

AKIVA SCHOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority London Borough of Barnet

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates 27-28 June 2018

Lead Inspector Dr Leon Bernstein

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	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of Governors	Kate Daniels
Headteacher	Susy Stone
Address	The Sternberg Centre for Judaism, 80 East End Road, Finchley, London N3 2SY
Telephone number	020 8349 4980
Email address	admin@akivaschool.org
School website	https://www.akivaschool.org/

Inspection team

Lead Inspector **Dr Leon Bernstein**

Team Inspector **Mr Laurie Rosenberg**

This inspection was carried out by two inspectors. They visited 15 lessons or parts of lessons, where the focus was on observing Jewish Studies. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including pupils' written work, the Jewish Studies Curriculum, the school's self-evaluation document for Jewish Studies and the school's development plan. The senior leadership team played an active part in this inspection, including attending meetings with inspectors, and observing lessons. School leaders agreed with all of the inspectors' judgements during joint lesson observations. The school's last *Pikuach* inspection took place on 9-10 October 2013.

Introduction

The inspectors looked in detail at the following:

- Outcomes for pupils in their Jewish education.
- Quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Jewish education.
- Effectiveness of Leadership, Management, and Governance of Jewish education.
- Effectiveness of the Jewish Studies curriculum based on the school's aims and objectives.
- Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (*tefillah*).

Information about the school

- Akiva is a two-form entry, progressive, Jewish primary school that provides particularly for the Reform and Liberal and New North London Synagogue communities.
- The large majority of pupils are White British, but a number come from overseas, with approximately 10% coming 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 integrated with National Curriculum subjects throughout the school. *Ivrit* (modern Hebrew) is taught as a modern foreign language from the start of Reception through to the end of Year 6.

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	1
Outcomes for pupils in their Jewish Education	1
Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Jewish Education	1
Effectiveness of Leadership, Management, and Governance of Jewish Education	1
Effectiveness of the Jewish Studies Curriculum based on the school's aims and objectives	1
Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (<i>tefillah</i>)	1

Overall Effectiveness:

The quality of Jewish Learning provided in Akiva School is outstanding GRADE 1 because:

- The Headteacher, governing body and leadership team have successfully steered the school through all areas of development highlighted in the previous *Pikuach* report, resulting in outstanding judgements in all areas.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding, resulting in Akiva pupils achieving very high standards in all areas of their learning and making rapid progress over time.
- The creative and imaginative curriculum at Akiva is interwoven with the National Curriculum at every level and this provides pupils with great breadth and depth of knowledge and at the same time links everything they do in their school day to their personal lives as Jewish people.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because of a deep and sincere respect shared by all. Pupils show great sensitivity and respect for themselves and for others, and display great enthusiasm for their learning.
- The inclusive nature of the school, underpinned by the school's strong ethos, ensures that every view is valued and this results in a culture of love and care which is palpable throughout the school.

The school has the following strengths:

- A supportive governing body who acts as a 'critical friend' to leaders. This approach allows leaders to be creative, while also being held to task on all aspects of their work.
- Strong leadership at all levels which encourages all staff to work as a cohesive team for the benefit of pupils.
- Passionate teachers work together to create lifelong experiences for all pupils.
- Teaching staff, including teaching assistants (TAs), are passionate about the school and its

ethos.

- A fully integrated curriculum provides breadth and depth, giving all pupils access to an exciting range of content and activities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Research systems to develop their current tracking of pupils' achievement and progress over time, which will exemplify the Jewish ethos of the school, in order to gain deeper knowledge of the outcomes of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Ensure consistency of marking throughout the school, in line with the school's policy.

