

LEEDS JEWISH FREE SCHOOL INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority: Leeds City Council

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates: 20th and 21st March 2023

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

Type of school: Secondary

School category: Free School

Age range of children: 11 to 16 years

Mixed /Single sex: Mixed

Number on roll: 137

Chair of Governors: Dan Cohen

Headteacher: Susy Hardacre

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School website: ljfs.org

Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Ruth Wilkinson

Team Inspector: Daniel Marcus

Introduction

Inspectors make judgements on the following three Key Areas:

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

The inspection was conducted over two days by two inspectors.

Information about the school

- Leeds Jewish Free School was opened in 2013 as a secondary school provision for Brodetsky Jewish Primary School and the wider community.
- As a Free School 50% of students can be of the Jewish faith.
- The school has a mixed faith community including Jewish, Sikh Muslim, Greek Orthodox and Hindu, with 50% of the students being Jewish. There are members of 22 different ethnic groups enrolled in the school as well as those of no faith. Eleven students have English as an additional language (EAL).
- Three Students have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). There are 26 students with special education needs (SEN).
- The Executive Head Teacher and the Head of Jewish Studies are responsible for both Leeds Jewish Free School and Brodetsky Primary School.
- There are 24 students (18%) eligible for free school meals.
- Many of the students (52%) completed their primary education at Brodetsky School before transferring to Leeds Jewish Free School.
- The school has 25 members of the teaching team, equivalent to 13.5 full time members of staff as well as two full-time support staff.

Inspection judgement

Grade

Quality of Jewish Education	1
Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development	2
Leadership and management	1
Overall effectiveness	1

What is it like to attend this Jewish school?

- Leeds Jewish Free School caters for students in Years 7 to 11. The students transfer to other education establishments for Years 12 and 13. Speaking to a group of past parents from the school, they felt their students had been well-prepared for Jewish life outside the life of LJFS (Leeds Jewish Free School) and the vast majority stayed connected and involved in Jewish communal activities. One past parent said it was the best decision

- she ever made to send her child to the newly opened school. The school nurtures the whole human being, and her child is still in touch with her LJFS friends.
- LJFS is situated on a on the Henry Cohen Campus together with Brodesky Primary School and Nursery. Additionally, the large campus houses Leeds Maccabee Football Club and The Zone community youth provision. There is plenty of accessible outdoor space on the site, including facilities for sports activities. Students and family members make good use of these communal facilities which enhances the community feel of the school. Parents feel that the LJFS campus is a safe place, commenting in the survey: “This school has the best security system in place and the fact that the after-school activities (Zone) are within the grounds of the school allowed extra security.” “The school is a safe and secure place for my children and they are comfortable to be there each day.”
 - The school building has the benefit of a drama room, a very well-equipped *kosher* cookery room, where the students learn the practical aspects of *kashrut* (keeping *kosher*) and foods linked to festivals. There are dedicated *Ivrit* (Hebrew) and Jewish studies classrooms as well as a lunch hall serving *kosher* cooked food.
 - The ethos of LJFS is built on the values of *Tzedek* (Integrity), *Chesed* (Kindness), *Mishpat* (Respect) and *Rachamim* (Compassion). These values are prominent in the school community and were observed? in the relationship seen between students.
 - The school’s vision is to offer outstanding educational provision that ensures high academic standards, a strong moral ethic, a joy of learning, high aspirations and an expectation to contribute to the local community. As a parent expressed, “We are pleased he understands he is part of the Jewish community and that means something”. This is underpinned by a strong Jewish ethos and an innovative educational model.
 - The overriding message from students, teachers, parents and past students, is that the LJFS is not just a school, it is a family. They expressed the community feeling in the school, the respect shown to all students and the support of the caring teachers. This was certainly apparent on visiting the school and referred to in the parent survey. “Small class sizes and a small campus means all the students know each other and their teachers.”

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

Quality of Jewish Education

- The Quality of Jewish Education at Leeds Jewish Free School is outstanding. Jewish Studies Lessons are underpinned by a recently launched and highly ambitious Jewish Studies curriculum centred around Jewish values and Jewish living. This curriculum is delivered in an atmosphere of respect and inclusion for all students, as expressed by a Key Stage Two student in a Year 8 lesson. “If I had another side to a debate she would listen to my opinion.” discussing the symbolism of food eaten during *Pesach* (Passover). Students from other faiths also participated freely and shared significant and symbolic food eaten in their homes. One student commented “I enjoy learning about the Jewish faith. I am also asked about my religion and feel included.”
- The school’s previous *Pikuach* inspection highlighted the needed to differentiate teaching according to students’ previous knowledge to ensure greater progress for all students. Responding to this, the school introduced two Jewish Studies tracks: Core and Higher. Both tracks largely follow the same curriculum aims and objectives, with the

