

SIMON MARKS JEWISH PRIMARY SCHOOL INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority: Hackney

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates: 5 & 6 December 2023

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

Type of school: Primary

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of children: 3 - 11

Mixed /Single sex: Mixed

Number on roll: 120

Chair of Governors: Howard Pallis

Headteacher: Gulcan Metin Asdoyuran

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Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Esther Colman

Team Inspector: Liza Taitz

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. They, together with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) observed 16 parts of Jewish Studies (JS) and *Ivrit* (Hebrew) lessons, assemblies, and *Tefillah* (Jewish Prayer). They also had detailed discussions with all interested parties including pupils, teachers and parents. Inspectors also scrutinised the *Pikuach* questionnaires. They carried out joint observations with members of the SLT in order to ascertain their expertise and knowledge in the monitoring process. They also met with the Chair of Governors and JS Link governor, SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator), Head of JS, and the school's Consultant Rabbi in residence. Inspectors scrutinised relevant documentation, including the school's JS Self Evaluation Form (SEF), its Development Plan (SDP), curriculum documents, pupils' work, floor books and data.

Information about the school

- Simon Marks Jewish Primary School is a one-form, voluntary-aided primary school for boys and girls. It has a Modern Orthodox Zionist ethos with a focus on pupils reading and speaking *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew). Pupils enjoy one and a half hours of *Ivrit* and two hours of Jewish Studies per week from Year 1 upwards. Jewish Studies is fully integrated into the 7 areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Simon Marks is a Jewish school where children of all faiths or none feel included and catered for. The school is made up of 51% Jewish children, 39% Christian and 10% Muslim pupils. All fully participate in *Tefillah* and in all aspects of the Jewish Studies curriculum. 35% of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Pupils who have SEND study the same curriculum content as others. Staff know how to adapt materials so that these pupils can learn and remember new skills and knowledge. In order to integrate a new pupil in the Y4 *Ivrit* lesson, the teacher provided him with transliterated Hebrew sentences to enable him to join in the learning experience.
- There is a strong leadership team guided by the Headteacher which includes the Assistant Head who is also Head of Jewish Studies and the Consultant Rabbi in residence. Governors, leaders, and teachers aim for consistently high quality and robust teaching and learning, catering for pupils of all abilities and all faiths and cultures.

Inspection judgement Grade

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

What is it like to attend this Jewish school?

- Pupils feel it is a privilege to attend this school. The Year 6 pupils told us: " Being part of Simon Marks is truly amazing - it is an honour to be in this school." In the pupils' survey 97.5% agreed that their Jewish learning made them think more deeply about the subject they had been learning.
- Teachers know the-pupils well and all members of staff work collaboratively to ensure that the values and ethos of the school underpin everything they do, whether in Jewish Studies, *Ivrit* or secular lessons. During the weekly "Big Conversation" lesson with their class teacher, pupils are given the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon a range of moral and ethical questions. For example, one inspector attended a Year 6 session in which pupils discussed what faith meant to them. The discussion was skilfully managed and led pupils to reflect deeply on the issues of faith and belief in a very personal way. Other topics covered this year were 'Democracy'; "What does the word Community mean to you" and "How does it feel to be back at school"?
- 100% of parents tell us that their children are happy at school. They also comment in the survey that they send their children to this school because of the strong focus on Jewish values and the warm family atmosphere. These universal values cut across all faiths. The JS Link Governor commented that Jewish Studies permeates everything in this school like a golden thread. Inspectors saw evidence of this in assemblies and displays around the school where pupils were able to express their deep connection to their faith.
- New to the school since September 2023 is the Additional Resource Provision (ARP) which was established to provide an outstanding learning environment for pupils with autism. The new unit consists of two specialised classrooms and a sensory/nurture room. With the help of highly trained and experienced educators, the autistic pupils have been able to settle into an established routine and are making great progress. Currently there are 4 reception pupils who are non-verbal. When inspectors visited the unit, the pupils were making and decorating their own *Chanukiot* (candelabras used during the Festival of Lights - *Chanukah*).

