

# ALMA PRIMARY INSPECTION REPORT

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Local Authority                      Barnet

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates                    22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022

Lead Inspector                      Esther Colman

**This inspection of the school was conducted under section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

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Type of school                      Primary

School category                    Free

Age range of children            4-11

Mixed /Single sex                Mixed

Number on roll                    203

Chair of Governors                Ilan Jacobs

Headteacher                        Marc Shoffren

Address                              Alma Primary, Friern Barnet Lane, Whetstone N20 OLP

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## Inspection team

Lead Inspector : Esther Colman  
Team Inspector: Daniel Gastwirth

## Introduction

Inspectors make judgements on the following three Key Areas:

- The Quality of Jewish Education
- Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development
- Leadership and Management

The inspection was carried out by two Inspectors. They visited 12 lessons, or parts of lessons, in addition to *Tefillah* (prayer) and Assembly. They had numerous discussions with the Senior Leadership team, the Chair of Governors, Governors, staff and representative groups of pupils, such as the *Hesed* (Kindness) Committee and School Council. In addition, inspectors observed Jewish Learning, *Ivrit* and integrated lessons. They also talked to parents at the start and end of the day. They looked at displays and class floor books, and scrutinised pupils' workbooks as well as listening to their Hebrew Reading. They discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school. They conducted and evaluated surveys among Parents – Staff – and Year 3 and 4 pupils.

## Information about the school

- Alma is a one form entry, inclusive Jewish Free School in Barnet.
- The school opened in September 2013 in temporary accommodation and moved to a permanent site in 2016, which continues to be developed.
- In July 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the school's first Year 6 class graduated. The current Year 6 cohort will be the first to have completed the SATs in Alma.
- The current role at Alma Primary is 203 pupils who come from a wide geographical area, including Muswell Hill, Finchley Central, Mill Hill and Barnet.
- As a faith-based Free School, Alma are required to admit a maximum of 50% of the school's intake on the basis of faith. The school currently has a variety of families, including those where both parents identify as Jewish, and some families where only one parent identifies as Jewish. For 5% of pupils, their only connection to the Jewish community, is Alma Primary.
- Pupils in receipt of Free School Meals are 4.93%, and 6.4% are Pupil Premium. There is a small number of ten pupils (4.93%) who are registered as speaking *Ivrit* as their first language and seven children (3.42%) speak other languages, including Polish, Farsi, Russian and Hindi.
- The school teaches *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) as a modern foreign language and *Ivrit* teachers

are responsible for the pupils' Hebrew reading and writing, as well as speaking and listening.

- *Ivrit* learning at Alma suffered particularly during Covid-19 due to staffing instability (long term sick leave and family challenges) which resulted in both *Ivrit* teachers leaving the school in 2021. The school has now recruited two new *Ivrit* teachers who are ensuring that the pupils re-engage with *Ivrit* enthusiastically.

## Inspection judgements

## Grade

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Quality of Jewish Education</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>1</b>

## What it is like to attend this Jewish school?

- Alma Primary is an outstanding school where pupils display the embodiment of the school's vision, which is "*Olam Hesed Yibane*" 'a world built on kindness.'
- Aspects of the Jewish Learning Curriculum are taught and enhanced through "integrated" lessons. These are lessons where skills are taught by the class teacher, whilst the knowledge and content is based around Jewish Learning. For example, History lessons focused on Zionism.
- Pupils have the opportunity to join various clubs that all revolve around the school's values system. These include: *Hesed* club, Eco-warriors and Giraffe club. Pupils nominate other pupils to enjoy a lavish breakfast with the Jewish Learning Lead in "Giraffe club" when they "stick their neck out" for fellow pupils by doing acts of kindness. The involvement of senior leaders in these clubs, demonstrates to pupils that they are valued.
- Pupils benefit from seeing that all senior leaders are passionate about the school's Jewish ethos and their Jewish Education. For example, the Headteacher teaches Jewish Learning in Year 6 and leads the *Parasha* (Weekly Torah Portion) assembly, while the Assistant Heads lead *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) with the support of the Year 6 pupils. These senior members of staff are role models in integrating Jewish Learning with the National Curriculum. Inspectors were particularly impressed by the quality of learning and active engagement of Year 4, 5 and 6 pupils in the *Parasha* assembly. Pupils in Year 5 enjoyed writing an end of year play script based on an integrated unit on Zionism that was supported by both their class teacher and the Assistant Head.
- Pupils are fortunate to attend a school with committed and supportive governors. Inspectors met with four governors – Chair of governors, Lead governor on *Ivrit* and Jewish Learning, Safeguarding governor and co-chair of the Learning and Children's committee – who share their ambitious vision for graduates of Alma. Inspectors concurred with governors that they had observed these characteristics in the pupils they met. This resonated with feedback that governors had received from secondary schools "you can spot an Alma child because the

ethos lives in them.”

