

JFS

INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority: Brent

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates: 4th & 5th March 2025

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

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of children: 11-18

Mixed /Single sex: Mixed

Number on roll: 2048

Chair of Governors: Mark Hurst

Headteacher: Dr David Moody

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Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Rabbi Yaakov Heimann

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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, who observed Jewish Studies (JS) lessons in Years 7 to 13 (age 11-18), optional formal *Shacharit* (Morning prayers) and *Mincha* (Afternoon prayers) prayers, as well as 'lunch and learn' learning programmes. They also observed many informal learning activities, including on *Purim* (Festival commemorating the Jewish people being saved from annihilation in Persia 386 BCE) breakout and *Hamantaschen* (Pastry eaten on *Purim*) making. They also scrutinised the school's detailed Jewish Studies Self Evaluation Form (SEF), development plans, policies and students' written work. They reviewed the *Pikuach* inspection questionnaires, and tested students from Years 8 and 13.

Meetings were held with students from a range of classes, Chair of Governors, Headteacher, Co-Directors of Jewish Life and Learning, Director and Deputy Director of SEND (Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities), and JS Staff.

The Headteacher, together with Co-Directors of Jewish Life and Learning, played a full and active part in this inspection by attending team meetings and discussions with inspectors.

Information about the school

- JFS is a large, Modern-Orthodox, Jewish secondary school, which was founded in 1732. It moved into its present location in 2002 to be closer to the Jewish community. However, most students live outside the school's catchment area.
- With 2048 students on roll, which includes 540 students in the Sixth form, the school has up to 13 forms per year group. Students can opt for the *Iyun* (In-depth) streams where the JS lessons are more text based.
- JFS' foundation body is the United Synagogue, and its religious authority is the Office of the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.
- *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) is taught as a Modern Foreign Language, and is not taught as part of Jewish Studies.
- The school was judged to be 'Good' at its last Ofsted inspection, in April 2022.
- The majority of pupils are of white British heritage. The school is persistent in its aim to be inclusive of all pupils from all backgrounds, including those with SEND and to ensure that they are able to access the full JS curriculum.
- The proportion of students with SEND is above the national average, at approximately 23%.
- Approximately 14% of students have English as an additional language (EAL).
- The proportion of students eligible for Pupil Premium and free school meals is about 5%, well below the national average.

Inspection judgement Grade

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

What is it like to attend this Jewish school?

- JFS is a school where students are offered a wide-range of formal and informal Jewish learning and experiences.
- Students gain from being in a school where celebrating the *Chagim* (Jewish Festivals) and marking Jewish events is part of the strong Jewish ethos which permeates the school.
- Students receive a range of well-planned, inspiring, and engaging Jewish education and they are given many opportunities to further explore and learn.
- Students benefit from being in a school where they can learn in a positive and all-inclusive environment, allowing them to focus on their Jewish learning and experiences in an atmosphere of respect and inclusion, irrespective of their background, gender, religiosity, or culture.
- Students are taught by knowledgeable, dedicated and inspiring JS teachers under the leadership of outstanding Co-Directors of Jewish Life and Learning.
- Students are extremely proud to belong to JFS, and have positive attitudes to their JS learning and experiences. This is because the bespoke curriculum, combined with the lesson style and structure, as well as the students' positive relationships with their JS teachers, encourages them to actively engage in Jewish learning and practice. A student said, "My JS lessons have helped me become a better Jew and understand the reasons behind my Jewish identity."
- Students gain from being in a school where there is a consistent behaviour approach, leading to good behaviour both in lessons and around the school.
- Pupils exhibit an awareness of the spiritual aspects of Judaism and display a high level of personal conduct.
- Safeguarding at JFS is effective. Students feel safe when at school, know whom to speak to if they have a concern and are confident that any issue will be addressed.
- The school has addressed the key areas for development highlighted in the previous *Pikuach* report (2020).
- The school has continued to develop the Sixth form JS *Morasha* (Heritage) programme, and this is continuously being reviewed.
- The school has made much progress in developing *Tefilla* and Hebrew reading, although this remains an area for further development.