Higher track engaging with source materials and deeper analysis, while Core predominantly focuses on key Jewish knowledge learning points. Using an analytical, school curriculum-based assessment created by the Head of Jewish Studies, students are placed into one of these tracks. Through ongoing informal assessment in lessons, and discussions between the Jewish Studies staff team and SENDCo (Special Education Needs and Disabilities Coordinator) there is movement between the tracks when deemed beneficial to the students. During this inspection, a number of lessons were observed in each track, and it was clear that this dual system enables students to make good progress in an appropriate, engaging environment. This was commented on by both students and parents, "They love the *chavruta* (paired) style of learning." Recently, the school has identified the need to introduce a Super-High track to provide further challenge for high achieving students. This is one of many examples of the school acting in a responsive, flexible way to provide an impactful education for all students.

- The teaching of *Ivrit* (*Hebrew*) straddles the Jewish Studies and Modern Foreign Languages departments. There is a choice of modern foreign languages to study at LJFS, with spoken *Ivrit* and Hebrew reading holding a special place as it is closely linked to the school's Jewish ethos and Jewish Studies lessons. Parents expressed an appreciation of this holistic curriculum; "My kids tell me about the different things they are discussing in their Jewish studies including Hebrew language, Jewish studies and discussions about modern issues that face our religion", "I would just like to thank the whole school for giving my child a fantastic academic, moral and spiritual education". During an observed lesson, the *Ivrit* teacher engaged with the students', teaching vocabulary which was linked to topics of interest. She used effective strategies to help students build on their previous knowledge, giving them the confidence to experiment with a new language. The students were seen to be attentive during this outstanding lesson and were always given encouragement to participate, ensuring that everyone was learning at their respective level. The well-structured schemes of work make good use of several teaching programmes including computer resources. There is a rigorous assessment system in place. Assessment is mostly conducted whilst teaching, with more formal and summative assessments taking place at the end of each unit. With the support of the senior leaders, the *Ivrit* teacher has attended many Continuing Professional Development courses in specialist areas of education. This has given her an expertise in teaching students with alternative ways of thinking and learning, catering for their specific learning needs.
- Assessment and feedback in Jewish Studies have been prioritised since being identified as an area for development in the previous *Pikuach* inspection. Students' books are regularly marked with teachers' comments that are meaningful and informative to the students. This enables both teachers and students to identify areas for improvement and progress over time. A comprehensive and diagnostically thorough assessment system has been introduced where students are assessed against a number of learning statements for each unit of work. In Year 7, 92% of students achieved or exceeded the expected understanding for each learning statement. Student attainment was at a similar level in all year groups with no significant gaps between boys and girls and with Pupil Premium and SEN students achieving as well as, or better than, the rest of the cohort. After analysing the assessment data, the Jewish Studies team gives extra support to students who are shown to be underachieving. The appreciation that students have for the care and input from the teachers exemplifies the outstanding quality of Jewish education in this school. "I personally enjoy my Jewish studies lessons due to the fact I enjoy the teacher and his teaching methods and so do my other peers in my group." "My awesome Rabbi who comes every Thursday to talk to my group, is really inspiring and interesting".

Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development

- The school focusses on the welfare of the students when making the transition from Brodesky Primary School to the Leeds Jewish Free School. This is made easier as there is a crossover of teachers between the two schools. The Head of Jewish Studies, *Ivrit* teachers and Jewish Studies teachers, work across both the primary and secondary schools. Some students will also have siblings in the secondary school. When the Year 7 students start attending LJFS, they are supported by a 'buddy' system of older students. Additionally, the new Year 7 students have four lessons on resilience, looking at different scenarios, who it might affect and how it might make different people feel. Small group and class discussions are part of these useful transition lessons which are conducted in a safe environment to explore any feelings of anxiety.
- The school's ethos of *Tzedek*, *Chesed*, *Mishpat* and *Rachamim* are built into the curriculum with units on those *middot* (good attributes) being taught in Years 7 to 11. The school has identified the need to look at the rest of the curriculum and create links between those lesson units and the four school *middot* above.
- Jewish personal and spiritual development has been built into the curriculum and assessment process. The assessment statements used to track knowledge and progress are set against a mix of knowledge, skills, and spiritual development, with every student assessed against each of the statements.
- Examples were seen in a Higher Track lesson of students being helped to think about the more spiritual aspects of learning. In a Year 7 lesson, a student had brought a small *Sefer Torah* (*Torah* scroll) to the class. This opened a discussion about the spiritual significance of the *Sefer Torah*, with students giving views from their perspective and their faith. When learning about *Pesach*, students shared their family customs for *Seder* (a ritual meal at the beginning of Passover) which resulted in some meaningful and spiritual ideas being discussed. Students were inspired to participate in a discussion about why it might feel uncomfortable to go to other people's homes for *Seder*. A student expressed his feelings on the topic, "Because the customs in our own homes really matter and are the ones that build Jewish life for us."
- The School Chaplain and Chair of Governors are very frequent visitors to the school. They both speak at whole school assemblies, imparting important and relevant messages to the students. The Chair of Governors engaged with students as he spoke about the forthcoming festival of *Pesach*. He also included festivals of other faiths that were taking place at this time of year. The students were reminded to be considerate to those who were fasting for Ramadan and not eat food in front of them, and he reminded them of the Sikh festival Vaisakhi. The whole school was then set a challenge to find the link between all the festivals. It was a thought-provoking assembly taking into account the whole school population.
- All students in the school have the option to participate in daily acts of collective worship or reflection. Regular *Tefillah* (Hebrew Prayer) sessions are held for any member of the school wishing to attend. Those who prefer not to attend have a reflection time in their year groups. In an observed class reflection session, the teacher introduced the concept of 'doing nothing'. After a short introduction she referred to a quotation in a J.R.R Tolkien book, "Not all those who wander are lost". The students found this a difficult concept to articulate, and they were not forthcoming with reflective comments. The teacher needed to talk about her own examples and experiences before students were able to formulate their own thoughts and examples of the concept. One student articulated that, "Doing nothing time takes me away from where I am". Verbal self-reflection was not an easy task for some of the students.
- As well as the regular prayer sessions, Students who are nearing the time of their *Bar Mitzvah* or *Bat Mitzvah* (a celebration when a Jewish boy turns 13, or a girl turns 12, and take responsibility for observing the *Torah* commandments) they are offered specialised morning prayers. Once students have had their *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, they are

