are also taught about the beliefs and practices of other religions as part of their religious education. All class teachers teach Jewish Studies and contribute to the school's Jewish life, including *tefillah* (prayer) and other celebrations of *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and festivals. Girls and boys have the same opportunities in prayer and ritual practice.

Because the school was independent until recently, its Jewish provision had never before been inspected under the *Pikuach* framework and there are therefore no previous targets against which to measure the school's progress. In 2007 – 2008, the leadership of the school did not complete the process of self-evaluation to form the basis of inspection. At the time of the inspection – in the second week of the school year – the Reception classes had not yet received their full complement of children and it was some children's first day at the school; there was therefore very minimal observation of Jewish education in the Foundation stage.

Despite all these unusual circumstances, this inspection report offers the new headteacher and the relatively newly constituted governing body clear signposts for development.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of the school's provision for Jewish education

Because the school did not engage in a self-evaluation cycle in 2007 – 2008, these judgements are based entirely on the inspectors' findings. Furthermore, as the school has never before been inspected according to the *Pikuach* framework, no judgements are being made about whether the school met any targets it set for itself during the earlier stage of its development.

The school provides a Jewish ethos that is clear, strong and engaging, and to which all staff are committed. Relationships within the school are very good and staff provide role models for the behaviour they expect of pupils. Pupils are happy and confident in their Jewish identity. All class teachers are willing to teach Jewish Studies and there are many instances of Jewish learning being linked to National Curriculum subjects in a creative and beneficial way. This curriculum model, coupled with the school's vibrant atmosphere and the rich physical environment, offers a holistic approach to Jewish life that is an asset for the pupils. They have a well-developed awareness and appreciation of Jewish diversity and a commitment to equality. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a priority for the school and one of its strengths. *Tefillah* (prayer) is conducted in a spirit of devotion and delight. Jewish Studies benefits from the role of the subject coordinator, who is a specialist in the field, and who has begun the process of curriculum development; the documents that have already been completed are of high quality. The school also has access to rabbinic advice on the governing body and within the movements from which the school community is drawn.

While much of the teaching is broadly good, there is too much variability of quality: some teachers have expectations of pupils that are too low and do not provide sufficient depth and challenge. Many teachers lack sufficient subject expertise and confidence in teaching Jewish Studies. There are some discrepancies in the ways that teachers implement the curriculum for Jewish Studies. Pupils have the potential to read Hebrew much more fluently than they currently do. The Jewish Studies subject leader does not have enough time to mentor or monitor class teachers.

With the appointment of a new headteacher and a fairly new governing body, the school is in a good position to build on these strengths and to overcome its shortcomings.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

The school should not delay embarking on the process of self-evaluation, as required of all maintained schools, and should complete a self-evaluation document in anticipation of a future inspection. In this process, the school should:

- evaluate the arrangements whereby class teachers teach Jewish Studies with a view to –
 - either amending these arrangements
 - or providing a programme of intensive training and ongoing mentoring in Jewish Studies
- consider increasing the time available for Jewish Studies
- complete the process of developing the curriculum in detail
- monitor teaching, the implementation of the curriculum and the assessment of pupils' learning much more closely
- ensure that pupils are offered an appropriate level of challenge in Jewish Studies
- provide pupils with opportunities to enhance their skills of reading Hebrew.

Achievement and standards

In accordance with the school's stated aims for Jewish Studies, pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 show a very good understanding of Jewish religious practices, of Jewish history, of Jewish values and of Jewish contributions to society. They are well able to see connections between aspects of Judaism and aspects of other subjects they learn, and they move seamlessly between them. Given the timing of the inspection, it was not possible to make judgements about the standards reached by children in the Foundation stage.

Key Stage 1 pupils can recount the main observances of daily *tefillah* (prayer), as well as *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and festivals, and their origins. They have a sound knowledge of a range of stories in the *Torah* and have appropriate abilities in applying the values and beliefs embedded in the stories to their own lives.