Outcomes for pupils in their Jewish education is outstanding GRADE 1 because:-

- Taking account of their starting points, the proportion of pupils making and exceeding expected progress is high.
- Pupils are typically able to articulate and apply their Jewish knowledge and skills in an increasingly age-appropriate way.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They display a thirst for learning and actively participate in Jewish Studies lessons.
- Pupils understand the value of Jewish Studies, and they learn well. They develop a range of skills, including the following: enquiry, interpretation, evaluation and reflection.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their Jewish education, and where appropriate, the school ensures that pupils are aware of opportunities to further develop their Jewish learning and practice of Jewish life.
- Inspectors heard pupils read from Years 2 and 6. In both groups, inspectors were impressed with the tenacity of those who found certain words challenging, and the thought processes of those who made good progress in blending consonants and matching vowels. In some cases, pupils were able to translate into English, and all pupils confidently navigated both the *Chumash* (Bible) and the school's custom-made *siddur* (prayer book). A number of pupils were particularly complimentary towards their school for having taught them how to read Modern and Biblical Hebrew. Inspectors found reading across the Key Stages to be of a good standard.
- The school's philosophy of tracking a pupil's progress in Jewish Studies does not follow traditional methods. It monitors and tracks performance from a holistic approach, noting pupils' overall academic achievement and progress, as well as their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as they progress through the years. Assessment of Jewish Studies at Akiva is thus focused more on qualitative rather than quantitative data.
- Inspectors were impressed with the range of answers given by pupils in class and in their books, demonstrating deep thought and mature reflection based on their learning in school.
- The school monitors outcomes by frequent scrutiny of pupils' work, pupils' assessment of their own work and the work of others and teacher assessment, in line with the school's assessment policy. In doing so, members of staff are able to identify gaps in knowledge and target next steps for each pupil. In addition, they gain valuable qualitative data through annual interviews with pupils and through Year 6 exit surveys. Pupils' comments in the surveys are impressive: "Akiva has contributed to my Jewish identity because I never really practise *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) at home and it is nice to do it at school. Akiva has also taught me to speak and read Hebrew so I am able to read from holy books."
- The school would like to improve this system of monitoring and plans in the near future to explore meaningful measures by which they can demonstrate and document progress and outcomes against their stated aims. This principle is currently being used in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) area.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Jewish education is outstanding GRADE 1 because:-

- Much of the teaching in all key stages and most subjects of the Jewish curriculum is outstanding or at least good. As a result, almost all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities as well as the more able, are making rapid and sustained progress.
- Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and understanding of the Jewish subjects they teach, and this is reflected in their pupils' learning.
- Teachers are passionate about their subjects. They are determined that pupils achieve well in their Jewish education.
- Lessons are planned to accommodate classes and groups of pupils, including those pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Teachers systematically and effectively check pupils' understanding during lessons and anticipate where they may need to intervene. Such interventions have a notable impact on the quality of learning.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have ensured that Teaching Assistants (TAs) are usefully deployed. TAs observed played a full and active part in lessons, assisting the teacher as a result of fully collaborative planning. The impact of this was that the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, were met.
- Behaviour in lessons is outstanding. Behaviour of all pupils is managed exceptionally well, leading to a working atmosphere of calm and respect.
- Pupils move around the school calmly and work with concentration and engagement. They demonstrate a high level of self-discipline and maturity.
- There is an excellent culture of support, where Jewish members of staff coach their non-Jewish colleagues in subject knowledge and with resources. In some cases, this results in including their colleagues in Jewish ritual in their own families to enhance their understanding.
- Planning is skilfully woven into the school's curriculum to give pupils every opportunity to reflect on areas of spirituality in their own lives. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, one pupil told the inspector that as a result of his work in that class it made him realise that: "We have to be grateful for everything and we have to be grateful to God."
- Teachers frequently reference Jewish values, particularly in developing a positive Jewish and secular learning environment. Jewish values underpin the school's well-publicised behaviour code and the routines of the classroom and school.
- Principles and practices in early learning are embedded in the EYFS Reception area. Integration of the EYFS key areas of learning through a Jewish prism is evidenced by displays, children's activities and discussions with staff. For instance, *Shavuot* (Pentecost) paper flowers made by the children are then used in their own 'florist shop' where flowers are 'sold' with toy money.
- Digital evidence in EYFS showed children writing their own *mitzvot* (commandments) into a scroll, where different skills were being used, for example, reading, writing, speaking and using Information and Communications Technology (ICT). This activity epitomised the school's integrated approach to learning.
- Lessons proceed at a lively pace. Pupils are enthusiastic participants in all aspects of learning, in line with the 'Thinking Skills' approach of the school. They enjoy the challenge of Jewish learning. They work well collaboratively and are confident in asking questions which contribute to their own progress and that of their peers.
- Much assessment of pupils' learning takes place in class. This begins with a well-embedded system of pupils assessing themselves and then assessing the work of their peers. Their work is finally assessed by the teacher and the results are discussed daily by all teachers. This enables all teachers to have a thorough overview of the achievement and progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