encouraged to become more involved in the prayer service, learning some additional prayers and providing support for the younger students. There is an option for girls and boys to have their separate prayer groups. The girls attending their own prayer service eagerly told me about the prayers they say, and how they enjoy organising their own girls' prayer service. It was wonderful to see girls of all abilities really supporting each other and appreciating the input of all those involved. The boys' prayer group was initiated by four students who made it their mission to enlarge the group, which they have successfully done, with 13 boys now attending. They now want to ensure that there will be other boys who will take responsibility for taking the lead, so that when they have graduated from LJFS the group will continue to pray together and attract other students to join them. When asked why it was important to them, they expressed that it is a time to connect to God and concentrate on the prayers, as well as lead and give back to the school.

- Spirituality and deeper thought is becoming more intertwined with the Jewish Studies curriculum. This was seen in the Year 7 lessons where there was a discussion about how *Chametz* (leavened food) is something that we want to rid ourselves of at *Pesach*. The teacher shared with the class what she considers her "*Chametz*", which gave permission for students to likewise speak openly, making the task impactful. "My *chametz* that I want to get rid of are the things that hold me back from praying five times a day, I know I should, but sometimes other things get in the way, and it is Ramadan tomorrow. I will try and take my own *chametz* away and connect more to God." "I am addicted to TikTok, that is my *Chametz*".

The student survey also showed the students are being given more opportunities to focus on the spiritual in their lives. "We do a lot of exercises to do with reflecting and thinking." "We often have philosophical debates which are very interesting."

- In discussions with parents of past students, one summed up the outcomes of the school's philosophy, "It gave confidence without arrogance." Another parent explained how the school catered for her child's special needs stating that, "The school doesn't believe in trying to fit square pegs into round holes, rather it changes the shape of the holes." A current parent at the school expressed their thoughts, "What I like about LJFS is the religious bit of the school seems to just 'run through' everything."

Quality of Leadership and management:

- The strong and cohesive Leadership Team consisting of the Executive Headteacher, the Deputy Headteacher and the Head of Jewish Studies work closely together, sharing the workload and supporting each other. This is appreciated by the parents as was shown in the survey. "The school as a whole encourages very high standards of Jewish Studies. The Head of Jewish Studies and Head Teacher are fantastic leaders." In conversation with the school leaders, it was clear that they have the shared aims for the school, and this was echoed when meeting with the Chair of Governors and the School Chaplain. Members of staff, both Jewish and non-Jewish, said they felt very much part of the LJFS team. "LJFS is a great place to work with a supportive leadership team, strong community ethos and conscientious students".
- With the difficulties in finding Jewish Studies teachers in Leeds, the Governors and Leadership team have been creative in fulfilling the schools needs through third-party providers for example, the two Jewish Studies teachers from *Mizrachi* have a good rapport with the students and deliver creative and thought-provoking lessons. The Leeds *Kollel* (an institute for advanced Jewish studies) provides teachers for the Higher tracks and the school has strong links with LJOY- Leeds Jewish Orthodox Youth, for informal Jewish education activities. The also have the benefit of accessing the Zone Community Centre. The Chair of Governors, the School Chaplain and members of staff led by the Senior Leadership Team are proactive in encouraging Jewish students to participate in a Jewish life, and value the strength of their developing identity and their place within

