

# Hasmonean High School

## London NW4

### Inspection report

LEA	LB of Barnet
Inspection dates	9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup> January 2008 = 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Shevat 5768
Lead inspector	Mr John Gordon
Team inspectors	Rabbi G Shisler

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

Type of School	Secondary Comprehensive	School address	<i>Boys' site</i> Holders Hill Road London NW4 1NA
School category	Voluntary-aided		<i>Girls' site</i> 2-4 Page Street London NW4 2EU
Age range of pupils	11 - 18		
Gender and Number	Boys 507 : Girls 508	Telephone number	020 8203 1411 (Boys) 020 8203 4294 (Girls)
Appropriate Authority	Governing Body	Chair of Governors	Mr B Conway
Date of previous inspection	6-9 and 12 September 2004	Executive Headteacher	Mr D Fuller

## Introduction

### Description of the school

Hasmonean High School, founded more than sixty years ago by the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement, draws its intake from committed and observant orthodox Jewish families living in the North-Western boroughs of Outer London. It also takes a number of pupils from other NE London boroughs and from South Hertfordshire.

Boys and girls are taught on two separate sites some one and a half miles from one another, each being in effect a self-contained unit with just over 500 students on roll. In addition the boys' school has off-site facilities for the teaching and study base for its special *Beis Hamedrash* programme for Sixth Form boys, almost all of whom normally go on to a period of study in a *Yeshivah* during their gap year. A similar proportion of the corresponding Sixth Form girl students likewise go on to further study in seminaries.

Though there are differences of emphasis in the *Kodesh* curricula of the boys' and the girls' schools appropriate to the perceived roles and responsibilities of the two genders in orthodox Judaism, both curricula are firmly rooted in a common ethos of lifelong commitment to orthodox Jewish belief, observance, practice and religious study, combined with an equal dedication to acquiring the secular education needed to function in the modern world. This is the meaning of the school's Hebrew motto: *Torah im Derech Eretz*.

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Unsatisfactory

## Overall effectiveness of its provision for Jewish education

The overall effectiveness of the *Kodesh* provision is outstanding because of exemplary vision, initiative and outstanding impact.

Its main strengths lie in:

- the strong ethos of the school
- the competence and dynamism of its present leadership team
- a core teaching and pastoral staff of considerable experience, many of a high level of professional competence, with an impressive mastery of the knowledge and study skills they seek to pass on to their students
- the advantage of having a majority of pupils who are very well motivated and success orientated and are prepared to work to achieve
- the above-average results the school achieves in public examinations,
- a highly supportive governing body.

The school is continuing to work towards ensuring a stable teaching staff with clear strategies to enable their full integration in the life of the school, particularly for part-timers.

The school's capacity to improve is reflected in:

- the progress it has made in extending the use of laptop computers and video projectors in the classroom to enhance the teaching and learning in *Kodesh*
- the attention it is giving to reviewing and more closely defining the objectives of the *Kodesh* syllabus and schemes of work
- the progress it has made since the last inspection in improving support for pupils needing to improve their Hebrew reading skills or with other special needs in their *Kodesh* studies.

The school, as a whole, has been the recipient of national awards for high performance in Biblical Hebrew Religious Studies, as well as other awards for outstanding results at AS and A2 levels including the Good Schools Guide award for Classical Languages.

**Grade: 1**

## Effectiveness and efficiency of the Sixth Form

### Boys:

The entire *Kodesh* programme for Sixth Form boys is currently delivered outside the school premises on three sites in Hendon and is known as the *Beis Hamedrash* programme. This provides students with a solid grounding in *Gemarah* studies. With the arrival of a new, dynamic head of programme, it is achieving very high standards of learning. Attendance is obligatory for all Sixth Formers and student motivation is generally high, for example on the day of the inspection, although Year 13 was officially on study leave, 50% of the boys came into school to participate in the *Beis* programme.

Activities and course content are tailored to the needs of all pupils. There is a group of students who do not elect to study *Gemarah*; instead they have informal discussion groups led by members of staff, as well as by Rabbis from the *Aish* organisation. From time to time guest speakers are invited to the *Beis* to address all students and staff.