- Inspectors were treated to a delightful assembly, where Year 5 pupils showcased their education through a ‘technology-free’ assembly. They demonstrated their love of, and for, learning, and also the integration of Jewish education, through the subjects of the National Curriculum. One pupil summed up the ethos of the school by stating that: “Everyone understands the *Torah* in their own way.”
- There is appropriate use of ICT in the classroom. Clear diagrams, texts and other visuals on the interactive white board facilitate and enhance pupils’ learning. Pupils also make use of technology such as iPads to support their learning. Further use of ICT may benefit the pupils where, for example, pupils could have access to work and practice online from home, as they do in other subjects. The Lead for Jewish Studies is open to this idea and will pursue it in the coming autumn term.
- Most books are marked in line with the school’s marking policy. In some cases, teachers need to be more consistent in their marking, for example, constantly demanding neatness of presentation and ensuring that work is completed as directed.

The effectiveness of Leadership, Management and Governance of Jewish Education is outstanding GRADE 1 because:-

- The Headteacher has built up a very strong team over the years and has the respect and admiration of the staff and pupils. With her clear vision for excellence in every facet of the life of an Akiva pupil, she leads her team exceptionally well to protect the ethos and values of the school to ensure that all pupils benefit from her leadership.
- The leaders and governors of the school are deeply committed to, and driven by, the values it embraces. As one governor stated: “Jewish Studies is cross-curricular and this embraces every facet of every pupil’s school day and this links everything they do to their Judaism.”
- There is a dynamic and creative vision for Jewish education in which staff, governors and pupils strive for a culture of excellence. This is articulated confidently throughout the school community.
- Senior leaders, as well as governors, have a clear and shared vision of the school.
- The governing body carries out its duties effectively and offers excellent support while fulfilling its responsibilities as a ‘critical friend’ to school leaders and staff. It has a ‘hands on’ approach and is fully cognisant of all aspects of the school. Governors summed up their vision and ambition in describing Akiva as a school whose guiding principle is: “To promote Jewish values and ethos which run through the entire fabric of every moment in the school. It’s both a family and a community.”
- Governors hold senior leaders to account and this is evidenced in comprehensive minutes from regular governors’ meetings.
- The Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, Lead for Jewish Studies, together with the entire leadership team, work closely together as a cohesive unit to ensure a positive impact on the overall life, ethos and Jewish education of every pupil. This is most impressive as they work tirelessly in pursuit of providing an outstanding Jewish Studies provision for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Leaders focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning. They provide focused professional development for all staff, especially those who are training or newly qualified at an early stage of their careers.
- The school’s SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) / Inclusion Officer works very closely with all members of staff, and together they map out the provision for every pupil in the school who has special educational needs or disabilities. He also works closely with and supports teachers in guiding them to cater appropriately for all pupils. Action plans are drafted for these pupils and intervention programmes are put into place to help pupils’ progress in their learning.