- the community.
- The Head of Jewish Studies recognises the importance of experiential Judaism as well as classroom study. With the support of the Governors, School Chaplain and staff members, whole school events are organised around festivals and other significant days. Post Covid celebrations were arranged for the students who had their *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs* during lockdown and a recent *Shabbat* celebration for LJFS families, past and present, was arranged to celebrate the school's 10th anniversary. These events are greatly appreciated by parents and students and are a great opportunity for bring their classroom learning to reality. As expressed by parents, "My daughter has the chance to show skills practically including at the LJFS *Shabbat* a couple of weeks ago". "My daughter was able to take an active role in the *Shabbat* service". "A great communal event for extended school family. Loved that the kids led the *Shabbat* service the other week in *Shul* (synagogue)."
 - The school leaders also ensure there are many opportunities within school life for students to develop a strong sense of self, belief, and faith in line with their own family background. The LJFS students show that they value the diversity within the school and the opportunity to develop an understanding of each other. "My son is a child for whom school is not necessarily a natural fit, but he is so happy at LJFS." "We are not Jewish religion, in fact we are Muslim, but we very much welcome the way the school's Jewish ethos enhances our child's appreciation of their own Muslim faith."
 - A very successful example of senior leaders and governors responding to the needs of students is the establishment of The Hub. Senior leaders and governors proposed a model and secured funding for this new, well-resourced provision. The Hub provides a bespoke Jewish education for a small group of students who greatly benefit from a tailor-made curriculum and the support of additional adults, as expressed by a parent, "My child attends the Hub, and they are amazingly well catered for." Observing one of their pre-*Pesach* (Passover) lessons, the students were clearly engaged and motivated to develop their Jewish knowledge through the experiential style lesson which included dance, song and food.
 - Members of staff expressed that they feel supported by the senior leaders, "I know I can always approach the Head of Jewish Studies and he always listens to any request, and so will the rest of the school leaders". "Leaders are always available to help and support both staff and students". As we heard from several members of the school community, the school has the right balance in being inclusive and celebrating diversity, without losing a firm focus on Jewish education. "As a non-Jewish member of staff, I have always felt supported and encouraged to embrace all things Jewish. I have loved learning about the different aspects of the faith and joined the school because of the sense of family and community within it." "Everyone is encouraged to take part in the Jewish Festivals and gain a greater understanding, we are invited to *Shul* and other events and feel fully inclusive whilst remaining respectful towards other religions".

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Continue to embed the new Jewish Studies curriculum including tracking impact over time. In the Parents' Survey a comment stated, "Love that the houses have been named after the four values. Much better making meaningful links between the new curriculum and the school's core values of *Tzedek*, *Chesed*, *Mishpat* and *Rachamim* could now be extended throughout the curriculum to give further importance and meaning to the school's key values.
- Continue to increase opportunities for the students personal and spiritual development by providing further occasions for pupils to advance their ability to be reflective in lessons, assemblies, and prayer times. Empower the students to express themselves

verbally in this area by modelling vocabulary which gives them the ability and confidence to speak reflectively about their own beliefs and perspectives on life.

Statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (<i>Tefillah</i>)	Met
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Summary of Questionnaires

Pikuach invited parents and carers of pupils at Leeds Jewish Free School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 55 people responded to the survey.

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- “My daughter is now really flourishing doing her GCSE options and has been well supported during some anxious times when there was Covid and home schooling.”
- My child is very happy in the school, and I would recommend LJFS to any other parents.
- “The staff at this school is a small, a close-knit school has helped my son greatly with feeling safe and secure.”
- Some homework is provided but I don’t believe that homework is necessarily conducive to a child’s learning. The experiences they have in school and in other outside activities give just as much if not more support and learning.
- Doesn’t get much Jewish Studies homework but I’m happy with that.

Pikuach invited pupils at Leeds Jewish Free School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 120 pupils responded to the survey.

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- I’m positive in JS and pretty decent at it.
- I am a different religion and so it does not really make me close to my god but sometimes makes me understand about their religion and how it works.
- Our school is extremely involved in the Jewish community and always trying to add extra ways to add in religion to our lives in the best way they can but never force anyone.

Pikuach invited members of staff at Leeds Jewish Free School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 15 members of staff responded to the survey.

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- Children will be children and going through adolescence is not easy, so they will sometimes challenge the limits. However, with a consistent staff response through our PAL behaviour system, escalation is rare.
- We have a strong sense of community, where we all look out for one another.
- Any incidents that arise are dealt with effectively by SLT.(Senior Management Team)
- Effective CPD, safeguarding updates and training is delivered effectively. I feel supported in knowing what to do and who to go to.

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.