- The school has successfully developed strategies for supporting students with SEND in their JS lessons.

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

Quality of Jewish Education

- The Quality of Jewish education is outstanding. The curriculum is rigorous and engaging, encouraging students to explore the relevance of *Torah* (5 Books of Moses) in their lives through meaningful discussion. The high standard of learning ensures that all students are challenged appropriately, fostering both academic growth and a deepened connection to their Jewish identity. The curriculum is well-structured and sequenced, ensuring progression from year to year.
- Students at JFS are able to advance their learning by choosing from a variety of formal lessons, to best suit their learning style and aims. As an alternative to the regular JS lessons, students can choose the *Iyun* stream where there is greater focus on formal textual learning which is taught at greater depth. Observations confirm that there is consistency in the quality of teaching across all streams.
- Through well-planned activities, students develop key skills such as inquiry and analysis, thus developing their curiosity which contributes to their thirst for learning. In the majority of classes observed, students displayed high levels of engagement and were active participants. Lessons also provided plentiful opportunities for *Chavruta* (Study partner) learning, fostering collaboration and deep discussions.
- In the mainstream classes, students were highly engaged in their learning, with teachers successfully linking the content to their everyday lives. For example, in a Year 10 class, students were discussing the Jewish life cycle, focusing on the topic of *Brit Mila* (Circumcision). The teacher used a variety of teaching aids, including pictures of the various people and roles involved in a *Brit Mila*. This was followed by a discussion of some fundamental aspects of Jewish identity, including the "who, what, and why" of the practice. A student shared with the class that although he had previously attended a *Brit Mila*, he had not understood the significance of all the roles and practices but had now gained a deeper understanding of its importance.
- The school is successfully able to foster a connection between students and their Jewish heritage, encouraging both academic learning and personal reflection. For example, in a Year 7 class, students studying *Chumash* (Bible) were able to summarise the *Pesukim* (Verses) learnt and actively participate in a class discussion. A student remarked, "Although these events took place so long ago, they are still important for us today because they help us remember where we come from." Another student in the *Iyun* track noted that, "It is amazing to see the *Torah's* approach to modern-day dilemmas.
- In all classes, lessons are dynamic and students actively participate in discussions and grapple with meaningful Jewish concepts. A student commented, "The lessons are very engaging." As a result, students are well prepared for the next stage of their Jewish lives and develop a desire to deepen their own Jewish identity.
- The school also offers a voluntary *Beit Midrash* (Synagogue) programme after *Shacharit* for years 7-9 (age 11-14), and this is a standout feature of the school's Jewish education. Students are offered a unique opportunity to further develop their textual skills, in small groups, ably supported by Sixth formers. Students were seen learning *Halacha* (Jewish law) in a structured and meaningful manner. A student commented, "I enjoy this learning, it pushes me to think," whilst another added, "This learning is more enjoyable and is better than in the classroom as I can fully engage with the learning with my *Chavruta*." It was remarkable to see so many students choosing to attend this daily session, demonstrating their enthusiasm for independent *Torah* learning.
- The school's informal Jewish education is consistently strong, fostering a vibrant and

