

Michael Sobell Sinai School

Inspection report

LEA	Brent
Inspected under the auspices of	Pikuach
Inspection dates	8 – 9 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Rev Michael Binstock

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	672
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Clive Goodman
Headteacher	Mrs Vivienne Orloff
Date of previous school inspection	8 – 9 January 2007
School address	Shakespeare Drive, Kenton, Middlesex HA3 9UD
Telephone number	020 8204 1550
Fax number	020 8905 0260
Email address	admin@sinai.brent.sch.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two Pikuach inspectors who were shadowed and observed by a trainee inspector. The inspectors spent most of their time looking at learning. They observed 11 lessons and 2 *Tefillah* (davening) sessions covering all Jewish Studies teachers, and talked to staff parents and pupils. They also scrutinised the school's documentation and a sample of pupils' written work. In addition, 140 parent and carer, and 10 Jewish Studies staff questionnaires were received and analysed along with questionnaires from 189 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The quality of teaching and learning
- The progress made by all groups of pupils
- The extent to which the curriculum, schemes of work and lesson planning meet the needs of all pupils.

Information about the school

Michael Sobell Sinai School is the largest Jewish primary school in Europe with 672 pupils on roll. It was established in 1981 with a nucleus of pupils from the former Solomon Wolfson and Yavneh Primary Schools. It is an orthodox co-educational three-form entry school for children aged 3-11 located within the London Borough of Brent and the Foundation Body is the United Synagogue. The pupils are all halachically Jewish and are drawn from a wide religious spectrum from *Ashkenazi* and *Sephardi* families. Approximately 20% of the pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities relating to Jewish Studies. Whilst 19% speak English as an additional language (EAL), only a small number need support as most are able to speak and write fluently in English. The School has received various awards including the government's Healthy Schools Award, ICT Mark and Investors in People.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The quality of Jewish education at Michael Sobell Sinai School is good overall and in the Early Years Foundation Stage, it is outstanding. Pupils are happy and they work hard. Parents are pleased with the school as evidenced from the parents' questionnaires which were overwhelmingly positive. There is good support for pupils with special educational needs and some progress has been made in the support given to those of higher ability since the previous inspection.

There are good partnerships with other agencies which promote learning and enhance the pupils' personal development and well-being. The school's vision is to equip every pupil with a love of Judaism and the knowledge and skills to enhance that Judaism as they go through life. The staff and governors work hard to make this vision become a reality.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress. This is due to the outstanding quality of provision that ensures that they learn well both socially and academically in a safe and secure learning environment. In Key Stages 1 and 2, there is a lack of consistency in the quality of teaching and overall, teaching is judged as satisfactory. Nevertheless, overall effectiveness is good because there is an excellent level of care, guidance and support and this enables most pupils to achieve well from their different starting points.

Pupils' behaviour, both in class and around the school is good overall although some unsatisfactory behaviour was observed in those lessons where the quality of teaching was less than good. Pupils are eager to come to school and like the wide range of activities on offer which illustrates the positive effect the school's provision has on pupils' attitudes to learning.

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good with some significant strengths which particularly impact on pupils' personal development. The leadership and management are dedicated to the task of enabling all pupils to achieve high standards and this is shared by all members of staff. As a result, capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that best practice becomes uniform throughout the school.
- Improve the provision for pupils of higher ability by:
 - ensuring that a clear strategy is embedded so that individual pupils of higher ability are regularly and effectively challenged.

• Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' achievement is mostly good. During the inspection, some examples of very rapid learning were seen in lessons. Here, pupils were challenged to think things through for themselves, their depth of understanding was markedly increased and their progress was outstanding. Progress was not as good in some other lessons because teachers did not give pupils sufficient challenge. Learning here slowed significantly and behaviour deteriorated.

In discussions with pupils, many positive feelings were expressed. 'I like school because it is one big family' was the comment of one Year 6 pupil to the inspectors. Another said 'teachers are caring and helpful'. Positive comments similar to these were expressed by many pupils throughout the school and this is reflected in their very high attendance. Pupils feel safe in school and are aware of the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. The majority of pupils behave well in their Jewish Studies lessons, but examples of unsatisfactory behaviour occur in those lessons where they are not actively engaged.