- The SENCO oversees the procedures throughout the school for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities. This ensures that Jewish Studies practice is in line with the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.
- Leaders, including governors, focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning and provide focussed, professional development for all staff, especially those who are untrained and/or newly qualified and at an early stage of their careers. There is a highly robust system of performance management which encourages, challenges and supports teachers' improvement.
- The Lead for Jewish Studies has an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development in all aspects of the school's Jewish education. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate, and the leadership is constantly engaged in improving the quality of the Jewish education offered to pupils.
- The leadership team has worked hard since the last inspection to raise the standard of teaching and learning. Supported by internal and external evaluation, robust performance management, training, coaching and mentoring, the team has developed teaching so that a high proportion of teaching in the school is outstanding.
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- Members of staff value the leadership team and love being in the school. One member of staff wrote: "As a non-Jewish member of staff, I have felt part of the school and its Jewish ethos. I have been thoroughly supported and feel confident in facilitating Jewish Studies lessons." One member of the support staff commented: "It is a total joy and pleasure to work and to be a part of Akiva."
- The leadership team acknowledges that its unique system of tracking pupils' achievement and progress over time may benefit from a review to seek further precision on outcomes of all pupils. The team embraces this with determination and plans to investigate this next term.
- A number of comments from the parental survey highlighted parents' desire to have more frequent information about Jewish Studies and Hebrew. The Leadership team is taking this into account and will address this as a priority next term.

The effectiveness of the Jewish Studies curriculum based on the school's aims and objectives is outstanding GRADE 1 because:-

- The Jewish Studies curriculum is broad and balanced and provides pupils with their full entitlement of Jewish knowledge and experience. It is customised to meet the varying needs of individuals and groups.
- The school's Jewish Studies curriculum is very well organised, matching the school's ethos whilst reflecting the aspirations of the school community. Together with the numerous informal Jewish learning experiences, the curriculum provides Akiva pupils with rich Jewish learning opportunities, enabling them to grow and develop their Jewish skills, knowledge and understanding.
- The Jewish Studies curriculum is impressive because of its simplicity and its ability to demonstrate progress and development as pupils move throughout the key stages. The leadership team has decided to centre the curriculum around the main festivals, since it is partly the celebration of the festivals that gives the school its Jewish ethos. The impact of this means that pupils have the tools, knowledge and experience of the annual Jewish cycle.
- The school's documentation states that its curriculum is founded on a 'spiral model', which builds on skills and knowledge from year to year. This is evident in the curriculum maps that demonstrate increasingly sophisticated approaches to each of the *Chagim* (festivals). For instance, pupils studying *Pesach* (Passover) each year will tackle higher levels and deeper issues as they progress through their school years.
- Year 5 pupils host an interfaith *Seder* (Passover feast), and the Year 6 curriculum links modern-day slavery to the *Haggadah* (Passover text). This is also used to link the studies of the *Shoah* (Holocaust).

- There are impressive cross-curricular links. The festival of *Succot* (Tabernacles) is expertly interwoven with the National Curriculum, for example, pupils in Year 2 are asked to link the *mitzvah* (commandment) of *Ushpizin* (inviting people to the *succah*/booth) to their topic on famous people, whilst Year 6 pupils consider the prayer for rain and link it to agricultural sustainability.
- The school benefits greatly from the support and advice of a wide range of providers across the Jewish community, such as the Partnership for Jewish Schools (PaJes), *Tzedek* and *Pikuach*, the Jewish schools' inspection service. This has helped the school to frame its curriculum in line with its ethos. Festivals and commemorations, such as *Yom Hazikaron* (Remembrance Day) and Holocaust Memorial Day, are taught and observed, including families when possible, and there is a weekly *Kabbalat Shabbat* (welcoming in the Sabbath) ceremony.
- The school also enjoys celebrating festivals with others at The Sternberg Centre for Judaism and sharing them with pupils from other schools who are learning about Judaism.
- The school has a strong affiliation to Israel. Akiva School is proud of its Zionist ethos. Knowledge of and a love of Israel permeate the formal and informal curriculum, usually culminating in a 10-day trip to Israel in Year 6. Israel's Independence Day is a highlight of the year, and celebrations are organised primarily by the Hebrew Department and Israeli parents at the school.