Pupils at Key Stage 2 understand that stories are capable of many interpretations. When offered the opportunity, with relevant support and stimulation, they can handle demanding texts, explore a range of religious concepts and moral issues, suggest solutions to problems the material poses and resolve conflicts.

Pupils can meet challenging targets when they are set for them and when they are encouraged to extend their attainment. However, the expectations for some pupils, especially at Key Stage 2, are too low: as a result, some pupils are not adequately challenged to make satisfying progress. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress.

At both key stages, pupils pronounce *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) well, with a good working vocabulary, and they are accustomed to using *Ivrit* terms in Jewish Studies. However, their ability to read and understand Hebrew is not well developed and, as a result, pupils have not acquired the skills they need for *tefillah*.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is one of the school's strengths. Through Jewish education, the school successfully addresses four of the five outcomes identified in the government document 'Every Child Matters': 'being healthy', 'staying safe', 'enjoying and achieving', and 'making a positive contribution'. However, 'economic well being' is insufficiently well addressed in Jewish education because inadequate opportunities are given for pupils to use information and communications technology (ICT).

Pupils' participation in *tefillah* (prayer) shows joy and a high degree of engagement, and they sing with gusto. They show a mature capacity to reflect on their experiences and on the experiences of others, and some of the older pupils are able to use Jewish terms to articulate the beliefs and values they discuss.

Pupils respond very well to the opportunities they are provided with to cooperate with others and to make a contribution to the school, such as by participation in assemblies and in the support system that older pupils offer to younger pupils. They value the School Council highly and respond to the powers it is given in a responsible way. They are also well aware of their obligations to other individuals and communities in today's world and many are generous in the time and resources they give to a range of causes.

Pupils value the people, land and state of Israel and appreciate its significance, as well as some of its challenges. They have a well-developed awareness of diversity and individuality – both within the Jewish world and humanity as a whole. They are encouraged to value this diversity and to develop robust views about equality. Their relationships with peers in Christian schools provide a positive introduction to interfaith dialogue.

Social behaviour is consistently exemplary, with pupils showing consideration for other people and care of the environment: this applies during *tefillah* and mealtimes, and when they are moving around the building or playing outdoors. However, in several of the lessons observed, there were instances of inattention and off-task behaviour, when pupils were insufficiently occupied or challenged. Although not anti-social in the strict sense, such behaviour resulted in a waste of time and, at times, distraction of other pupils.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teaching is good overall but very variable in quality: as well as much teaching that was good, several examples of outstanding teaching were observed but also a small number of lessons that were barely satisfactory.

The quality of assessment of pupils' work is patchy. Some work remains unmarked for long periods and, when it is marked, comments are not usually helpful in indicating to pupils what they need to do in order to improve.

Weaker teaching featured too much talk by the teacher, with insufficient breadth and variety of subject matter and activities in the lesson. It involved material that lacked depth and did not engage the pupils' interests or promote their development: in these lessons, the pupils' lack of concentration was highly evident. In some cases, teachers lack the necessary knowledge of Hebrew or Jewish Studies.

Where there are weaknesses, there are colleagues on the staff whose teaching provides a model of good and sometimes outstanding features of teaching. This makes it possible for the school to take the necessary steps to raise the quality of the weaker teaching.

Good teaching was characterised by the teacher's confidence with the subject matter, clear learning objectives that were shared with the class, a well-chosen variety of activities and a pitch that was appropriate to the ages and aptitudes of the pupils.

In the case of the very best teaching, the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject matter was infectious, and there was a brisk pace and a good match between materials and activities to individual pupils' attainment. Some lessons also used creative starting points to capture the pupils' imagination and engagement. Much of the good or very good teaching occurred in lessons where elements of Judaism were the focus of a National Curriculum subject.

In all lessons, the teachers showed care and respect for the pupils and, in almost all lessons, the teacher had positive rapport with the pupils.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum for Jewish education is broad and balanced. It introduces pupils to Jewish history, religious practice and ethical values with relevance and a sense of engagement. A wide and engaging range of additional activities enhances the curriculum and provides pupils with a rich experience of Jewish life. These include music, regular Israeli dance classes, special events and preparations for and celebrations of festivals.

