

# Akiva School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Local authority</b>	Barnet
<b>Inspected under the auspices of</b>	Pikuach
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 October 2013
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Selwyn Ward

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	420
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jon Epstein
<b>Headteacher</b>	Susy Stone
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10–12 September 2008
<b>Address</b>	The Sternberg Centre for Judaism 80 East End Road London N3 2SY
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8349 4980
<b>Email address</b>	admin@akivaschool.org
<b>School website</b>	www.akivaschool.org

# Introduction

## Inspection team

Selwyn Ward      Lead Inspector

Sharon Raphael    Team Inspector

This inspection was carried out by two inspectors. They visited 20 lessons or parts of lessons including *tefillot* (prayers). They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of children. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including children's written work, teachers' lesson plans, the Jewish Studies curriculum, the school's self-evaluation documents and the school's Jewish Studies development plan. In accordance with the protocol that exists between Ofsted (Section 5) and *Pikuach* (Section 48), the lead inspector had a discussion with the inspector who led the school's recent Ofsted inspection, which took place a week before the *Pikuach* inspection.

The inspection team looked in detail at the following:

- The Jewish education curriculum
- The progress pupils make in Jewish education
- The quality of teaching in Jewish education
- Leadership and management in Jewish education
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including collective worship.

## Information about the school

Akiva is a two-form entry progressive Jewish primary school that provides particularly for the Reform, Liberal and Masorti communities. The large majority of pupils are White British, but a number come from overseas; close to 10% come from Israel. The school shares a campus with several Jewish institutions, including a rabbinical college, a synagogue, the headquarters for the Movement for Reform Judaism, and a *mikveh* (ritual bath). Jewish Studies is taught as a discrete subject throughout the school, but the school also endeavours to link Jewish education to learning in other subjects. *Ivrit* (Hebrew) is taught as a modern foreign language from the start of Reception through to the end of Year 6.

The school sets out as its Mission Statement:

- We see each child as an individual and provide a broad and dynamic Jewish and secular curriculum reflecting their needs.
- We expect the highest standards of learning and teaching.
- We provide a secure, nurturing and stimulating environment.
- We work together to understand and realise each child's full potential.
- We embed Jewish Studies throughout the curriculum, enhancing a positive, confident, Jewish identity.
- We teach our children to value being active participants in the wider community.
- We prepare our children to meet the challenges of a changing world.
- We teach our children to value all members of the school community and treat each other with kindness.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The achievement of pupils in their Jewish education</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of teaching and assessment</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the Jewish education curriculum meets pupils' needs</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development including the duty to fulfill the daily act of collective worship</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management of Jewish Education, including through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>

### Overall effectiveness: the quality of Jewish education provided at Akiva is outstanding because:

- The headteacher, governing body and leadership team have been exceptionally successful in achieving the school's key aims while steering the school through its year-on-year expansion since the last *Pikuach* inspection.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because pupils are taught about their shared cultural heritage and traditions while learning to respect the beliefs and traditions of others.
- What stands out about the curriculum at Akiva is the imaginative way that Jewish education is seamlessly interwoven with National Curriculum subjects so that pupils deepen their understanding of their heritage while learning in other subjects.
- Standards are high. Pupils are confident and articulate, and they make rapid progress learning about Judaism, Jewish celebration and belief.
- Pupils join in enthusiastically in *shacharit* (morning prayer) because it is a lively celebration of their Judaism rather than a mere daily routine. The progress they make in learning *Ivrit* contributes strongly to their understanding of the Hebrew texts, verses and *brachot* (blessings) which they recite.
- The teaching of Jewish education is good. Lessons are well planned and teachers succeed in making learning interesting and fun. Teaching is not yet outstanding because opportunities are sometimes missed in lessons to ensure that every child is listening well and taking part, and that those who need a little extra help are able to keep up with the fast pace set by the most able pupils.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move more of the teaching of Jewish education from good to outstanding by:
  - making more effective use of 'talk partners' to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills
  - always giving teaching assistants an active role during whole-class teaching
  - giving more help in lessons to less-able pupils so that they are better able to keep up with their classmates.

## **Achievement of pupils at the school in their Jewish education is outstanding**

Pupils make rapid progress through their time at Akiva. From quite varied starting points, they learn a great deal about Jewish tradition and belief, especially through *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) and *chagim* (festivals). Through their time at the school, pupils develop a thoughtful approach to their faith, so that they understand not merely the festivals in the Jewish calendar but also the fundamental tenets that underpin Judaism and Jewish life.

Pupils make excellent progress because they are so very eager to learn. As one child was keen to explain, 'This is a thinking school; it switches our brains on.' Pupils get on and work very well together, readily stepping in to help one another or to correct a classmate's misunderstanding. They mostly listen well to the teacher, even when not all are quite so attentive in listening to their peers. They are very keen to contribute their answers and ideas in lessons.