The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, (SMSC) including meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (tefillah) is outstanding GRADE 1 because:-

- The school fulfils the statutory requirement for collective worship.
- SMSC is outstanding, and is one of the driving elements of the school's ethos and values. In a discussion group with pupils across both key stages there was a deep understanding of the role of the Divine in their own and other people's lives. One pupil suggested that: "If it wasn't for God we wouldn't be here", while another Year 6 student spoke eloquently about God "helping her to be curious" about the big questions in life.
- Pupils show respect towards each other and to adults. They are polite and care about the feelings of others.
- When speaking with one of the inspectors, all of the pupils in the group spoke about the caring nature of the school and how supportive all adults in the school were in looking after their emotional needs. The core ethos of 'respect' was clearly articulated by all pupils. Additionally, the ethos of respect was not only confined to Judaism, as pupils had a clear grasp of being in a diverse society and were pleased to be learning about and from other faiths. One pupil, sensitive to the issues surrounding Islam, stated: "Just because one person does something wrong, it doesn't mean that they're all wrong."
- The school organises a daily act of worship through *Shacharit* (morning prayers) in their classrooms. In one Year 3 class, pupils were asked to select their own prayers from the *Birchot Ha'Shachar* (morning blessings) and this was developed into one pupil formulating his own blessing for the home: "*Todah al ha'bayit*" (thank you for the home). Pupils were respectful and were urged to look at the English translation as well as reciting the Hebrew text.
- Display work around the school complements and enhances its Jewish ethos, from showcasing Israeli artists through to pupils' own prayers, hopes and dreams. Display work is highly crafted, and standards are very high. It is also evident that display work changes regularly. There is a large amount of Jewish portraiture evident from the moment one enters the school. Every door and area is named in Hebrew, and every opportunity is taken to stress Jewish values and the school's ethos. This actively consolidates pupils' Jewish Studies and Hebrew learning in an informal way.

- There is a quiet and purposeful atmosphere of goodness and calm throughout the school. Pupils are polite, respectful, but also curious. Behaviour is outstanding and, in the playground at lunch time, they sit in groups and chat calmly, sometimes with teachers and other adults while others play games. The entire playground provides pupils with a safe and caring environment.
- Pupils listen well to instructions from adults and act on them immediately.
- All the pupils seen by the inspectors seemed happy to be in the school. Pupils show respect for each other and for staff at all times. They were also very courteous to the inspectors.
- Jewish values are exemplified through the school's approach to *tzedaka* (charity). Each year pupils discuss and select three charities, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Charities sponsored include Cancer Research UK, Great Ormond Street Hospital and 'My Israel'. In addition, the school encourages pupils and their families to take part in Jewish communal initiatives, such as 'Mitzvah Day.'

Views of parents and carers

Pikuach invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils at Akiva School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In response to the statement: 'My child is happy at this school, 97% of parents strongly agreed or agreed, and in response to the statement: 'My child makes good progress in Jewish Studies, 84% of parents strongly agreed or agreed.

The comments below represent some of their views:

'Akiva has provided my child with a caring, safe environment in which to grow and develop her Jewish life. She enthusiastically talks about what she has learnt in Jewish Studies and surprises us with her knowledge of Hebrew. We are proud to be part of the Akiva family.'

'We value the way that Akiva naturally blends Jewish learning and a passion for Judaism across subjects. This way Judaism is not seen as a standalone 'subject' to be liked or disliked. Instead it is part of school life, the same way as it is part of our everyday lives. In addition, the positive ethos means that our children leave Akiva proud to be Jewish.'

'It's a lovely school and we're very happy with it but would like more feedback on Jewish Studies/Ivrit'

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 pupil's 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.