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

Quality of Jewish Education

- Since the last inspection in June 2017 the school has addressed the areas for improvement. There is now a clear spiral JS curriculum framework which includes the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils should achieve by the time they leave school. All JS lessons observed by inspectors were at least good with some outstanding ones. In order to increase

the number of outstanding JS lessons, teachers need to make sure that the knowledge aspect of a lesson is always embedded before moving on to applying the knowledge to pupils' own lives. Pupils would also benefit from a wider range of creative activities to record and consolidate their learning.

- The senior leaders at Simon Marks work well together to improve and support all JS and *Ivrit* Teaching and Learning. The Headteacher observes *Ivrit* and JS lessons and provides invaluable feedback to teachers on how to extend their pupils' learning further. Inspectors noted the deep and detailed feedback given to the *Ivrit* teachers by the Headteacher in a supportive and encouraging way. This atmosphere of striving for excellence, ensures that pupils have a high standard of both *Ivrit* and Hebrew reading throughout the school, as observed by inspectors.
- Displays around the school are effective in supporting its ethos. There are lots of examples of pupil voice where pupils have been given the chance to express their views about a range of moral issues. For example, in one display pupils had shared creative and ambitious ways in which they would try to make the world a better place. Displays in the dedicated *Ivrit* room are particularly impressive and reflect the ambitious nature of the *Ivrit* curriculum. They show pupils' examples of the level of written Hebrew which is targeted from Year 1 up to Year 6 and are both visually appealing and a powerful motivational tool. Many displays with pupils' work have their names in both English and Hebrew. This demonstrates how much *Ivrit* is valued at Simon Marks.
- The intent of the school's Jewish curriculum is clear and provides memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high quality learning for all pupils, including those with additional needs, and those from different religious backgrounds. The curriculum is spiral which ensures progression from year to year. This is particularly important for the *Chagim* (Festivals) curriculum so that each year group learns a different aspect of the festival. For example, when learning about *Chanukah*, pupils in EYFS were learning about the story of *Chanukah*, while pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 focused on the characters in the story and the miracle of the oil. To make the curriculum even stronger, it would be good to link *Ivrit* and JS further by reinforcing the key *Ivrit Chagim* vocabulary in JS lessons.
- The impact of the Jewish curriculum is strong and contributes well to fostering pupils' commitment to continued Jewish study. The pupils are enthusiastic learners, and a number told us that they will take what they have learnt here with them to their secondary school. One Year 6 pupil said that she will take the 4 steps of Repentance with her as we all make mistakes in life, and this is a good guide on how to act. Feedback in pupils' written work is of a very high standard with evidence of pupil's responses to comments and assessment for learning. Pupils are clear about teachers' expectations through the learning intentions and success criteria which are used in all lessons effectively. *Ivrit* teachers regularly review their pupils' work and keep a record of the progress made by each pupil based on the expected outcomes at the end of each term.

Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development

- Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development (JPSD) is a core strength of the school and permeates all lessons during the day. All staff are invested and committed to the ethos of Simon Marks, and this is evidenced through experiences such as the Big Conversation. During an inspiring *Tefillah* session in the Early Years, children discussed the meaning of *Modeh Ani* (morning prayer) and shared their thoughts on something they are thankful for with each other, skilfully led by the teacher. Similar reflection time is built in across the school as observed in a Year 6 discussion on how pupils feel when they start their day with prayer. One pupil said: "I feel faith that *Hashem* is going to be with me all day" while another one felt that "*Hashem* will help me with the work I will do today."
- The way the school goes about developing pupils' Jewish character and values is exemplary and is worthy of being disseminated widely as an example to other schools. All

teachers, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, are excellent role models for pupils' personal behaviour, attitude and spiritual development and exemplify the Jewish values of the school. This is achieved through regular training for all staff on Jewish Festivals, values and aspects of prayer. As one teacher commented in the survey "This school gives phenomenal opportunities for staff with regular staff meetings to update us all on upcoming festivals and High Holidays. We are all valued, and the school's moral values fit in with my moral values."