There is insufficient liaison between *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) and Jewish Studies teaching to ensure that pupils have adequate skills to read traditional Hebrew adequately.

The school has taken the decision that Jewish Studies is mainly to be taught not by a specialist but by class teachers. While class teachers willingly accept this arrangement and it has some clear advantages for the pupils, it is evident that some teachers do not yet have sufficient subject expertise and this has undoubted disadvantages for the pupils.

Akiva School provides less curriculum time for Jewish Studies than other Jewish schools. However, curriculum time is augmented to some extent by the arrangement of curriculum integration whereby aspects of Judaism are taught in the context of National Curriculum subjects. Where these links are forged, they are extremely effective.

The very scant use of information and communications technology (ICT) resources in Jewish Studies not only limits the development of pupils' ICT skills but also reduces their access to an increasingly large bank of available resources for Jewish learning and potentially diminishes their appreciation of the relevance of the Jewish tradition in the modern world.

The school has taken the initiative to develop an appropriate curriculum for Jewish education at the school and this has involved a praiseworthy amount of effort. The generic documents are of high quality and some of them have been translated into working documents for practical use by teachers; others remain at earlier stages of detailed development.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

The school provides a safe and healthy environment, in which pupils know that there is always an older child or an adult to whom they can turn for help. They feel protected, respected and cared for. While some pupils report being bored in some Jewish Studies lessons, they love the school and appreciate its benefits. Rabbis from the Liberal, Reform and Masorti movements are involved in the school as visiting speakers and presenters on special occasions.

The school exceeds the legal requirement to provide collective worship every day by arranging *tefillah* (prayer) each morning and *Birkat HaMazon* (thanksgiving after meals) after lunch; on Friday, there is *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Sabbath welcome). Worship takes place in a range of contexts, groupings and settings. In keeping with the school's ethos, girls and boys play equal roles in worship. Pupils value visits from rabbis, prior to festivals or on special school occasions.

Grade: 1

Leadership and management

The day-to-day management of Jewish Studies is competent but the allocation of time for the subject leader is too slight for the task of developing the Jewish Studies curriculum, as well as leading and supporting the class teachers who are tasked with implementing it. There is insufficient provision for the continuing professional development of staff, including coaching and mentoring: this is most noteworthy in relation to teachers' subject expertise. Likewise, monitoring of the quality of teaching and assessment is currently inadequate and instances were observed of teachers not meeting the requirements of the curriculum. There is a lack of clarity about the role and status of a rabbi as a member of staff and this is a source of confusion for pupils and staff members.

The school's process of self-evaluation is at a very early stage of development and incomplete at the time of this inspection. While defined as a Progressive school, the practice of Akiva School operates in many ways on pluralist principles. This is evident in relation to the school's approaches to religious practice and also in the attitudes to diversity that are espoused.

The governing body has a clear understanding of its role and responsibilities, and discharges them reliably. The school has managed very well its recent and very marked changes of accommodation and status, as well as an increase in the number of pupils on its roll. These developments have necessarily demanded the attention of the school's leaders and governors, and absorbed much time. They now have the possibility of concentrating more fully on the standards and quality of Jewish Studies within the school.

Nevertheless, within the constraints of time, there has already been some impressive and inspirational provision for Jewish education, executed with energy and enthusiasm. The thinking behind the school's provision for *tefillah* (prayer) and the atmosphere during worship, the potent sense of community that pervades the school, the quality of relationships, the pupils' joyous embrace of Judaism and Jewish culture, and their commitment to justice, equality and *tikkun olam* (healing the world) are all exemplary and are clearly the fruit of positive leadership.

The school is at a point at which it needs to focus more sharply on the school's religious direction and to transform its vision into reality in Jewish Studies lessons. There are indications that the experienced, accomplished and newly appointed headteacher, other leaders in the school and the governing body are aware of this and are keenly committed to raising standards in Jewish education still further. They are well poised to intensify the school's development.

Grade: 2