- Most parents are full of praise for the teaching their children receive. One parent said, “my children are taught very creatively and the Learning Days are excellent.” Another commented, “we do *Shabbat* at home because of what the children do in school.”
- Pupils enjoy their Jewish Learning and are very proud of their school. There is a very good rapport between the pupils and their teachers. Pupils benefit from a calm, purposeful learning environment in all areas of the building from the start to the end of the day. As one Year 6 pupil said, “I will miss this school when I leave”.
- Pupils engage in daily *Tefillah* (prayer) with enthusiasm and behaviour is excellent. Youngers pupils are led by Year 5/Year 6 pupils who act as role models and explain the meaning of the *Tefillot* (prayers). Pupils also see their teachers involved in this activity which is why they take it seriously. Year 6 pupils also lead age appropriate *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after meals) for the various age groups after having helped to serve lunch. The resulting atmosphere in the dining hall makes for a pleasurable lunchtime experience for all pupils.
- Pupils appreciate the diversity of human experience through Alma’s unique curriculum, which creates meaningful connections between secular and Jewish Learning. Pupils engage in discussions about how they can be the best they can be, with an eye to a Jewish understanding of what this entails. For example, pupils in Year 5 prepare written questions to challenge their peers to achieve high standards in the inter-school Etgar quiz.
- All pupils, including those with Special Needs, or those who speak other languages at home, benefit from a value driven Jewish Learning curriculum, i.e. where the focus is on *Middot* (character traits), which aligns with the school’s ethos. This is built on three pillars: A commitment to meaningful learning and excellence for all; inclusivity rooted in Jewish values and a nurturing community.
- Pupils’ learning is deepened through carefully sequenced and structured lessons. These are based on a system that shows the Jewish Learning curriculum intent and implementation. Due to Covid-19, the impact of some aspects of the curriculum has not been as strong as expected. The leadership of the school is well aware of the need to further embed strong, foundational, textual skills to enable the acquisition of knowledge and engagement through *Tanach*, *Siddur* and Rabbinic teachings.
- Staff enjoy working at this school. They appreciate the time, support, and training that they receive in order to carry out their responsibilities effectively.
- Safeguarding at Alma is effective. Children say they feel safe when at school and are able to talk to an adult if something is worrying them. 85% of children report that bullying either does not happen, or, that if it does, teachers are good at resolving it.

## What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

### Quality of Jewish Education

- Teaching is consistently good with some outstanding features.
- The strong teaching at Alma Primary promotes purposeful learning and high expectations. For example, pupils in a Year 4 lesson were highly motivated and engaged when finding out information about *Rashi* (Bible commentator) on their iPads.
- The positive atmosphere established in Jewish Learning lessons, enables pupils to rise to the challenge, contribute their own ideas, whilst listening and learning from their peers. This was seen in a Year 6 lesson where pupils were tasked with comparing the two versions of the 10 commandments in the *Torah* (Bible).

