

ETZ CHAIM PRIMARY SCHOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority Barnet

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates 13th and 14th December 2023

Lead Inspector Dr Alan Shaw

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

Type of school Primary

School category Free School

Age range of children 4-11

Mixed /Single sex Mixed

Number on roll 182

Chairs of Governors Mrs Elizabeth Bennett / Mr Samuel Shaerf

Headteacher Mrs Hannah Martin

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Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Dr Alan Shaw
Team Inspector: Mr Richard Felsenstein

Introduction

The inspectors looked in detail at the following:

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

The Inspection was conducted over two days. Together with the Headteacher and Head of Jewish Studies, inspectors visited nine part-lessons, seven class *Tefillah* (prayer) sessions and observed a whole school *Chanukah* (Festival of Lights) assembly to which parents and grandparents were invited. Inspectors held meetings with Year 2 and Year 6 pupils and they also spoke informally with pupils during lessons. Inspectors held meetings with the Headteacher, Head of Jewish Studies, governors and visiting rabbis. Inspectors examined the School's Self Evaluation Form (SEF), School Improvement Plan (SIP), Subject Action Plans for Ivrit and Jewish Studies, Curriculum Maps, assessment and tracking documentation, pupils' work, displays and resources.

Information about the school

- Etz Chaim Jewish Primary School is a one-form entry primary school and provides for children between the ages of 4-11 years old (Reception to Year 6 inclusive), serving the local community in Mill Hill, North London. The school opened in September 2011 and was one of the first new Free Schools that year. For its first two years, the school was located in temporary accommodation. It moved to its permanent site in September 2013.
- The school is committed to the practice of Modern Orthodox Judaism under the religious authority of the Chief Rabbi.
- There are currently 182 pupils of mixed gender on roll: 84 boys and 98 girls. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of children from ethnic minority groups.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average and includes a number of Israeli children, temporarily living in the UK.
- The proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) is below average, as is the proportion of those with Educational Health Care Plans.
- The school's stated aims are "to develop within the pupils a positive commitment and passion for Judaism and British Values. Our Jewish ethos and values permeate all aspects of school life and learning within it. Every child, whether or not they are of the Jewish faith, will, we believe, benefit by learning the ethics and values associated with Judaism. We want our pupils to leave our school understanding how they can make a positive contribution to their community and to the wider world."

Inspection judgements

Grade

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

What is it like to attend this school?

- Pupils reported that they enjoy coming to school and that it is a safe and secure setting. One pupil stated, “From the minute I walk in, I feel it is a safe, special, happy place for me.” Another said, “I know who to go to if I have worries.” Leaders ensure that appropriate measures are taken to promote a positive and protected atmosphere. In the Parents’ Survey, 94% of respondents said that their child felt safe and 99% said that their child felt happy in school.
- Pupils display both respect and affection for the staff at this school. This was clear from the lessons observed by inspectors and from speaking to pupils who appreciate that “the teachers help us and make lessons fun – not boring.” Behaviour around the school is generally good and there is a calm and positive atmosphere. In the Parents’ Survey, 100% of parents said they would recommend the school to others.
- Pupils benefit from integrated learning activities because the school Leadership Team maximises opportunities to promote cross-curricular links between Jewish Studies, *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) and National Curriculum subjects. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities for “creating and designing” related to the festivals. One said that she was “so happy to be in a Jewish school - it’s a gift.”
- Pupils enjoy opportunities for extra-curricular activities, including an Israeli Dance Club, participating in the national Etgar (Y5 Jewish Knowledge) Quiz challenge, various trips and a Y5 *Shabbaton* (Shabbat residential experience).

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

Quality of Jewish Education

- The Quality of Jewish Education at Etz Chaim Primary School is good. A recently introduced and well-structured curriculum outlines how the Jewish Studies and *Ivrit* components go hand in hand to provide pupils with Jewish knowledge as well as Hebrew literacy. This is being reviewed and evaluated. Detailed curriculum maps for each year group outline the expected progress in Reading, Spoken *Ivrit*, Festivals, *Torah* (five books of Moses) texts and general Jewish Knowledge. Every opportunity is utilised to enhance the Jewish ethos of the school

and to use Biblical stories and texts as vehicles with which to teach *Middot* (ethical values). These are reinforced by activities both in the school and in the wider community, such as weekly charity collections and visits to elderly care homes. Leaders value the importance of involving families in their child's education and provide many opportunities for parents and grandparents to come into school such as the *Chagigat HaSiddur* (presentation of prayer books), *Chagigat HaChumash* (presentation of Biblical books) and festival assemblies. In addition, parents and grandparents are welcomed into school to act as volunteers to hear pupils read Hebrew. These opportunities are greatly appreciated with comments from parents including: "The *Chagigah* was wonderful - the children wrote and performed a poem about how much they love the Torah. It was very moving and special," and "I enjoy attending events such as *Kabbalat Shabbat* (welcoming the Sabbath ceremony) and parent workshops and can see how much the children gain from these."