Inspectors were very favourably impressed by the atmosphere of study and personal engagement in the *Beis Hamedrash*. During this session, there is one assistant for boys who require more help, and other members of staff circulate among the pupils offering assistance where requested.

The second hour is given over to *Shiurim* at three levels. In the top-level group there are ten 'high flyer' students who have an advanced *Shiur* with the head of the *Beis* programme. The standard of attainment of these students was judged by their teacher as being on the level of that of third-year *yeshivah* students.

For the groups at the other two levels there are well planned *Shiurim*, each appropriate for the students' needs, delivered by highly competent, committed and enthusiastic teachers. The general levels of learning attained are so high that, last year, 98% of all students, including those in the 'Main Stream programmes' went on to *Yeshiva* and this is excellent preparation for their life after school.

The quality of this *Beis Hamedrash* programme sets a 'gold standard' showing what it is possible to achieve in *Kodesh* learning in the context of Jewish secondary school education in this country.

- The girls are taught on site and are similarly engaged in high levels of conceptual and textual learning in the main areas of *Chumash*, *Nach* and *Halocho*. Girls demonstrate motivation and commitment to their studies and are appreciative of the element of choice in their *chavrusa* and other programmes. The vast majority go on to further religious study in seminaries for which they have been well prepared by highly competent, committed and enthusiastic teachers.

**Grade: 1**

## What the school should do to improve further

- Develop consistency in marking practices
- Develop the level descriptors in all areas of the *Kodesh* curriculum similar to those already drawn up for the study of *Gemarah*.

## Achievement and standards

In almost all the lessons observed, pupils' performance and attainment were considered to be well above the national average.

Attainment on entry in Jewish Studies varies but those students who enter the school with lower attainment are able to make up the gap in skills and knowledge by the time they reach the Sixth Form.

The inspectors are in broad agreement with the school's assessment that, standards and achievement are good and in some aspects outstanding. Pupils are well motivated and eager to succeed. Progress is clearly tracked. Pupils on the Special Needs register are well supported so that they make good progress.

### Grade: 1

## Personal development and well-being

The Orthodox Jewish character of the school permeates every aspect of its activity with the result that regular collective worship and opportunities for personal prayer and spiritual development are an integral part of the normal school day and fully meet the requirements of national legislation.

Pupils' behaviour and courtesy are good or better and levels of attendance are well above the average for the Local Authority.

The overwhelming majority of pupils enjoy their *Kodesh* studies and are very positively motivated towards them. This motivation is strengthened by the creative contributions of the Directors of Informal Jewish Education in both schools who provide many opportunities for students to participate in relevant individual and group activities beyond the confines of formal classroom study.

The Personal, Social and Health Education [PSHE] programme is delivered through Jewish Studies and is viewed both from the Jewish and the general perspective. It includes many valuable contributions by outside speakers. Work is also in hand to adapt the Jewish Studies curriculum to incorporate the government's *Every Child Matters* agenda. In parallel with this, the school is also developing its own agenda, *Being Jewish Matters*, to meet the spiritual needs of all pupils.

There are many opportunities for pupils to make a positive and active contribution to the wider community by participating in charity programmes as well as visiting the sick and the elderly. Musical productions take place and these are then taken into the wider community. Generous sums are raised for *Tsedakah* (charity) by the pupils to support many worthy causes both at home and abroad, including Israel.

## Grade: 1

### Quality of provision

#### Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning is good and on occasions, outstanding. None was less adequate although in one lesson seen, the challenge was inappropriate for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The majority of pupils respond positively to their learning, settle down to work well and make good progress. They often make quite penetrating and perceptive individual contributions when exploring the issues being studied.

Formative and summative assessments of pupils' progress and attainment and how they are reported by the *Kodesh* department have now been brought into line with the scheme used by the rest of the school. A particularly well articulated scheme of level descriptors has now been developed for describing levels of individual pupil attainment in *Gemarah* study. The development of corresponding schemes of level descriptors for assessing performance in *Chumash*, *Nach* and other areas of the *Kodesh* curriculum is a development area for the department.

Marking by some teachers is well in accordance with good professional practice, however this practice is not consistent, particularly in relation to explaining clearly to the pupil why something is wrong and what needs to be done to put it right, and ensuring that all work is dated.