- Lessons are made relevant through contemporary references. For example, when learning about *Rashi*, the teacher connected this to pupils' own lives by making an analogy with a live sports commentator which helped the children understand the concept of *Rashi* as a Bible commentator.
- All staff provide effective support to pupils with SEND. (Special educational needs and/or disabilities.)
- Pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as all other pupils and they too achieve good results. In a Reception class, where children were learning about Moses and the burning bush, a group of children including an SEND child were building a flame out of Lego ably supported by the LSA (Learning Support Assistant).
- Pupils learn Jewish Values and *Middot* through effective *Parasha* lessons and assemblies. The positive learning atmosphere in the hall during one assembly encouraged all children to express their views to their talk partners. In one example, a pupil suggested that the reason why the spies gave a bad report about the Land of Israel to the whole nation was because they cared about the wellbeing of the people. Inspectors would recommend sharing a weekly *Parasha* summary with families to extend pupils' learning into the home.
- Pupils benefit from a range of creative assessment activities developed by the Jewish Learning Lead. These were evident in photos from floor books and carefully collated into meaningful data. These show pupils' progress and areas for development.
- The school is working to develop similar high-quality assessments in *Ivrit* (especially in Hebrew Reading), which will pinpoint areas for development more effectively. This has been highlighted in the school's evaluation report and leaders are planning additional training for *Ivrit* staff.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Jewish Learning is integrated into the Seven Areas of Learning. Pupils in Reception used their imagination to learn about the life of Moses and were able to recall to the inspector his time in the basket on the Nile River. This lays the foundations for the school's goal of developing an understanding and connection to the Jewish people through history.
- For pupils at Alma, Jewish learning is not just about being able to answer factual questions, it is also about being able to engage with ideas and messages. This creates a firm foundation of Jewish knowledge and identity. Pupils were keen to share their thoughts and feelings on the founding fathers of Zionism. They expressed empathy with the challenges these people faced in establishing the State of Israel. Through this the pupils developed a closer connection to the subject studied.
- Pupils are split into ability groups for their *Ivrit* (including Hebrew Reading) lessons, and this enables them to receive a greater level of attention to develop their *Ivrit* skills. Lessons are dynamic and interactive, and pupils feel comfortable to respond to questions in *Ivrit* due to the smaller groups.

## Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development (JP&SD)

- The pupils' JP&SD is woven into the school life, providing opportunities for reflection, and resulting in pupils developing respect for others. This is a priority in this school and underpins all learning. When learning about the spies in the *Parasha* lesson, pupils in Year 2 were encouraged to identify with the different views that were expressed by the spies. This was achieved through drama with the pupils pretending to be a spy, exploring their feelings, and showing respect to each other.
- In Aramaic, the word "Alma" means 'World.' And indeed, Alma primary brings together children from across the Jewish community and the wider local community. This inclusivity and diversity go hand in hand with the school's Jewish values, including *Derech Eretz* - respect for everyone. For example, in a meeting with the *Hesed* committee, one of the pupils spoke about how they had chosen to raise money for Camp Simcha to support children with cancer. The

group knew someone who'd been unwell with cancer as a young child, and this made it considerably more personal for them. Pupils realise that their actions can give rise to certain feelings in others, such as gratitude. One pupil commented to another, "You inspire me."

- All pupils, irrespective of faith participate fully, and feel included in the prayer life of the school. Through this, they begin to recognise God in a meaningful way, articulating feelings of happiness and gratitude.
- Prayer is part of the fabric of daily life, through *Brachot* (blessings), e.g. in the Giraffe Club, morning *Tefillah* and Birkat Hamazon. A parent commented that her children know the blessings and use them at home.
- Pupils show reverence, attentiveness, and enthusiasm to engage during collective worship, through communal singing and discussion of the meaning of the *Tefillot*. All members of staff are excellent role models by showing respect and sincerity during *Tefillah*.
- At morning *Tefillah*, pupils show *Kavannah* (sincere feeling, devotion of the heart).
- Y5/6 pupils are empowered to lead *Tefillah* for the younger pupils. They take their responsibilities very seriously and are excellent role models.
- The Year 6 pupils leading the *Parasha* assembly applied learned traits to their younger peers by validating and valuing all the responses to their higher-order thinking questions. The Headteacher developed this positive behaviour even further by highlighting that there are respectful ways to disagree and linked this to the ongoing train strike.
- Pupils gain a strong sense of British Values. As well as learning about Jewish Festivals, pupils learn about other celebrations. For example, the school held an inter-faith Passover *Seder* ritual together with Sacred Heart Catholic School. The pupils from Sacred Heart shared their experiences of celebrating Easter. These events instil in the pupils a strong awareness of the spiritual in all humankind (*Tzelem Elokim*).
- School-wide Jewish events have restarted post-Covid. Pupils and staff were proud to participate in the recent *Shabbat* UK initiative. They came together on Zoom to bake *Challot* (special bread for *Shabbat*). Inspectors saw a colourful display, highlighting this event.
- There is a strong approach to *Tzedaka* (giving justly) at Alma. This is led by a school group with pupil members from each class and relates to a range of national as well as local charities. Inspectors saw evidence of this in the entrance of the school, where certificates from a range of excellent causes, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are proudly displayed for all to see.
- All parent volunteering was paused due to Covid-19 and the school is now re-engaging with family volunteers for the library, website and learning days. Parents/carers are involved in their children's learning and have termly meetings with class teachers. Although the Jewish Learning teachers are available at any time to speak to parents, we would recommend exploring a formal arrangement for this in the future as some parents would really value this opportunity.