A feature that stands out about pupils' achievement at Akiva is that the daily *tefillot* have genuine meaning and purpose for the pupils because pupils understand the verses they recite and make daily choices about which *brachot* to include and which tunes to sing to. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 assemble their own individual *siddur* (prayer book), which they customise as they move up the school.

Alongside Jewish Studies, the progress that pupils make learning *Ivrit* also contributes to their growing sense of Jewish identity and pride. From the start of Reception, children learn Hebrew letters and the sounds they make (phonics), similarly to the way they learn phonics in developing reading skills in English. Their knowledge of *Ivrit* equips them to understand the Hebrew they use in *tefillah* and to begin to tackle texts from the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible). During the inspection, pupils in Year 6 were able to recognise familiar Hebrew words and to deconstruct words they initially only partially recognised, so that they could decode text from *Ecclesiastes*. Though they are hardly fluent *Ivrit* speakers by the end of Year 6, the standards they reach compare favourably with those attained in other modern foreign languages in most primary schools.

## **The quality of teaching and assessment in the school is good**

Teachers know their pupils well and plan lessons so that activities capture pupils' interest and imagination. It is a mark of how successful teachers are in inspiring pupils that many go on to put such care into their homework assignments and projects, often drawing on their information and communication technology (ICT) and other skills. Teachers also make good use of ICT in lessons, particularly in presenting work and activities using the interactive whiteboards and visualisers.

Teachers' expectations are high, both for pupils' conduct and for the standard of work they expect to see. Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace, with work that usually challenges and extends even the brightest pupils. On occasion, however, some less-able and other pupils struggle to keep up because they are not given enough help, such as prompt sheets to remind them of details that they have not remembered quite as clearly as the more-able pupils.

Teachers are confident teaching Jewish Studies and the elements of Jewish education that are woven in with other subjects. This is because very effective support is provided through the way the headteacher and leadership team have organised classes, so that teachers in the two parallel classes in each year group plan together and support each other. Teachers also benefit from support from some subject specialists; for example, from a teacher who teaches *Shiur Torah* (lessons in Torah).

Pupils enjoy the extra challenge introduced by bringing together learning across different subjects. In Year 5, for example, pupils studying persuasive language in English rose to the added challenge of linking the lesson to the previous day's work on the three different types of *brachot*: *shevach* (to praise God), *bakashot* (to ask God for something), and *hoda'at* (to thank God). They looked at the English text of these *brachot* to find examples there of persuasive language devices.

Teaching assistants often provide effective additional support for those who need it, but they are not always fully utilised during teachers' lesson introductions. On these occasions, they are sometimes largely passive observers when they could be helping the teacher by, for example, making a note of those pupils who are more reluctant to volunteer answers. This would help teachers to better direct questions in their next lesson, so as to ensure that every pupil is fully involved.

Teachers routinely use techniques such as 'talk partners' to vary activities in lessons and to try to ensure that all pupils are engaged. Teachers do not always use 'talk partners' to best effect to develop good listening skills, however, by asking pupils to report back to class on what their partner told them.

School leaders identified that assessment arrangements for Jewish education were not sharp enough. They have improved through the introduction of increasingly measurable assessment criteria, so that teachers identify what, specifically, each child can do.

Some of the marking at Akiva is of exceptionally high quality, providing crystal-clear guidance to pupils on precisely what they need to do to improve their work, and with the expectation that pupils will read, respond to and follow the advice they are given. Not all, however, is of such a high standard.

## **The extent to which the Jewish education curriculum meets pupils' needs is outstanding**

Jewish Studies is taught throughout the school as a discrete subject but it is also interwoven with other subjects. Although this is not an uncommon approach in Jewish and other faith schools, what stands out at Akiva is the way this is done seamlessly so that the links are relevantly drawn and not mere bolt-ons. For example, pupils in Year 2, locating countries in atlases as part of their work in geography, found added relevance to the task because the teacher had them locate the countries they had previously identified in homework as being the places their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents had come from. This gave them increased insight into Jewish migration, linking to themes that they will be expected to build on as part of the Jewish Studies curriculum as they move up the school.

The Jewish education curriculum is designed very well so that pupils learn incrementally as they revisit topics in later years. That means, for example, that when *chagim* come round

again the following year, pupils are able to increase their knowledge and deepen their understanding of the festival, its celebration and its significance. Jewish themes are also explored through topics which offer pupils a moving experience. For example, the *Shoah* (Holocaust) topic in Year 6 takes pupils through the historical context of Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the consequences for Jews. It identifies links with pupils' own family stories and focuses on Kindertransport, and the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers.

