

AKIVA SCHOOL INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority: Barnet

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates: 8th & 9th July 2024

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: 4 to 11 years old

Mixed /Single sex: Mixed

Number on roll: 420

Chair of Governors: Davina Solomons-Wise

Headteacher: Claire Silver

Address: The Sternberg Centre for Judaism
80 East End Road
Finchley, London
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Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Rebbetzen Esther Cohen

Team Inspector: Mrs Ruth Wilkinson

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 conducted over two days by two inspectors who observed Jewish Studies (JS) lessons, an Israeli dance lesson and one Religious Education (RE) lesson. They also listened to pupils' Hebrew reading at different ages and in different year groups

They attended Years 1 and 2 *Havdalah* prayers (Prayers at the end of *Shabbat*), *Shacharit* (Morning prayers) and *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after meals). All taking place separately, in different year groups. Inspectors also attended Key Stage 2 (KS2) assembly.

Inspectors had numerous discussions with the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, who leads on Jewish values, JS Lead, Chair of Governors and other representatives of the governing body, teachers, and the SENDCO (Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator).

They also had discussions with pupils in Years 2, 3, 4 and 5, and spoke informally with several other pupils and members of staff, parents and stakeholders during assemblies, lessons and around the school. They heard pupils reading Hebrew. Year 6 pupils were not present at school as they were on a school residential as informed by the Headteacher, who requested that inspection should nevertheless go ahead.

Inspectors looked at pupils' work, their books, displays, and photos of past *Chagim* (Jewish Festivals), celebrations, and events.

They looked at the different components of the JS curriculum, Humanities curriculum, tracking (Pupil progress) and school documentation, including policies.

Information about the school

- Akiva is a voluntary-aided co-educational, two-form entry primary school based in Finchley, London. The school moved into a new building in 2008 located on the site of the Sternberg Centre for Judaism, from whose extensive grounds and facilities they are able to benefit. There are 420 pupils on the school roll and an intake of 60 children for Reception.
- Akiva is the only Progressive Jewish school in the UK, primarily serving families from the Liberal, Reform and Masorti movements. The school is proud of its Progressive Jewish ethos, modelling a Judaism that is egalitarian, and which is a fundamental and an integral part of the fabric of the school. Its Judaism reflects that of their stakeholder communities who founded the school and continue to guide the school's Jewish life.
- Akiva celebrates and engages with the racial and cultural diversity of its school

community. Akiva’s Jewish ethos runs alongside its school ethos. The school enjoys excellent relations with local faith and non-faith schools.

- The school follows the National Curriculum. Jewish Studies is taught as a distinct subject and is also integrated into the broader curriculum. Hebrew is taught as a modern foreign language and is inspected under Ofsted.
- Since the last *Pikuach* inspection in 2018, the school has appointed a new Headteacher (September 2019), a new JS Lead (Autumn 2018), a new EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) team, and new SENDCOs. The present SENDCO started in April 2022. Akiva has also had a new Chair of Governors, and the school has developed new operating procedures since the last inspection.

Inspection judgement

Grade

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

What is it like to attend this Jewish school?

- Progressive Jewish values, observance and ritual are at the heart of the Akiva curriculum. These are integrated and laced through the school’s daily life enabling pupils to connect to Judaism through different areas of the curriculum. Pupils benefit from the school’s strong values which also supports their Behaviour Code. Progressive Jewish values that underpin Akiva’s Behaviour Code are *Tzedek* (Justice) and *Kavod* (Respect). Added to these are three other school values: *Chessed* (Kindness), *Chossen* (Resilience) and *Yosher* (Integrity). The values of *Kavod*, *Chessed*, *Chossen* and *Yosher* are displayed throughout the school and are regularly referred to and are linked with pupils’ Jewish learning during lessons, assemblies and *Tefillah* (Collective worship).
- The school fosters a spirit of community with a sense of belonging without judgement. Where parents and pupils feel both accepted and welcomed. Many parents described Akiva as a community school with a community atmosphere. One parent talked about the care and kindness she experienced when going through challenging times, saying that she had not experienced this in any other community. A parent expressed her approval of the connection with St. Theresa’s School saying that her child had Jewish pride but was not fazed by other religions.
- Jewish Studies is a core part of pupils’ whole learning both in discrete lessons and also by being integrated into the general curriculum with a focus on Progressive Jewish values. In addition, we observed pupils thoroughly enjoying a *Shiur Torah* (Lesson on the 5 Books of Moses scroll) delivered by a specialist teacher, which many refer to as the highlight of their Jewish learning. One pupil said “I enjoy how we do a lot of translating Hebrew to English. He (the teacher) really helped us understand how a translator can use and change words, like learning about the different gaps in the Torah and how the

Rabbis created interpretations”. A second pupil commenting on *Shiur Torah* said: “When I learn I can feel a bit more Jewish.” This was backed up by parents’ comments. One parent shared, “Gorgeous school. My child goes to shul and can answer questions on the *Sedra* (Weekly *Torah* portion) in the children’s service”.