- Educational displays in the entrance hall and corridors promote and reinforce pupils' knowledge and understanding of Jewish values. Classrooms have designated boards for *Chumash* (Bible studies), *Ivrit* and current topics. Innovative resources that encourage pupils to reflect and engage with Jewish Studies include a Visual *Sefer Torah* (Scroll of the Law) to which successive groups of Year 6 pupils contribute, and *Chodesh* (Monthly) Wheels which highlight key days and lessons in each month. Pupils are grateful to their teachers for providing "Jewish learning in a fun way" with drama, art, singing and interactive tools such as Kahoot, Jigzi and YouTube. In the Parents' Survey, 94% of respondents stated that their child enjoyed Jewish Studies with comments such as, "The ethos and Jewish values of the school are strong. My children love their Judaism because of what they have learnt at school," and "My child runs into school every day and speaks passionately about her learning - she is thrilled to start learning *Chumash*."
- The Jewish Studies and *Ivrit* teaching staff comprise one full-time and two part-time staff - equivalent to 2.45 full-time – a reduction from previous years. New schemes for Hebrew reading and teaching about the Jewish festivals have been introduced recently. These are still to be embedded fully and leaders acknowledge that further training in the classroom management of these would be beneficial to ensure more consistency across teaching and learning. The Hebrew reading scheme incorporates group reading and ensures that the children understand the meaning of the words. Pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 were heard reading and standards were as expected for their age and ability. The children like the new scheme and, as one Year 6 pupil said, "It's very important to understand what we are reading."
- The inspectors observed good teaching overall with pupils, who were engaged and interested. Lessons observed included a Key Stage 2 *Ivrit* lesson in which pupils composed short sentences in *Ivrit* on their individual whiteboards – one pupil was so proud of her work that she asked if she could photograph it before rubbing it out. In another Key Stage 2 *Ivrit* lesson, groups of pupils prepared and then performed plays in *Ivrit* to the class. One lesson based on the *Chanukah* story skilfully incorporated the values of pride and identity. In another, the teacher portrayed the Maccabean 'heroes' as exemplars to the children and elicited from them how they could be 'modern heroes' by helping others. Pupils clearly enjoy Jewish Studies and *Ivrit* at the school. One parent commented, "The Jewish Studies staff are all passionate about what they do and the children really love and value Jewish Studies."
- The school has developed an assessment and tracking system based on the secular system used in Barnet schools. This assesses pupils at the start of each school year and at the end

of each term so that each child's progress can be monitored and checked. A scrutiny by the inspectors of children's books identified different work for different ability groups. There were examples of effective use of praise to encourage pupils and 'I can....' statements which helped children understand whether they have met their learning objectives. However, the school's Marking Policy was not followed consistently as there was little evidence of developmental marking giving pupils guidance as to how they could improve their work further.

Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development

- Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development (JPSD) at Etz Chaim is outstanding. The way the school develops pupils' Jewish character and values is exemplary and is worthy of being disseminated widely as an example to other schools. Year 6 pupils spoke enthusiastically about their experiences at Etz Chaim. One pupil told the inspectors that "The school is special because the staff are amazing, it's a fun place to be, and a real community." The Jewish ethos pervades every aspect of life throughout the school. In corridors and classrooms, well-planned displays and artefacts project and enhance the Jewish values celebrated by the school. For example, in the entrance to the school, a *Chanukiah* (candelabra used during the festival of *Chanukah*) stood on a table covered with the Israeli flag with a question above it: "How many candles do we light tonight?" This table stood in front of the *Etz Chaim* (Tree of Life) which is permanently attached to the wall in the foyer and which contains branches and leaves with different family names on them.
- Etz Chaim consistently provides rich Jewish experiences in a coherently planned way through both the formal and informal curriculum. The importance of *Chagim* (festivals) in the Jewish Studies curriculum can be seen both in the classrooms and around the school. One *Succot* (a Jewish festival) display highlighted photos of activities in the *Succah* (a temporary hut used during the festival of Tabernacles), with comments from pupils about their "amazing *Succot* experience." A Year 6 pupil told inspectors that "during *Chol Hamoed Succot* (intermediate days of the festival), Year 6 pupils from two local schools, Courtland and Fairway, came to Etz Chaim and we took them into the *Succah*, and explained all about the *Tishrei* (Hebrew month) *Chagim*." Etz Chaim pupils were then invited back to one of the schools to learn about Diwali and an Etz Chaim pupil explained "how important it is for us to learn about other faiths."
- Members of staff are excellent role models for pupils' personal behaviour, attitude and spiritual development. This was very much in evidence during both *Chanukah* days the inspectors were in school. During a whole-school *Chanukah* assembly all members of the school community were present: pupils, teachers, parents, grandparents and governors. Teachers and pupils commented on "a real feeling of spirituality," as teachers led the singing of *Chanukah* songs, with the words projected onto the screen in the hall. Teachers chose a pupil from each year group (Reception to Year 6) to light a *Chanukiah*, the *Brachot* (blessings) were sung together, and a Rabbi from SEED (provides family and adult education) gave a *Dvar Torah* (word of *Torah*) about the miracle of the oil. One pupil, in response to a question from the Rabbi, said that "it was a miracle the oil lasted 8 days," and at the end of the assembly another pupil told an inspector that "I learnt that the oil was meant to last for one day, but the real miracle was it lasted for an extra seven days."

