

HERTSMERE JEWISH PRIMARY SCHOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority Hertfordshire

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates Tuesday 17th and Wednesday 18th May 2022

This inspection of the school was conducted under section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of school	Primary School
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	3 - 11
Mixed /Single sex	Mixed
Number on roll	451
Chair of Governors	Judy Greenberg
Headteacher	Mrs Rita Alak-Levi
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Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Sandra Teacher
Team Inspector: Jonathan Spector

Introduction

Inspectors make judgements on the following three Key Areas:

- **The Quality of Jewish Education**
- **Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development**
- **Leadership and Management**

These key judgements will then contribute to the overall judgement on the school's efficiency and effectiveness in its provision of Jewish education, enabling inspectors to reach their final judgement.

Information about the school

- Hertsmere Jewish Primary School is a modern orthodox Jewish school that serves the local and wider Jewish community. Pupils come from a range of family backgrounds in terms of religious knowledge, ethos and practice including families of other faiths and none. The school's foundation body is the United Synagogue.
- The school is a two-form entry primary school, that has a bulge class in Year 6. This is due to pupils from Moriah primary school joining in September 2020. Pupils have one Jewish Studies lesson a day.
- There is a low percentage of pupils receiving Pupil Premium, 2% (8 pupils). There are 23 pupils on the SEN register (5%). Nine pupils have an Education Health Care Plan. The school has a low number of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL).
- The school was judged to be inadequate at its last Ofsted inspection in January 2019 due to Safeguarding concerns and subsequently became a sponsored academy under the Jewish Community Academy Trust (JCAT) in October 2019. Staff instability and recruitment issues coupled with the Covid pandemic further impacted on the development of Jewish Studies within the school. The school teaches *Ivrit (Modern Hebrew)* as a modern foreign language, and this has only recently been introduced to the older pupils.

Inspection judgements

Grade

Overall effectiveness	2
The Quality of Jewish Education	3
Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development	2
Leadership and management	2

What is it like to attend this school?

- The school has been through a difficult period which has affected its ability to maintain the quality of Jewish life and learning. Over the last two years, this has contributed to issues with the leadership of Jewish Studies, staffing, and the quality of Jewish education. Consequently, the quality of aspects of the provision such as Hebrew reading and *Chumash* (Bible) have suffered, and Jewish education has not always been prioritised.
- Over the past few months, however, the leadership and Jewish Studies team, aided by the Jewish Studies' JCAT school improvement partner, have worked tirelessly to improve the situation, and put in place a more stable leadership team, curriculum and teacher training that has led to rapid development. Although the school is aware that there is still a long way to go on their journey of improvement, the green shoots of recovery are there, and leaders understand the further improvements that are necessary. For this reason, the overall effectiveness of Jewish Studies within school is good.
- Pupils enjoy Jewish Studies and are proud of their school. There is a good rapport between the small but committed Jewish Studies staff and pupils. Parents are positive about recent improvements. As one parent said, "There has been a recent change in teaching, and the excitement and interest is reappearing."
- Pupils engage in daily *tefillah* (prayer) and *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after meals) with enthusiasm, and behaviour is good. Time is given during assembly for pupils' own personal *tefillah*. All pupils, including those with special needs or who speak other languages at home, benefit from a values-driven curriculum, i.e. where the focus is on *middot* (character traits) which aligns with the school's ethos of Living, Learning and Caring. Inspectors were particularly impressed with the additional provision put in place by the SENDCO (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator) to ensure additional support in Jewish Studies lessons.
- The school has recently adapted a curriculum for Jewish Studies with an intent that is coherently planned and sequenced to provide Jewish knowledge and skills for future learning. Pupils have positive attitudes because teachers create a positive learning environment. However, the implementation and impact require further improvement, which the school recognises. Planning work for pupils of different abilities will meet the needs of all pupils, supporting lower attainers and challenging higher ones, as pupils themselves say, work is too easy, especially for the higher attainers.

What does the school do well what does it need to do better?

The Quality of Jewish education:

- Teaching is generally, although not securely, good throughout the school, with pockets of weaker practice. This is the targeted focus of the Jewish Studies leader's support together with intensive CPD (Continued Professional Development) from the school improvement partner. Where

teaching is strong it promotes purposeful learning and high expectation. As a result, those pupils rise to the challenge and are able to contribute their own arguments and opinions, while listening and learning from their peers. Where teaching has less impact on learning and progress, that challenge is missing because the teacher does not ask probing questions in order to challenge and deepen, or to check their pupils' understanding. These weaknesses are gradually being eliminated as teachers' subject knowledge and confidence develop and grow.