- immersive Jewish atmosphere throughout the school. There are many programmes that students can choose to participate in, including lunchtime programmes that actively engage students, creating a sense of excitement and deeper connection to their Jewish identity. This ensures that the school's Jewish ethos permeates all aspects of school life, and students express genuine pride in their Jewish identity. The lunchtime clubs and informal programmes create a real buzz, reinforcing the school's commitment to making Jewish learning accessible, enjoyable, and impactful beyond the formal classroom setting.
- During the inspection the school hosted (the) Rabbis from the United Synagogue. Students were split according to their community and had the opportunity to engage in Jewish learning whilst strengthening their links to their community.
 - The school regularly hosts a range of external Jewish organisations that run learning sessions, which have been particularly well received. One lunchtime session observed featured a group learning *Gemarra* (Talmud), where students in Year 13 (aged 18), many of whom had been attending since Year 7, were completing a *Gemarra* topic. Their commitment to continued learning is commendable, with most of the group planning to attend *Yeshiva* (Talmudical College) after leaving school.
 - The Hebrew reading is mostly linked to *Ivrit*. Students who opt to learn an alternative language in Year 9 have limited opportunities to read Hebrew. This was raised by parents in the *Pikuach* questionnaire and the school has identified this as an area for development.
 - The school also fosters leadership in Jewish and other charitable and social initiatives, with students taking ownership of various *Tzedaka* (Charity) projects. A key example is the student-organised bake sales, where they prepare baked goods at school and sell them to raise funds for charity. Beyond fundraising, students have further opportunities to lead *Tzedaka* initiatives, ensuring meaningful connections with both the Jewish and wider communities.
 - The school's effective use of data significantly enhances student outcomes in Jewish education. GCSE Religious Studies (RS) results are well above the national average, with 87.8% of pupils achieving a grade 4 or above, 48.3% attaining a grade 7 or above, and 10% achieving a grade 9. Students with SEND also perform well. The school analyses data to inform teaching strategies, ensuring areas of challenge are identified and addressed. Targeted recommendations provide clear guidance for staff, enabling them to support pupils in understanding their misconceptions and improving performance. This proactive approach ensures pupils are equipped with the tools needed to achieve higher grades and deepen their understanding of RS.

What does the school need to do to improve the 'Quality of Jewish Education.'

- Further opportunities for Students to read Hebrew beyond Year 9

Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development

- Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development at JFS is outstanding. The way that the school shapes students' Jewish character and values is driven from the Headteacher's clear and unequivocal vision and passion to "*create tomorrow's Jewish leaders and develop the students' Jewish character*". This is exemplified by the students' excellent behaviour in lessons, around the school, break times and in both formal and informal settings. All members of staff displayed an unfailing respect for all students, as well as a deep engagement with the Jewish life of the school, and were able to articulate the core value of the school motto "light and honour".
- The school provides all students with a carefully crafted range of rich Jewish experiences in formal and informal settings and in extra-curricular activities. Prior to

the inspection, 256 students from Year 12 (age 16) took part in a Poland trip. Whilst there, a student, who had missed out celebrating his *Bar Mitzvah* (Coming of age at 13) due to Covid19, was able to mark this “very precious and spiritual moment”, in the shul in Krakow. Other students described the tangible *Ruach* (Spirit) that was palpable in the shul.