- Inspectors were very impressed by the pupils' concentration and enthusiasm whilst singing the various *Tefillot* (prayers). They had clearly been taught and had given thought to the meaning of the *Tefillot* and why they say them. For example, the Reception teacher asked the class: "Why do we say *Modeh Ani* (a morning prayer) and a pupil answered, "because we thank *Hashem* (G-d) for waking up in the morning." Also commenting on *Tefillah*, a Year 6 pupil said that "during the *Amidah* (one of the daily prayers) I spend quiet moments with *Hashem*, it makes you grateful." Another Year 6 pupil said that she was grateful for prayer because, "it gives you time to reflect on what we care for and what we wish for." A Year 2 pupil told an inspector that we say *Bircat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) every day "because we thank *Hashem* for our yummy food and for looking after us for the rest of the day."
- Outstanding *Tzelem Elokim* (awareness of the spiritual in all humankind) is shown through *Tzedakah* (charity) and social action. On *Mitzvah Day* (a day when good deeds are done for other people), Etz Chaim pupils collected food and took it to a food bank. Etz Chaim was partnered with Kisharon (a Special Needs School) and Langdon (a Special Needs College) for this project. Pupils from Kisharon school came into Etz Chaim and met some of the Etz Chaim pupils before taking the food collected to Food Bank Aid to distribute. Pupils were also enthusiastic about the weekly *Tzedakah* collections by their classes. One Year 2 pupil told an inspector that "on Fridays, a Year 6 pupil comes to our room to collect our *Tzedakah*, and whichever class raises the most money gets a teddy bear to look after until next Friday; we are told who gets the teddy at *Kabbalat* (Celebration of) *Shabbat*. Another Year 2 pupil said, "it is important to think about other people and collect money to help them."

Leadership and Management

- Leadership and Management at Etz Chaim is outstanding. Leaders at all levels articulate and communicate the school's strong commitment to high standards of work and to pupils' Jewish spiritual development and well-being. Together with staff, they have developed a shared clarity of how they want the school to progress further. They engage effectively with pupils, parents and all key stakeholders to promote the school's vision for Jewish education. One member of staff commented, "Being part of a community is key to staff, pupils and parents at Etz Chaim and is something we take pride in helping to create." Another commented, "It is a privilege to teach in the school - leadership is supportive, staff work closely together, and I am always inspired to do more for the children's learning."
- The Headteacher, who has only been in post for one year, has a strong and clear vision as to how the school should develop, and has introduced effective assessment procedures to monitor and track pupils' progress. She has focused on improving teachers' subject, pedagogical and content knowledge to enhance Jewish education throughout the school. The Head of Jewish Studies is a recognised mentor and trainer in the Jewish community and utilises her skills and experience to introduce exciting and innovative resources which pupils enjoy. She has an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development for all aspects of the school's Jewish educational provision. Together, they have led the staff in creating an exceptional Jewish atmosphere that permeates throughout the school and, according to a parent in the survey, this has provided: "a community feel, good friendships and a positive caring staff." They know what needs to be done to improve further and have the capacity

to achieve this.

- Governance is very strong at this school. Several members of the governing body including a co-Chair and the link governor for Jewish Studies are professional educators and play a full role in monitoring the assessment and progress of pupils. All governors are fully committed to securing and sustaining improvements in teaching, learning and assessment in Jewish education. They have high expectations for social behaviour grounded in Jewish values and engage well with parents, other stakeholders and local synagogues to promote the school and support all pupils. They challenge senior leaders to ensure an effective and fair deployment of staff and resources to secure good outcomes for all pupils. They receive termly reports from the Headteacher on all aspects of the school including Jewish Studies and they visit lessons and look at pupils' books. Every governor is linked to a member of staff to provide support and keep up to date with developments and future plans.
- Leaders, including governors, have been exemplary in promoting the school both with the parent body and in the wider area. Activities have included: *Kiddushim* (receptions following services) in the Mill Hill and Mill Hill East synagogues, pupils giving *Divrei Torah* (short talks on Jewish learning) on Friday nights, a 'back to school' social for parents and other parent evenings, a Family Education programme and links to other schools and charities. All of these activities promote and celebrate the school's positive and vibrant provision for the pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Continue to embed the new systems and resources.
- Provide further training to improve classroom management strategies.
- Ensure that Jewish Studies staff follow the school's Marking Policy and make greater use of developmental marking to guide pupils in their next steps.

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 Etz Chaim Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 57 people responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited pupils from Y5 and Y6 at Etz Chaim Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 46 pupils responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited members of staff at Etz Chaim Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 14 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.