- Pupils learn Jewish values and *middot* (character development) through effective *Parashah* (weekly *Torah* portion) lessons. For example, the pupils' understanding of neurodiversity (the way different people think), allows them to have *rachmanut* (compassion) for their classmates. Inspectors saw lessons where pupils were taught about kindness, helping others and perseverance. This was a result of clear direction and implementation of the new curriculum, put into place by the leaders.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Jewish Studies is integrated into the seven areas of learning. Pupils in the nursery develop their communication skills through singing Hebrew songs. In Reception, they use their imagination to learn and understand about the laws of *Shavuot* (festival celebrating the giving of the *Torah* on Mount Sinai), when they play in the florist shop situated in the role-play area. This lays the foundations for embracing a love of Jewish life and living as recorded in the school's aims.
- Inspectors saw that the development of the younger children was less impaired than that of the older pupils, as they had not been affected by the negative issues resulting from the pandemic. For example, the younger children already knew their *aleph bet* (Alphabet), *brachot* (blessings) and how to be involved in *kabbalat shabbat* (bringing in the Sabbath).
- There is a similar picture with the assessment of pupils' progress. Teachers' skills in assessing pupils' work are beginning to improve, thanks to CPD, but also as a result of the joint moderation with the leadership team. This support will enable them to arrive at reliable judgements on individual progress over time and to ensure assessment has a real impact on learning.
- The feedback policy is beginning to become embedded, but care must be taken over the quality and appropriate challenge of the teacher's formative comments, as well as the quality of the pupils' responses, so that feedback becomes a real driver of progress over time.
- The school's assessment data shows that the quality of Hebrew Reading is weak, especially for the older pupils. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic and staff shortages. However, this has been a main focus for improvement by leaders in recent months and there is slow but sure progress coupled with the additional lessons in *Ivrit*. The school has plans to gradually re-introduce elements of the curriculum that have recently not been taught, such as *Chumash*. Leaders and teachers would benefit from assessment and tracking in other areas of the Jewish Studies' curriculum so they have a better understanding of pupils' progress from their starting points and can then identify the gaps in their learning.

Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development

- All pupils, irrespective of faith background, participate fully, and feel included, in the prayer life of the school. This contributes enormously to the spiritual and moral development of the children. Pupils' prayer is woven seamlessly into the fabric of daily life, through *brachot*, (blessings) *birkat hamazon* (Grace after meals). and the pupils are given numerous opportunities to deliver their own prayers. They show reverence, attentiveness, and a willingness to play a part in assemblies and whole school celebrations. At morning *tefillah*, they show *kavanah* (sincere feeling, devotion of the heart), pronounce the Hebrew words correctly and have an understanding of what the prayers mean. Year 1 pupils excitedly rehearsed for their *chagigat siddur* (party, celebrating receiving one's first *siddur*, - prayer book) and were confidently able to explain what prayers were

found in the *siddur*, what they meant and when they were said, including *mashiv haruach* (prayer for the wind and rain). As they move through the school, pupils are offered increasing opportunities to engage in regular prayers, festivals, celebrations, commemorations of significant events and *Torah* study. This, for example, is seen when older pupils lead their younger peers in *tefillah* (prayer service).