- Assemblies and *Tefillah* create an atmosphere of reflection, awe and wonder (*Morah*) which is truly unique. Each *Tefillah* is introduced in a meaningful way and all pupils and teachers model respect while there is a palpable feeling of spirituality in the room. The pupils have a good understanding of the prayers and were able to share the fact that they experience holiness (*Kedushah*) in their everyday life as everything they do in school, even maths and English is *Torah* (5 books of Moses).
- The ethos of the school is tangible and highly valued by pupils, teachers and parents as reflected in the survey results where 97% of parents say they value and support the school's Jewish ethos. The school prepares pupils for life in the Jewish and wider community by developing their understanding of how to be responsible active citizens. The *Chanukah* lighting at Hackney Town Hall by the pupils of Simon Marks is an annual highlight and is an example of how pupils contribute positively to the wider community.
- Year 6 pupils impressed the inspectors by the way they were able to articulate their Jewish knowledge and spiritual insights, and the way these impact their daily lives and the choices they make. For example, when discussing what they will take from their JS lessons for life outside school, pupils mentioned "how to be honest and not to embarrass someone in front of a large crowd". "When you meet someone new– respect their faith and you can have a good friendship. We should not stereotype people". One pupil was grateful for the *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Bringing in the Sabbath) weekly assemblies where she learnt how to light candles for *Shabbat*, a skill she will need in the future.
- Pupils engage in a range of extra-curricular activities that offer personal or spiritual fulfilment such as GIFT which teaches them to be givers through helping those in need, and workshops with SEED which "help us to learn more" as one Year 6 pupil explained. One of the highlights Year 6 pupils mentioned to us was taking part in ETGAR last year, an exciting inter-school Jewish General Knowledge quiz for Year 5 pupils across all Jewish primary schools which inspires a love of learning.

Leadership and management:

- The leadership team together with the Consultant Rabbi in residence are passionate about Jewish Studies and *Ivrit*. Together they ensure that Simon Marks meets its aims and safeguards its very strong ethos. The leadership of the school, including governors, have a strong commitment to high standards of work and to pupils' Jewish spiritual development and wellbeing.
- One of the strengths of this school is that under the strong leadership of the Headteacher, JS, *Ivrit* and class teachers see themselves as part of one team with the same aims and focus for excellent teaching and learning.
- The school is very fortunate in that the Headteacher is a foreign language specialist and has been instrumental in driving the improvement in the standard of *Ivrit* across the whole school. *Ivrit* is now a real strength of this school and other schools would benefit from visiting Simon Marks and learning from its expertise.
- The school's leadership ensures that teachers receive focused and highly effective professional development. For example, the Assistant Head, who is also Head of JS, is studying for his NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship). Teachers' understanding of pedagogy consistently builds and develops over time. This translates into improvements in the teaching of the JS and *Ivrit* curriculum as observed in the feedback by the Headteacher to the *Ivrit* staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- To increase the number of outstanding JS lessons, teachers need to make sure that the knowledge aspect is always embedded before moving on to applying the knowledge to pupils' own lives. Pupils would also benefit from a wider range of creative activities to record and consolidate their learning such as re-telling the weekly *Torah* portion through drama or a cartoon.
- Document the clear progression that is evident across all year groups in *Tefillah* by creating a curriculum map.
- Introduce some more extra-curricular activities, as discussed with the JS team, such as Israeli dancing and a *Rosh Chodesh* (new month) monthly club.

Statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (tefillah)	Met
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Summary of Questionnaires

Pikuach invited parents and carers of pupils at school to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 34 people responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited Y5 - 6 pupils at school to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 16 pupils responded to the survey

Pikuach invited members of staff to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 14 out of 21 members of staff responded to the survey.

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.