- Pupils enjoy and benefit from a Buddy Programme where children from Reception and Year 1 are paired with pupils from Years 5 and 6. Older pupils spend at least one session a week reading and joining with their buddies during play, and also working together during some of the Jewish festivals. A pupil in Year 5 explained, “I like when on a special day we made special booklets on Israel and famous people. We looked at the people and we were inspired by people. We had lunch with our buddies. Before we go to buddy break, we did Israeli flags. Whenever there is a festival, we do things with our buddies and help them learn. It is really cute and fun”.

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

Quality of Jewish Education

- The school’s curriculum is broadly divided into four stands. These are Jewish Values, Jewish Practice (including *Tefillah*), Jewish Identity, and Jewish Knowledge and Literacy. Jewish Knowledge and Literacy is assessed and tracked using the quantitative tracking and assessment programme used across core and foundation subjects. Jewish Values and Jewish Practice assessments are informed by teachers’ observations of pupils’ participation in class and the work they produce. Progress in Jewish knowledge is shared as a distinct foundation subject in the end of year report whilst comments about Jewish Values and Practice is written in the introduction of the report under ‘Personal Learning Journey Comment’. One report, for example, says “She joins in during morning *Shacharit* prayers and especially loved learning new prayers in preparation for Year 2. She is taking an increased interest in her Jewish identity and asks many thoughtful questions during JS lessons”. Several parents were uncertain when they received or would receive information about their child’s progress in Jewish learning. One parent stated, “Maybe it’ll be in the end of the year report?” while another said, “No updates at the moment, only from my child”. This reflected the view of several parents. The majority of parents agree that their child receives a good understanding of Jewish values.
- The intent of the school’s Jewish curriculum is well thought through, organised and coherently planned. It links to the school’s values of *Kavod*, *Chessed*, *Chossen* and *Yosher*. Recently, the Jewish strand has been added to the Humanities Curriculum Map and pupils can recognise and talk about its integration to their learning. The curriculum’s content and delivery, support and highlight the Progressive ethos of the school and promotes cross-curricular links between Jewish and secular subjects. In some lessons, pupils engage in discussions and are encouraged to be reflective.
- Teaching is overall good. Some lessons had outstanding elements to them which enabled the pupils to reflect on what they were learning and make connections to previous knowledge. In some lessons pupils would benefit from being encouraged to reflect on the tasks’ meaning and purpose. Some lessons were teacher led with less opportunities for pupils to think reflectively. Lessons for each year group are planned by the two parallel form class teachers. They use the same lesson objectives and resource materials, yet in some year groups, there was a noticeable difference in the way the topic was delivered using the same resource. For example, whereas in one year group children made links between the topic and their own understanding of the world, the parallel class was still struggling to understand the main focus of the lesson. Checking pupils’ understanding at an earlier stage would have given the opportunity to correct misconceptions. Teachers use well-prepared resources, such as PowerPoint

presentations to enhance their lessons, demonstrating a good use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology).