- The pupils' Jewish personal and spiritual development is, at times, prioritised over more academic textual learning. However, the professional development and opportunities for teacher training are slowly having a positive impact on higher order skills of *Chumash*. The older pupils were enthused by in-depth class discussions with their teachers on a variety of Jewish topics. When asked about when they feel close to *Hashem*, one pupil said, "I feel closest to *Hashem* when I am staring at the sky with my best friend." Pupils begin to understand the concept of holiness when they research the clothes of the priestly garments such as the *choshen mishpat* (*the Breastplate of Judgement, worn by the High Priest*). Inspectors heard an example of a younger child encouraging his family to attend *shul* (synagogue) and parents of the younger children were effusive in their praise of the way their children come home telling them stories and singing songs about what they have learnt.
- Year 5 pupils are able to connect what they had learnt in assembly about diversity with their lessons about *tzelem Elokim* (awareness of the spiritual in all humankind). A pupil explained to the class how, "Every person has a spark of *Hashem* and that's why we should respect every human being." Pupils and staff from other faiths and cultures explain about their festivals such as Diwali and Easter whilst being proud to attend a Jewish school.
- School-wide Jewish events have restarted post-Covid. The pupils speak with excitement about their *Shabbaton* (an event or programme of education held over the Sabbath) *activities*, *Pesach* (Passover) and *Sukkot* (festival of 'Tabernacles') celebrations, and the younger pupils enjoy making *challot* (special bread, usually braided and typically eaten on ceremonial occasions such as Shabbat and major Jewish holidays) with their teachers. Pupils are aware of the importance of lifelong learning when studying about Rabbi Akiva and were eagerly anticipating their *Lag B'Omer* (a holiday that occurs on the 33rd day between Passover and Shavuot) celebrations. The school has a close relationship with the SEED organisation, which enhances the school's ability to engage parents with Jewish celebrations through activities such as the *Shabbat* fair.
- Personal, social, health and relationships education is taught from a *Torah* perspective and older pupils benefit from additional visits from Streetwise (a community organisation that teaches about safeguarding). The impact of a talk from a child of a Holocaust survivor left a lasting impression.
- The *Anim Zemirot* club gives parents enormous pleasure when they hear their pupils take part in a *shul* service. The school has endeavoured to provide higher order learning for more able pupils, although currently only one child attends the *Mishna* (the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions which is known as the Oral Torah) club.
- The Year 6 pupils can put themselves forward for the Pupils' Leadership programme through which they form the Pupil Leadership team. This helps the pupils to reflect on their conduct, character, and values through *chesed* (loving-kindness) and *tikkun olam* (*repairing the world, to make it better*). They consider moral and ethical issues within Judaism, such as whether or not heart transplants should be allowed and linked this to their studies in English when they were reading 'Pig Heart Boy'.
- Year 2 pupils play the part of detectives, finding out about the differences between a *Sefer Torah* (a handwritten copy of the Torah, i.e. the five books of Moses) and a *Chumash* (printed Bible). However, all teachers are overly dependent on the use of worksheets, which restricts pupils' independence and creativity. There are missed opportunities to make full use of latest technologies to enhance teaching and learning.

Leadership and Management

- Leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the provision for Jewish Studies effectively, because the systems employed are robust, searching, and – crucially – making a real impact on the raising of standards of teaching and learning. The governors’ monitoring schedule is closely linked to the school’s development plan priorities. The Jewish Studies curriculum has been adapted to suit the particular needs of the school.
- Lesson observations and book scrutiny are used effectively to monitor progress, and these feed into Inset (In-Service Training) and CPD support. Most parents are full of praise for the teaching their children receive (see parents’ responses below). Subject development plans are drawn up based on the monitoring data gathered and used as working documents that are proactive in supporting and training to arrive at more accurate assessment for learning and making decisions about schemes of work - and how best these meet the needs of different groups of pupils.
- The Leadership team, coupled with the new governors and JCAT, are initiating continuous support for teachers and their subject development, and the powerful modelling of best practice. It is a journey but carried out with determination to ensure each child has the best climate and motivation to learn and fulfil his or her potential. The Jewish Studies Lead is fully supported by senior leadership and governors, as well as getting support through collaborating with the other Jewish Studies leads from the JCAT hub.
- The school is aware that Jewish Studies would benefit from a permanent appointment of a full-time Head of Jewish Studies and further training opportunities for the Jewish Studies teachers. Plans are in progress to achieve this.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Ensure the school continues to implement their development plan by instigating the full Jewish Studies curriculum including making best use of the latest technological aids.
- Implement the planned effective assessment procedures for Jewish Studies subjects which can be used by leaders to monitor the quality of the provision and by teachers to direct their planning and to address gaps in learning.
- Continue to invest in a Jewish Studies leadership team to ensure high quality Jewish education for all pupils.

Statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (<i>tefillah</i>)	Met
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- Inspectors were particularly mindful to carry out a thorough and rigorous investigation of concerns that had been previously raised. They analysed questionnaires, scrutinised all comments and carried out a wealth of discussions with all stakeholders. Inspectors found that although some of the concerns were valid previously, the school has made a concerted effort to overcome many of these challenges and the majority of views were now much more positive.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 156 parental questionnaires returned. The majority were positive about the school and their children's Jewish education. Some typical responses included:

