

Michael Sobell Sinai School

Inspection report

LEA	Brent
Inspection dates	8 – 9 January 2007
Inspected under the auspices of	Pikuach

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

Type of School	Primary	School address	Shakespeare Drive, Kenton, Middlesex HA3 9UD
School category	Voluntary Aided		
Age range of pupils	3 - 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8204 1550
Number on roll	654	Fax number	020 8905 0260
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Clive Goodman
Date of previous inspection	13 -16 March 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Vivienne Orloff

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Introduction

Description of the school

Michael Sobell Sinai School is the largest Jewish primary school in Europe with over 650 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. Over 11% of the pupils speak other languages including, Farsi, French, Italian, Ivrit and Russian as their first language.

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 Limmudei Kodesh department of the Michael Sobell Sinai School is good overall with some outstanding features. There is a strong commitment to continue improving the quality of Jewish education. Considerable progress has been made since the previous inspection, particularly with regard to its provision for pupils with special educational needs which was then judged to be poor. This provision is now a strength of the school. Other strengths include the personal development and well-being of the pupils and the care, guidance and support that they receive.

Pupils are happy at the school and feel secure and the overwhelming majority of parents indicate very strong support for the school. Pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school is mostly very good and the manner in which they conduct themselves during *Tefillah* (Collective Worship) is exemplary.

The Head of Limmudei Kodesh has a clear vision of the school and understands what is needed to move the school forward. Teachers and pupils relate very well to each other. The teachers feel well supported by the Head of Limmudei Kodesh and they in turn, are highly dedicated and motivated. The school places great emphasis on improving the standards of Hebrew reading and writing and is succeeding in this aim due to the considerable resources it invests in teaching these important skills.

The school has been meticulous in producing appropriate policy documents relating to all aspects of the Limmudei Kodesh Department. Areas for development include fuller implementation of these policies, specifically those relating to the further development of the curriculum and the planning of lessons.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that appropriate schemes of work are in place for all areas of the Limmudei Kodesh curriculum so that sufficient challenge is provided for all pupils
- review the planning of lessons and their intended outcomes in order to maximise use of time
- undertake a review of long term planning to ensure the curriculum is delivered consistently across the school

Achievement and standards

Whilst pupils' prior attainment varies considerably, most, including those with learning difficulties, achieve satisfactorily and make good progress in line with the school's expectations as they advance from year to year. The appointment of a Hebrew reading co-ordinator has been a wise investment evidenced by good to very good standards of reading throughout the school. Script writing is introduced in Year

2 and most pupils gain competence in this skill so that by Key Stage 2, most are able to write with confidence and accuracy.

Standards generally achieved in most other areas of the Limmudei Kodesh curriculum including *Chumash*, *Chagim*, *Ivrit*, Israel Studies and general Jewish Knowledge are satisfactory and in line with the school's expectations. The teaching of *Chumash* focuses on comprehension of the selected texts rather than on translation. Whilst pupils are expected to be familiar with basic grammar including prefixes and suffixes, most of the pupils observed struggled with this.

Many lessons rely heavily on worksheets as a means of reinforcement and assessment. However, for the more able pupils, these often lack stimulation and more challenging tasks need to be incorporated into the lessons to enable them to reach their full potential.

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being

The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school fully complies with the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship. *Tefillah* takes place daily as does *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) at each lunchtime. Pupils conduct themselves in an exemplary manner during *Tefillah*, thus reinforcing the ethos and Jewish values of the school.

Evidence gained during lesson observation and from discussions with pupils confirms that they have very positive attitudes towards the school. They are happy to be at the school and they enjoy their Jewish Studies lessons. The views of pupils are taken seriously and issues are raised by means of the effective school council. Pupils understand and appreciate the importance of leading healthy lifestyles and the school provides opportunities and encouragement for them to do so. For example, a variety of healthy foods are available at lunchtime. Behaviour is mostly very good and pupils display an impressive degree of *derech eretz* (courtesy) to visitors, teachers and peers. During the course of the inspection, they opened doors and greeted members of the inspection team.

Pupils contribute to the Jewish and wider communities in a variety of ways. For example, they collect money for *tzedakah* (charity) which benefits Jewish and non-Jewish causes and they visit the three local Jewish homes for the aged during the course of the year. Educational visits are also organised, for example to the Jewish Museum. Pupils learn about Sephardi customs and a prominent member of the Sephardi community was recently invited to the school to address them.