- Teachers continually assess the strengths and needs of learners, adapting their teaching accordingly to ensure all learners can meet expectations. This was observed in lessons with all children including those with SEND receiving extra support. For example, during *Tefillah*, a child was being guided and encouraged to use the *Siddur* (Prayer book) and to take part in prayers. All pupils benefit from having their class teacher teach JS as they know their pupils well and can effectively provide for their needs especially those with SEND, as directed by the SENDCO.
- During conversations with the inspectors the upper year groups of pupils recall their Jewish knowledge and could explain what they have learned, either from memory or by looking at their books. One Year 5 pupil explained concerning the story of *Purim* (Festival commemorating Esther, the Jewish Queen of Persia, who saved the Jewish people from execution by Haman, the Advisor to the Persian king), that “we were understanding how women were part of the *Purim* story and how not all stories of festivals have women in them. Some festivals there are stories where no women are involved in it. I like how Esther, a main character, is a part of it. I feel really connected with this story because I am a girl”.
- Taking account of their starting points, pupils in KS2 are confident and display good knowledge and understanding in relation to the school’s Jewish curriculum. Younger pupils were proud to show their favourite work and were eager to talk about their pictures, but some struggled to make the connection with the content of JS learning. There are opportunities for staff to engage pupils’ interest and encourage them to succeed. Almost all parents who filled in the questionnaire said that their child is happy at school. Inspectors saw happy pupils during their visit, yet their responses to the questionnaire indicated that 51.33% of them only sometimes enjoyed coming to school and 78.57% out of 112 pupils in Years 5 and 6 said that their JS lessons were sometimes interesting. Older pupils were able to pinpoint where JS was taught through the integrated curriculum, could find the links in their books and talk about their learning.
- Hebrew reading is taught as an integral part of the *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) curriculum. The pupils are introduced to *Ivrit* in the Reception Class where they learn through speaking and listening but are not yet introduced to the letter sounds. From Year 1 the pupils begin a more structured programme, where Hebrew reading is taught through *Otiot Medabrot* (a specialist Modern Hebrew programme). Reading practice takes place regularly in school. There is no home/school reading programme. Pupils from a range of classes were eager to share their good knowledge of Hebrew reading. There was a range of levels, as would be expected. The pupils in the reading groups respectfully gave their classmates the time to work out tricky words. All pupils impressively had the skills and confidence to persevere with trying to work out unfamiliar words and mostly achieved their aim.
- Pupils participate and learn from a structured programme including a rotation of events of Jewish ritual significance according to year groups. Events are attended by parents and carers and provide an authentic and meaningful Progressive Jewish experience. Year 2, for example, have a *Chagigat Siddur* (Celebrating receiving one’s first prayer book), while Year 4 attend a *Tu Bishvat Seder* (New Year for the trees celebratory event). In addition, the school chooses two Focus Festivals each academic year when parents/carers join their child’s class to learn about and celebrate the chosen Jewish festival. A parent talked about how the school has motivated their child to want to be more involved, “The older one was not involved in Jewish Studies but now wants to know more about it. We started to do at home, festivals and Friday nights. It gave her a way of wanting to do more.”
- The school offers an extensive range of extracurricular activities and clubs. These take place before, after and during the school day creating a level wrap-around schooling for Akiva pupils. Parents spoke about the great benefits of the *Shtilim* (Ivrit programme) which runs before the beginning of the school day. *Shtilim* aims to teach *Ivrit* as a modern

foreign language and as a tool for engaging with the Jewish tradition and Israeli society. Parents expressed how the *Shtilim* programme compliments the school's *Ivrit* and Hebrew reading curriculum and also positively impacts on their child's fluency in Hebrew reading. Israeli dance lessons take place as part of the school curriculum and as extra-curricular clubs. The observed Israeli dance lesson was impressive with all of Year 2 actively participating. The pupils knew the words to the Hebrew songs and were clearly familiar with the dance steps. It was a pleasure to see the enjoyment on their faces with all members of staff also participating. Pupils spoke about taking part in the Primary Schools Dance Festival and how they enjoyed participating in the dancing at school on *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Israel Independence Day). One of the Hebrew teachers is also the Israeli dance teacher which has the advantage of her teaching the pupils the words of the songs and their meaning. An Israeli Dance Club is also held weekly at a lunchtime for Year 3 pupils, which many of the Year 2 pupils hope to join next year. Other lunchtime clubs include Football, Art, Chess and Performing Arts, amongst many others. Club at Akiva runs as a before and after school facility from 8am before school and until 6pm after school. As well as games and activities this club provides time for homework and reading.

Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development

- The curriculum extends beyond the academic. For example, in Year 1 Spring term, pupils learn about *Tzedakah* (Charity) linking it with helping the poor and not being selfish. This provides for pupils' broader growth including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In some of the lessons, pupils were encouraged to reflect especially during *Shiur Torah* lessons, which received high praise from pupils. The school curriculum and wider work support pupils' developing resilience, confidence and responsibility.
- The school helps pupils develop strong positive values which reflect and encompasses both Progressive Jewish and British values. These are delivered through the integrated curriculum, assemblies, JS and the day-to-day life of the school. Pupils can recognise and link them with life at school and personal attitudes and behaviours. A pupil showed understanding about integrity when writing on the importance of keeping promises: "If you don't then you should not have promised because people won't trust you and won't like you." One parent stated that their child receives a good understanding of Jewish values, linking them with British values, saying, "From issues concerning *Tikkun Olam* (Repairing the world to make it better), to *Tzedaka* (Charity) - my daughter understands how her Judaism fits in with her British identity and she does so with pride."
- KS2 pupils can articulate feelings about friendship and good behaviour and can talk about how their actions may make a difference to the environment. Pupils are beginning to recognise God in a meaningful way in connection to their *Tefillah*. However, many pupils struggle to connect experiences in their lives to something that cannot be perceived by the senses and to articulate what it means to them. They do not seem to have the range of language to spontaneously express their feelings about Judaism and their relationship with God. Older pupils can talk about events and personalities that move them but were only able to relate experiences in a more shallow, less spiritual way.
- Teachers actively encourage children to join in with *Tefillah* and they generally participate with enthusiasm. The school's personalised *Siddur* allows pupils to take ownership of their prayers and make a personal reflection on the prayers they say. In Year 3 *Shacharit*, the classroom was well-staffed allowing some pupils to have the individual attention they needed. *Tefillah* began with the pupils singing a beautiful rendition of *Mah tovu* (a Jewish prayer to greet the morning). This set the atmosphere for the rest of the *Shacharit tefillah*. As the pupils followed in their own bespoke *Siddurim*,

they were given opportunities to verbalise the importance of certain prayers. At *Baruch She'amar* (a Jewish prayer) one pupil remarked 'About promises, it's important so that people trust you. It's important as it shows that you are kind'. Pupils use hand actions which helps them understand the meaning of the *Shema* (One of Judaism's most important prayers).