Pupils have a very clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong and are polite and courteous. They are mostly thoughtful, caring and responsive to each other's feelings and needs. They grow in confidence and enjoy taking responsibility through the school council which provides them with a valuable opportunity to express their views for the benefit of the whole school. An example of this is the enclosed 'quiet area' erected in the playground for pupils who prefer to read at break times. Pupils contribute well to the school and wider community in other ways, for example acting as mentors to younger pupils and raising *tzedakah* (charity) that benefits worthy causes, both Jewish and non-Jewish. These positive attitudes, together with their good academic achievement, make a valuable contribution to pupils' development of skills for their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

All lessons are characterised by very good relationships between teachers and pupils. The quality of teaching overall is satisfactory, with over half of the lessons observed being good to outstanding. The very best lessons move forward at a good pace, actively engaging all pupils in appropriate and interesting activities. In these lessons pupils make excellent progress, because teachers' accurate assessments allow them to set work which is challenging. Where teaching is less successful, not all pupils are kept on task as planning does not take sufficient account of what pupils already know and can do. As a result, progress is slowed because some pupils find work too easy and others find it too difficult. Provision for the more able pupils has improved since the previous Pikuach inspection; however this provision lacks consistency and is not delivered in a structured manner. It is important to devise a clear strategy to ensure that pupils of higher ability receive regular and challenging work that is suitably matched to their individual needs.

The quality of the Jewish Studies curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and most appropriate to the modern orthodox Zionist ethos of the school. The curriculum is enriched by material produced by the JCP (Jewish Curriculum Partnership), of which the school is a partner. Further enrichment is provided by regular visits from local community rabbis who come to address the pupils at assemblies and to participate in other educational activities. There are good partnerships with various other organisations including Binoh, Tribe and B'nei Akiva, which promote learning and enhance the pupils' personal development and well-being. The school offers a variety of extra-curricular activities and informal learning initiatives to reinforce Jewish learning such as 'Pizza in the Hut' during *Succot* and 'Chanukah Funday'.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those learning English as an additional language receive effective support. The excellent level of care, guidance and support provided by the school is highly praised and valued by parents and pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership and management of the school in relation to Jewish Studies are good. They have a vision for improvement and progress which they communicate to staff by urging them to challenge the pupils in their Jewish learning. A main priority for the department as detailed in its Jewish Studies Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) is to 'raise the level of teacher expectation by making lessons and learning objectives increasingly more challenging.' Although some more able pupils are challenged by more demanding work in their Jewish Studies, this needs to be more consistent and part of an embedded programme of special provision for higher ability pupils.

Professional and academic targets are set annually with each Jewish Studies teacher. These are reviewed in the middle of the school year and at the annual performance management meeting. Teachers' record books are reviewed regularly by the Head of Department who provides very detailed written feedback for staff aimed at improving the quality of their teaching. A programme of lesson observations takes place and teachers are given specific guidance on how to improve.

Governors are supportive of what the school is trying to achieve in Jewish Studies. There is a new link governor with special responsibility for Jewish Studies who plans to monitor its provision on a regular basis. Minutes are now produced for the Jewish Studies Sub-Committee and a report on what has been happening within the department is delivered termly to the full governing body.

Staff questionnaires reveal strong support for the way the department is led. Teachers also feel strongly that their contribution to the school's Jewish Studies provision is 'valued'. The school is effective within the parameters of Jewish religious education in ensuring that all pupils have equality of opportunity in the experiences available. Leaders work together well with parents and outside agencies to support pupils and to ensure that there are no forms of discrimination. The school promotes community cohesion successfully by having good links with other Jewish schools and specifically with a local, multi-cultural state school. Pre-school and after-school clubs are successfully organised. Resources are deployed effectively to ensure that outcomes for pupils are good and that good value for money is achieved.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	Not inspected
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion through the Jewish Studies curriculum	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision for Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. The excellent leadership and management team oversees a programme of learning in a secure and warm atmosphere. The outstanding teaching in both lessons observed shows the dedication of teachers and their understanding of children's needs. The teaching of Hebrew reading commences in Reception with letter recognition thus providing a sound basis for further development as children advance to the next key stage.

The excellent Jewish Studies curriculum is linked into the six areas of learning. There is good integration between the *Kodesh* and secular curricula. Pupils greatly enjoy their Jewish Studies and were observed working productively in groups with one another. Behaviour is excellent throughout the early years. Children feel confident and safe, enabling them to develop to the best of their ability.

Equality of opportunity is evident in each class; work is differentiated allowing each child to achieve. Health issues are stressed in accordance with Jewish practice, for example eating healthily and the washing of hands. Independence is encouraged at every level. Pupils willingly participate in activities, share opportunities with others and learn to make choices during their free-choice learning sessions.

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Pikuach invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Michael Sobell Sinai School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children. In total, there are 430 families registered at the school.

The inspection team received 140 completed questionnaires and the overwhelming majority indicated strong parental support for the school with regard to its provision for Jewish education.

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. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
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. Pikuach inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment: the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.

Progress: the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

Achievement: the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.

Capacity to improve: the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.

Leadership and management: the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