## Leadership and Management

- Pupils at Alma Primary benefit from outstanding leadership and management from their Headteacher, Assistant Heads, Jewish Learning Lead and SENDCo. The systems employed are robust and make a real impact on the high standard of their Jewish Learning.
- The governors have a key monitoring role in the school and provide support and challenge to the Senior Leadership. For example, governors suggested more detailed curriculum maps for Jewish Learning, to ensure that the learning progresses, topic by topic, in each year group.
- The Senior Leadership has identified the need to continue to develop and review the Jewish Learning curriculum, prioritising key skills and knowledge.
- The leadership of the school supported pupils' Jewish Learning during the pandemic by putting into place a range of strategies to ensure continuity of learning and Jewish practice for the pupils and their families. For example, hosting an online community *Kabbalat Shabbat* (welcoming the Sabbath) every week, throughout the whole two years. As these proved so

popular, the school has maintained an online option for families who are unable to attend in person.

- Pupils commented on how much they learn and enjoy the whole school Learning Days which are planned and led by staff across the school with clear age-appropriate learning outcomes embedded in the day's activities to ensure progression of learning across the year groups. Inspectors saw photos of these days in Jewish Learning "floor-books" and were impressed by the variety and creativity of activities. For example, for *Shavuot* (Pentecost), pupils had the opportunity to create colourful flowers and representations of themselves to symbolise their own presence at Mount Sinai for the Giving of the Ten Commandments.
- Year 6 pupils look forward to their weekly time with the Headteacher, when they prepare for the *Parasha* assembly which they lead. Each week three children are chosen to discuss the *Parasha* and choose their own focus and Jewish value through the *Pesukim* (verses). In this way, the Headteacher is modelling the importance of life-long Jewish learning which the pupils can take forward in their own lives.
- An example of outstanding leadership at the school is the way in which the Headteacher proactively addresses challenges at the school. For example, during Covid-19 there were staffing difficulties in relation to *Ivrit*/Hebrew Reading. These have now been resolved with the appointment of two new *Ivrit* teachers.
- A Year 6 pupil said: "We'd like to have a school rabbi like lots of other schools have." This resonated with inspectors' findings that pupils and teachers would benefit from additional staffing capacity in the Jewish Learning department.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

Further develop the Quality of Jewish Education by :

- Looking to develop consistent and robust assessment strategies for *Ivrit* (including Hebrew Reading). *Ivrit* support interventions should also be recorded on the school's provision maps to assess their impact.

<b>Statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (tefillah)</b>	<b>Met</b>
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## Summary of Questionnaires

**Pikuach invited parents and carers of pupils at Alma to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 89 people responded to the survey. The responses were almost all positive.**

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- The teachers are passionate about Jewish Learning and this rubs onto the students .
- Alma is a proudly Jewish school with a genuinely inclusive outlook, and we are just as thrilled that our child also regularly comes home talking about what they have learned of other cultures and communities - and not just Judaism.
- The children love the Jewish Learning and Ivrit lessons so am very happy with how it's done at Alma. They are proud to be Jewish and proud to join in at Shul and lead others all thanks to the confidence and love of traditions they receive at Alma.

- The children have had fantastic visitors like a Sofer who showed them how a Torah is written and a visit to the British Museum around Pesach to understand about Egypt.

**Pikuach invited pupils at Alma to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 92 pupils responded to the survey.**

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- Alma is an amazing school.
- Alma is a very good, kind school and educates you about everything and does it very well.

**Pikuach invited members of staff at Alma to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 28 members of staff responded to the survey.**

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- The Jewish Learning Lead works hard to support teachers and other members of staff with their knowledge, understanding and application of Jewish Learning.
- The Jewish Learning Lead inspires us and the children to really develop their/ our identity in being a 21st Century Jewish person.
- We have received many compliments from parents of our past Year 6 as to how brilliantly they are doing in their Jewish secondary schools.

## GLOSSARY

### WHAT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS MEAN:

GRADE	JUDGEMENT	DESCRIPTION
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its' pupils needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its' pupils well.
Grade 3	Requires Improvement	A school requiring improvement is not providing adequately for its' pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its' pupils.