- The pupils understand the rules of good behaviour in the school resulting in a calm and happy atmosphere. Akiva pupils are taught Progressive Jewish values, practises and rituals, and the rationale behind them, enabling them to make informed choices, where appropriate. There is a non-judgemental atmosphere amongst pupils who are appreciative and accepting of differences and are given equal opportunities in all facets of Jewish life at school. One pupil talked about diversity, saying that "There are different types of Judaism, but I think it is good that you think what you like about Judaism. You might believe in God, you might not".
- Pupils of different ages showed an appreciation and sense of responsibility for the world around them. In Reception pupils were observed sharing examples of how they are '*Chessed Heroes*' by taking care of mini beasts. The concept of *Tikun Olam* (Repairing the world to make it better) as a focus was spoken about in lessons and highlighted during meetings with stakeholders. One pupil in KS2 said, "I love how Judaism is not just about helping people, and it is also about helping the environment."

Quality of Leadership and Management:

- There is a seamless understanding and integration between all members of the school's leadership and management teams, including governors. All stakeholders who the inspectors met can clearly articulate the school's values and vision. The school is aware of and has a great understanding of their pupils, families and staff. It is proactive in welcoming families and providing a strong community spirit where everyone feels cared for and valued. Many parents commented on this being a strong asset of Akiva school.
- The Headteacher has a deep understanding of her school and has introduced very effective ideas since the last inspection, for example, the Golden Rules and school values. Together with her staff, she has developed a shared clarity of where they want the school to be, beyond the short term. Staff describe the Headteacher's leadership as using a positive relational approach which fosters very healthy relationships with everyone benefiting from her support. A staff member described the Headteacher as "not afraid to roll up her sleeves and offer to help the staff". A parent shared that "I have been impressed by the Headteacher and she knows what she wants for the school".
- Leaders have high expectations of pupils' work, spiritual development and behaviour. The Senior Leadership Team recognises that the teaching of Jewish learning requires further work to become outstanding, for example, by pairing teachers in a way where experienced members of staff support those with less expertise or knowledge of Progressive Jewish Values. The school has a clear vision for its next steps. It works with its teachers providing training that supports and helps staff to understand and deliver the school's identified values.
- The Jewish Studies Lead oversees the Jewish Studies curriculum together with the Deputy Head, who oversees Jewish values. Working together, they ensure that standards are continually improved. They have written the school's *Siddur* together and share ideas to benefit the pupils through the school's integrated Jewish Studies curriculum.

- Akiva’s governors led by their Chair have a solid understanding of the school and are proactive in monitoring and supporting it and the leadership team. They have a clear, shared and ambitious vision of Jewish education and Spiritual development in accordance with the Progressive ethos of the school. They describe the school as “feeling that you are walking into a family”, a view endorsed by parents. Governors play an active part in managing the school. There are several sub-committees with different foci, all of which the Headteacher is part of, thereby coordinating all aspects of schoolwork. Some governors volunteer at school and visit the school regularly, including doing learning walks. Together with the leadership team, they place a strong emphasis on well-being.
- Staff talk about the ‘Magic of Akiva’ coming from ‘everyone having each other’s back’ and being there for each other. A teacher describes the school leadership and staff as-being “one big team”.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Ensure consistency in the quality of lesson delivery and teaching, ensuring that both forms in each year group receive at least good or outstanding lessons that inspire the pupils.
- The curriculum intent offers opportunities for Jewish personal and spiritual development. Pupils would benefit from a better use of those opportunities which help them to connect experiences in their lives with the spiritual. Such opportunities will also enable pupils to articulate what this means to them and to learn from each other’s perspective. For example, using opportunities offered by the curriculum enabling pupils to reflect and make meaningful connections between Jewish experiences and learning at the school, in their personal lives and with something that cannot be perceived by the senses i.e. the spiritual.
- Pupils would benefit from developing the vocabulary and range of language to talk about their relationship with God and their feelings about Judaism and how their learning brings meaning to life in and outside school.

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| 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 School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 125 people responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited pupils at School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 113 pupils responded to the survey.

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

GLOSSARY

WHAT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS MEAN:

| GRADE | JUDGEMENT | DESCRIPTION |
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| 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. |