## Grade: 2

### Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is considerably enhanced by extra study and enrichment opportunities for both girls and boys. There are additional lessons before and after school in which students are expected to participate. In addition, for boys, there is the Sunday morning learning programme which imaginatively extends the breadth and variety of *Kodesh* learning experiences open for them to choose from, so enabling them to perfect the skills they need to function in their present and future personal and communal religious roles.

In the teaching of *Mishnah*, the school has identified some challenges but strategies for overcoming this are being considered.

In the Boys' school, where every Key Stage 3 [KS3] and KS4 pupil studies *Gemarah*, the use of '*Talmud Made Easy*' workbooks and course material is being piloted with the lower ability groups in KS3. If found successful, its use will be extended into KS4. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the topics chosen for teaching *Gemarah* in these groups are appropriate for the level of understanding of the students.

After careful evaluation a new interactive programme, '*Gemarah Berura*', has recently been acquired and teaching staff are currently familiarising themselves with the course material and presentation techniques required. This is seen as providing a further opportunity for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning by exploiting the potential offered by the use of laptop computer-controlled video projection which is being increasingly used in *Kodesh* teaching in the school. It is intended to introduce this material gradually into the main school Boys' teaching programme as from September 2008 but at this stage it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

The school's recent record of performance in public examinations is generally outstanding, with excellent results at GCSE, AS and A2 in Biblical Hebrew and Religious Studies. More than 90% of girls and boys go on to seminaries and *Yeshivot* during their 'gap year'. This is indicative of the love for Jewish learning and the desire to continue learning that the school instils in its pupils.

## Grade: 1

### Care, guidance and support

Care, guidance and support of students throughout the school are of high quality and, where relevant, make active use of communal, local authority and other educational support agencies both at home and in Israel. On both school sites effective arrangements are in place for the supervision and safeguarding of students throughout the normal school day. On-site security measures are efficient and conform to best practice.

On the boys' site a *Mashgiach* (an experienced teacher acting as pastoral counsellor and mentor) has recently been designated whose task is to know all the boys and advise and support them wherever necessary. He works in close liaison with the Year Heads, the Head of *Kodesh* Studies (who is also the on-site Child Protection Officer) and the Director of Informal Studies. Pupils may be referred to the *Mashgiach* by school staff but are equally able to approach him themselves if they are in difficulty. Consequently he has begun to make a significant impact on the school, and staff and pupils are very appreciative of his input.

The Girls' school, too, has a Student Welfare Officer who is a trained counsellor. It also has established procedures for counselling and guiding senior girls who wish to continue studying in a seminary or who wish to

pursue alternative options and routes during their gap year. There are effective peer mentoring arrangements and older students are trained through 'Childline' to guide and listen to the younger girls.

Regular collective worship and opportunities for personal prayer and spiritual development are an integral part of the normal school day and fully meet the requirements of national legislation.

**Grade: 1**

## **Leadership and management**

Since the last inspection of the school there have been significant changes in the personnel, structure and composition of its senior leadership. It has now emerged as a strong, competent team of impressive quality in which the Heads of School and the Heads of *Kodesh* of both the girls' and boys' schools play key roles.

The leadership team has a clear vision of where the school should be going and has shown itself fully capable of coming to perceptive, honest and realistic judgements in evaluating the school's progress and needs in attaining its aim of providing and delivering an effective *Kodesh* curriculum.

Guided and coordinated by an Executive Head of wide experience, in the view of the inspectors the senior leadership team is convincingly demonstrating its ability not only to maintain the high standards of academic achievement of which the school is so proud but also to drive forward new initiatives to improve the effectiveness with which the *Kodesh* curriculum is delivered to all pupils. It is outward-looking and receptive to new ideas and modes of delivery which extend and improve the range and quality of students' *Kodesh* learning and study experiences.

The present Governing Body is to be congratulated on its readiness and resourcefulness in ensuring that funding has been made available up to now to enable these improvements in *Kodesh* provision to be implemented.

Governors should consider funding further professional development for staff. The benefit to the school would more than justify the outlay involved.

**Grade: 1**