- Students shared how deeply impacted they were through the experience of both Krakow, and their tours of Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps. This was because they were well prepared for the trip and also given ample opportunities for reflection post trip. The Holocaust display in the main school corridor includes piles of shoes, spectacles and other artefacts, which further enable students to acknowledge the impact of the *Shoah* (holocaust) on their Jewish lives. A Year 13 student (age 17) who had previously been on the Poland experience related that “the Shoah taught me that when something is stripped from you, it makes you want it back even more, and this must have come from a higher power.” The student also related this to the events of October 7th in 2023 and how the school had helped her and her peers by means of an assembly, where families of those whose lives were impacted by October 7th were invited to talk to the students about their emotions and feelings.
- Another significant event was the Year 7 *Shabbaton*, (Weekend away) organised by the JIEP (Jewish Informal Education Programme) and attended by 137 students. Year 12 were *Madrichim* (leaders) and they were keen to share with inspectors their pride to have been afforded the opportunity of positively impacting younger students.
- JIEP plays an important part in the life of the school, enabling students to “learn and connect to their Judaism, and to empower children to feel part of a community”. JIEP also provides a range of activities and initiatives including “drop-down” days for *Purim*, as well as lunch and learn sessions in the *Bet Midrash*. Preparations for the *Etgar* Quiz (a national, Jewish, Inter-school, challenge competition) added to the *Ruach* in the school. The *Ruach* was also palpable at lunchtime, where *hamantaschen* were distributed to students while they participated in a *Purim* quiz. Despite the great excitement, behaviour remained exemplary.
- The school has introduced a “*Machshava la’Boker*” (A thought for the week), and a Daily reflection programme ‘a thought for the morning’. A Year 13 student created an app for staff to use and staff are provided with carefully crafted PowerPoints and videos. The impact of this initiative, together with “Tefillah through my eyes”, is a more in-depth look at prayer, where students are developing their spiritual and emotional capacity. This was evidenced by their reflections written in their self-assessed work. They are also encouraged to share these discussion prompts at home.
- The Sixth form *Morasha* programme is now embedded with all students taking part in the bespoke and all-encompassing curriculum. The aim is to enhance students’ spiritual and Jewish values and identity. Students can choose from different tracks that include Gift (Give It Forward Today), Project Impact (A Youth Volunteering Programme), helping the blind and teaching English to Israeli students via zoom. Outside presenters are invited in to run various workshops. The *Morasha* programme is still being fine-tuned to ensure that it is all engaging. Some-students and parents have asked for more text-based lessons in the Sixth-form and the school has noted this as an area-for development.
- Students display a keen awareness of the role of God in their own and others’ lives. For example, in a Year 10 (age 14) lesson, when studying the Jewish Life Cycle, students reflected on their own experiences of key Jewish events in their own lives. One explained how important it was to “take a part of life and create a Jewish moment, a spiritual moment.” In a Year 7 (age 11) lesson, students were studying about *Avraham* (Abraham) and the city of *Sodom* using Jewish texts, and taking time to delve deeply into the verses. One student told the inspector that she “didn’t want to argue with God” as Avraham had done. Another said she “could not understand why the people of *Sodom* were so wicked after God destroyed wickedness in the flood.” Another student commented that the school helped her to know that “there’s a higher

- being” and that the school encouraged deeper thought and reflection.
- In a Year 8 *Iyun* lesson on *Mishloach Manot* (gifts of food distributed on *Purim*) students were encouraged to write their own commentaries on the text. One student explained that, “being Jewish and keeping kosher gave me a connection to God and reminded me of who I am.”
- Students take pride in their work, as can be evidenced from the JS books. Self-assessment is effectively used to raise standards. A new type of summative assessment named SPARK (Skills, Personal Spiritual Growth, Action, Respect and Knowledge) has been introduced, with each criteria valued at 20%.

What does the school need to do to improve the ‘Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development’.

- To continue to review all aspects of the *Morasha* Sixth-Form Programme

Quality of Leadership and management:

- The Co-Directors of Jewish Life and Learning and the Headteacher have an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development in all aspects of the school’s Jewish education.
- The outstanding leadership in the school, including governors, articulates and communicates a strong commitment to high standards of work and learning and to students’ Jewish spiritual development. Working closely together, SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and governors have developed a shared clarity of where they want the school to be beyond the short term.
- The school’s leadership ensures that the JS staff receive effective professional development and that their pedagogy builds and consistently develops over time.
- The Co-Directors of Jewish Life and Learning are encouraged and supported by the Headteacher and Chair of Governors. They model excellent practice in both academic and spiritual matters and work successfully to monitor, improve and support teaching. They also encourage the enthusiasm of staff whilst simultaneously challenging them to improve, ensuring that they receive relevant professional development.
- The Co-Directors of Jewish Life and Learning work in tandem to identify areas for development in JS and are well placed to take the school forward.

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 JFS to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 90 people responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited students at JFS to complete a questionnaire about their views of the

school. 101 students responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited members of staff at JFS to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 73 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.