Grade: 1

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching overall is satisfactory with some good and some outstanding features. Very good procedures are in place for the assessment of Hebrew reading

and significant efforts are made to hear all pupils read individually at least weekly. Limmudei Kodesh teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching resources are very well prepared. They have good relationships with their pupils who enjoy their lessons. Most of the lessons observed were satisfactory and some were good and a minority graded outstanding.

Some decisions made for the whole school timetable to maximise time for the teaching of National Curriculum subjects have had an impact on the quality of teaching and learning of Limmudei Kodesh. Lessons are generally an hour long and at times up to an hour and fifteen minutes. Lesson planning does not always take this into account and some lessons observed did not use the available time well, particularly at the ends of lessons when there is a tendency for too much time to be devoted to less challenging work. Learning objectives, although stated on lesson plans, are not always clear to pupils.

The Limmudei Kodesh Department has made great strides in the use of ICT (Information and Computer Technology) and a member of staff has responsibility for producing resources and training colleagues. ICT adds interest and variety to the lessons and when it is used well, it supports learning and helps to achieve the learning objectives.

Grade: 3

Curriculum and other activities

The quality and range of the Limmudei Kodesh curriculum is good. It is suitably broad and balanced and reflects the ethos and values of the school by providing a solid foundation of Jewish knowledge and skills, as well as implanting Jewish attitudes, beliefs and practice. The Head of Limmudei Kodesh has direct responsibility for PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education) which contributes to the pupils' capacity to stay healthy and safe. There is good integration with the secular curriculum and the school fulfils its mission statement to provide its pupils with the essential skills for their future lives in the context of orthodox Jewish beliefs, practices and values and a love of Israel. The curriculum is enhanced by some excellent extra-curricular activities including weekly clubs for *Mishnah*, *Minchah*, Leyning (chanting from the Torah scrolls) and Israeli dancing. In addition, there is a club for *Ivrit* speakers.

The school is a partner of the JSCP (Jewish Studies Curriculum Partnership), and will shortly be introducing the new JSCP *Chumash* curriculum. This is a project to support schools in the development of their Jewish Studies curriculum.

The Head of Limmudei Kodesh is aware of the need to further develop schemes of work, particularly in *Tefillah*, *Chagim* and Modern Jewish History, so that more challenge is provided for all pupils throughout the Limmudei Kodesh curriculum.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

The provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is outstanding. The school has clear policies on Anti-Bullying, Health and Safety and Child Protection. Discussions with pupils reveal that they feel very safe and secure and know to whom they should turn in the event they have a problem. Security in the school is very effective. Security officers are on duty throughout the day and they ensure that everyone is carefully vetted before being admitted through the school gate.

The school has strong links with the Jewish secondary schools and Year 6 pupils are given valuable advice and support so that they are well prepared for the transition.

Since the previous inspection in March 2000 there has been an enormous improvement in the provision for pupils with special needs and this is now a strength of the school. Significant resources have been invested by the school to support pupils and particularly impressive is the use of learning support assistants. Pupils are withdrawn from classes throughout the school and receive support as required.

Grade: 1

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the Limmudei Kodesh Department are good with some outstanding features. The Head of Department is also Assistant Headteacher and the member of the school's Senior Management Team responsible for a number of whole school issues including behaviour and PSHCE. In this he is well supported by the entire senior management of the school. These factors have helped to raise the profile of the Limmudei Kodesh Department and helped to create a whole school environment. The appointment of middle managers with specific responsibility for co-ordinating Hebrew reading and ICT is a very positive step forward in the management of this large department.

The Limmudei Kodesh teachers work very well together as a team and share a sense of purpose. There are very good performance management procedures in place and teachers feel very well supported by the Head of Department. They are keen to learn and it is admirable how many teachers requested feedback after lesson observations during the inspection.

The school has made a reflective evaluation of its Jewish Education provision in the Pikuach self-evaluation form. The information provided in the form, together with discussions which took place during the inspection, has confirmed that the school knows itself well in many areas. The inspectors are aware of the enormous efforts made by the school to provide the best Jewish education possible for its pupils. The Head of Limmudei Kodesh and staff are well placed to take the department forward to its next stage of development.

Grade: 2