Although not all pupils say they enjoy *Ivrit* lessons, pupils throughout the school benefit from the opportunity to learn *Ivrit* as a modern foreign language and to apply some of what they learn in reading classical Hebrew texts. Those pupils with Israeli parents join the school already with some familiarity with *Ivrit*. The school offers special classes to better meet their needs.

Because the school shares a campus with several other Jewish institutions, pupils and parents have access to a vibrant Jewish learning environment which enriches the everyday curriculum. Further afield, pupils benefit from visits to the Jewish Museum in Camden, and there are very strong partnership arrangements with other progressive and pluralist Jewish schools, and with a number of other faith schools. There are close ties with a kibbutz in Israel, and pupils look forward eagerly to the trip to visit Israel that Year 6 take each year. Although a large minority of parents say they want to see more extra-curricular activities that link to Jewish education, there is already quite a lot on offer.

## **The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding**

It is Rabbi Akiva, scholar from the 2nd century CE, who gives his name to the school. He is remembered for his teachings, including the maxim, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. The school's aims reflect Rabbi Akiva's philosophy and teachings, including a commitment to egalitarianism and inclusivity, where for example, boys and girls are treated equally, including in their participation in *tefillah*.

*Tefillah* is a notable strength of the school. There were no whole-school or key stage assemblies scheduled on the dates of the inspection, but inspectors were able to sample *Shacharit* in year groups and classes, as these take place on those days when there is no assembly. These sessions vary each day because pupils make their own informed choices about what to include. Pupils understand the *tefillot* and *brachot*, and so their devotion is genuine. As a result, *Shacharit* is a joyous celebration.

Pupils are very aware that many come from relatively advantaged homes. They learn and appreciate the meaning of *Tikkun Olam* ('repairing the world') and *Sh'mira Hateva* (caring for our world) and they take a keen interest in performing *mitzvot* (good deeds), including through *Tzedakah* (charity). The school council nominates three charities to support each year, in addition to the school's participation in national charity events like Jeans for Genes and Red Nose Day. The latter, last year, was adopted into the Purim celebrations, as pupils incorporated red noses into their fancy dress.

Akiva's excellent links with other faith schools enable pupils to learn about other religions while proudly sharing their celebration of *chagim* with children from other local schools.

There are very well-established links with schools in Israel and Ghana, and pupils correspond with and speak to their counterparts overseas using email and internet teleconferencing. In this way, they build an appreciation of other ways of life and, in some cases, intercontinental friendships which, parents say, continue long after pupils move on to secondary school.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management of Jewish education is outstanding**

In its prospectus, in displays around the school and on its attractive and informative website, Akiva describes itself as 'an inclusive and egalitarian learning community, teaching its pupils to be happy, confident and knowledgeable citizens, with a love of Israel and all aspects of their Judaism'. It sets as a key aim that Akiva children will 'understand and respect themselves, others and the world'. Leadership and management of Jewish education at this school are outstanding because the headteacher, leadership team and governing body have been admirably successful in achieving these aims.

Although leaders readily acknowledge, and have themselves identified, that there is further to go to move teaching from good to outstanding, they have been successful in devising a rich and stimulating curriculum where pupils learn about Judaism and their cultural heritage while learning about other subjects. As a result, pupils are proud of their traditions and family roots, and they are keen Zionists. Akiva's strong links with other faith schools in the area mean that pupils learn about and respect other beliefs, while eagerly explaining Jewish festivals and customs to children from different religious backgrounds.

Leadership and management of Jewish education at Akiva have been through much change since the last *Pikuach* inspection. The Jewish Studies coordinator joined the school's senior leadership team and, more recently, became the deputy headteacher. Since September 2013, she has shared leadership of the subject with a new coordinator, who takes responsibility for *chagim* and *tefillah*, in particular. Because leaders and governors place Jewish education at the heart of the school's work, the headteacher has maintained a keenly focused overview of the subject, helping to ensure that it is fully resourced and that staff have the support they need.

This is especially the case for the small minority of teachers who join the staff with only a limited knowledge of Judaism. Through careful organisation of the classes, leaders have ensured that teachers in the parallel classes in each year group are able to plan lessons and work together, including through team-teaching. This has helped to boost the confidence of non-specialists in teaching Jewish education. Leaders have also ensured that pupils' Jewish education is supplemented through specialist teaching.

## **Views of parents and carers**

*Pikuach* inspectors spoke to parents and drew on the recent Ofsted *Parent View* survey, as well as the parental survey on Jewish education conducted by the school earlier this year. Parents are very supportive of the school and of their children's education. They greatly value the work of the school but they are naturally very demanding. A number say that they want to see standards rise further and would like Akiva to organise even more out-of-school activities.

# Glossary

## What inspection judgements mean

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.