- He loves his JS Studies and all the creativity and fun of those lessons; he has learned so much and in a way that promotes a love for it too
- His Jewish knowledge is good, and he knows his brachot, but he struggles with reading.
- Favourite subject. Taught in a way which makes kids enthusiastic about Judaism.
- They do what they can with the money they have and are fantastic. More funding would hugely enrich and add to what they can do without the financial constraints though and currently I imagine there are things they would love to do but can't because of money constraints
- The school do all they can with financial constraints, I am sure if they could have more funding, they would do more
- My child has commented recently that festivals / celebrations are quite uneventful
- Started mishna club, which is fantastic, but it is one teacher with one initiative
- Before the first lockdown there was a new JS teacher who tried to change everything! scrapped Alef Champ and weekly parasha, obviously it took time after lockdown etc. but now Alef Champ and weekly parasha are back - thank you, this helps me as a parent to understand what they are learning and to help them with their reading.
- My child can read well but is still at a fairly basic level. This is prayer book Hebrew. My child has no conversational ivrit. I see very little evidence of my child's Hebrew writing
- My child can read words made from Hebrew letters and has some ability to write. My child cannot speak Hebrew at all
- When raised at the last parents evening, Alef Champ workbooks appeared for the children to use at home and more recently, Alef Champ readers, thank you.
- During pandemic it was hard to gauge how much they should have been given. There were a lot of sheets!
- Hebrew reading no. Other aspects of Jewish learning yes.
- Hopefully not contradicting myself but the online learning for the festivals was good and ivrit was brilliant
- My child is happy and learns well. From a JS perspective the school is definitely lacking leadership and a permanent JS head
- It all depends on the teacher you get
- Depends on what parents would want for Jewish education.
- The teachers are fantastic, so passionate and make the learning so fun, creative and age appropriate, so their JS is a highlight of the day for my kids, and they have learnt so much
- Our JS teachers are fantastic, not only are they nurturing and lovely but they are passionate about JS and teaching, and they make the lessons so creative and fun and age appropriate, so my son loves all the art activities and learning, one of his highlights of his day
- Would be good if the school could provide homework in paper form in a folder. I don't find online suitable.
- My child is on the fourth JS teacher in two years which shows lack of stability and lack of support from JCAT to the school. Unfortunately during the 3 years that HJPS has been part of JCAT the school appears to have been struggling and with the Chief Rabbi championing Jewish education this is upsetting. It would be good to see the US and the local communities being involved and getting behind the school.
- The Jewish ethos and vibe at the school has dwindle since my child joined. The lack of ruach and excitement surrounding events and festivals needs to be a priority and all teachers need to engage. Other local schools appear to be doing more, and that's a shame. Support from all the United Synagogues in the Hertsmere borough would be appreciated. Asking the parents to give money for books that the school had previously purchased and then discarded is a real shame
- The Year 5 Shabbaton was great. My son thoroughly enjoyed it. I think it was so well done that everyone had such a good time - whether you were religious or not, shy or loud, boy or girl, had special needs or neurotypical. That is truly amazing that it was so well organized that it appealed to everyone.

- I was thrilled both my small children attended anim zemirot club and sang at their brother's bar mitzvah!
- Very pleased to have recently learnt that HJPS will be taking part in Etgar this year but disappointed that the children have only just been given their books for this and started working towards this, especially as other schools have already been doing this for several months. We hope that a permanent Head of Jewish Studies will be found soon and that he/she will remain in post for some time to provide more stability to this role.
- I think the depth and difficulty of Hebrew reading could be improved.
- As mentioned for my daughter. All aspects of Jewish Studies is excellent. My son loves it, talks loads about what he learns each day. The only thing I would like Improved is hebrew and ivrit somehow. If possible, more time on it. Although I know this is difficult.
- The learning about ethics, Morality, Jewish way of life, Parsha, the Jewish calendar, Shabbat, Festivals is excellent. For me I would like both kids to have more hebrew learning.
- They need a strong head of JS
- He can't even read Hebrew properly!!
- I don't think they understand the customer base at this school, and I don't feel they tailor the curriculum to who the children are. More useful would be to open the siddur and ensure they can follow a service rather than learning about Gemara etc.
- Lack of proper JS teaching is upsetting. i.e. Children do grace after meals - secular teachers / TA's let them do whatever they want i.e. don't do it properly or finish it.
- My child has a great love for Judaism since starting at school and on Friday's nights we now sing a variety of songs which he loves to join in with.
- My son is extremely fond of Mrs. and her sweet and caring nature has contributed to him excelling in Jewish Studies and enjoying every aspect of it
- The events we have had in the past year in the school have been fantastic. Where the parents have been allowed to come in.
- Unfortunately due to constant staff changes the school has suffered with their Jewish learning continuity. New Hebrew reading homework is great as that has fallen behind during covid. My daughter enjoys all parts of Jewish learning at HJPS.
- The Jewish Studies department has improved a lot over the last couple of months. My daughter feels inspired by the JS lessons and is gradually improving with her hebrew reading. The Jewish events at the school are great too and the kids love them.
- Our JS teachers are fantastic, not only are they nurturing and lovely but they are passionate about JS and teaching, and they make the lessons so creative and fun and age appropriate, so my son loves all the art activities and learning, one of his highlights of his day
- I wish they would enforce the ethos of the school and not allow parents to enter premises if not wearing a skirt or kippa
- The school needs its own head of Jewish Studies and Rabbi. Since Mrs ... has joined the JS department my reception child has embraced Jewish Studies.

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' 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.