



SIMON MARKS JEWISH PRIMARY SCHOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

LEA Hackney
Inspection dates 28 February – 1 March 2006/30 Shvat – 1 Adar 5766
Reporting inspector Angela Gluck Wood
Team inspector Jean Shindler

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

Type of School	Primary	School address	75 Cazenove Road London N16 6PD
School category	Voluntary aided		
Age range of pupils	3 – 11	Telephone number	020 8806 6048
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Fax number	020 8442 4722
Number on roll	160	Chair of governors	Mrs Jo-Ann Myers
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mr Laurie Rosenberg
Date of previous inspection	8 – 12 November 2004; 24 – 28 Heshvan 5765		

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Introduction

Description of the school

This smaller than average school is supported by the Simon Marks Jewish Primary School Trust, the Scopus Educational Trust being the foundation body. While not being formally affiliated with any synagogue or synagogue organisation, the school adopts a Modern Orthodox approach to Jewish education and practice, with a Zionist perspective.

For the purposes of admission, the governing body recognises as Jewish those children who have a Jewish parent. There is also a very small number of non-Jewish pupils on roll. Pupils come from Ashkenazi and Sefardi (including Adeni) backgrounds, and a significant number of pupils are of Israeli parentage. Amongst the school's families, there is a wide range of Jewish observance. A survey in the school showed that two-thirds of the school's families have no synagogue affiliation. For most families, the school is the major formal contact with the Jewish community.

An above average number of pupils have a first language other than English and the majority of these pupils are Hebrew speakers. The pupils' social and economic backgrounds are varied. Pupils' prior attainment on entry to the school is average, with significant variations from year to year. A number of pupils have special educational needs, including five with statements.

After several years of decline, the number of pupils is increasing and the nursery is growing particularly fast. Families are drawn to the school from an exceptionally wide area of London.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school's provision for Jewish education

The inspectors consider that the Jewish atmosphere of the school is vibrant and strong. It is clear that most parents are satisfied with their child's Jewish education, that teachers are caring and committed, and that pupils are happy and confident at school. The school's most effective features are its inspirational and energetic leadership, the contribution it makes to pupils' spiritual and moral development, pupils' very good behaviour, the positive relationships between members of the school community, the quality of worship and festivals, and the whole celebration of life that is very powerfully felt.

Since the last Pikuach inspection, there have been some improvements in Jewish Studies teaching but there is a need for more improvement in the subject. A director of Jewish education and development (DJED) has recently been appointed and he has already begun to act on the recommendations in the last Pikuach report. He has good support from the headteacher and the chair of the governing body, as well as the trustees.

The school has made a very accurate and insightful evaluation of its strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development. This is borne out by the inspectors' findings and judgements. Care must be taken not to overload the post of the DJED with too many initiatives too soon.

The school knows itself well and has a proven capacity for change. There can be confidence that the Jewish ethos of the school will be sustained and that Jewish Studies will be enhanced.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

- complete the development of the Jewish Studies curriculum to create practical schemes of work that promote pupils' progression
- improve assessment in Jewish Studies so that pupils understand how they can do better and teachers can plan further learning
- continue and expand the arrangements for the professional development of Jewish Studies teachers
- introduce regular modelling and monitoring of Jewish Studies teaching, and the mentoring of individual teachers

Achievement and standards

Pupils gain much of their Jewish knowledge and understanding not only from Jewish Studies lessons but also from their experience of the school's Jewish life, such as in worship and the celebration of Shabbat and festivals.

Some children may enter the school with little prior knowledge or experience of the Jewish tradition. In the Foundation Stage, the school continues to be

successful in enabling pupils to make good progress and to achieve sound Jewish knowledge and understanding.

At both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, some pupils who have the potential for high achievement are not being fully enabled to reach it. However, most pupils' achievement and progress are at least satisfactory in relation to their age and aptitude. Further, there are early signs that the measures that the school is taking to raise achievement and improve pupils' progress are proving to be effective.

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being

The school makes an exceptionally fine contribution to pupils' spiritual development, within and outside lessons. Likewise, the school promotes pupils' moral development very effectively. Staff provide positive role models of ethical behaviour and Jewish commitment. The 'Mitzvah Wall' – a prominent display of pupils' art – enables pupils to express their ideas about how commandments can be fulfilled and affirms them in their values. The focus in assembly on a 'middah', related to the weekly Torah portion, supports their development of personal qualities. Pupils' behaviour towards each other and adults is exemplary, and they treat resources carefully. They have a good concern for health and safety, in eating and in moving around the school.

Pupils' attitudes to learning in Jewish Studies are generally positive but some do not entirely enjoy the ways in which they learn.

Pupils value the opportunities for engagement in the recently revived but as yet fully developed School Council. It needs to become a forum for the expression of views and a democratic decision-making process.

The school is increasingly involving pupils in their awareness of the wider society and the contribution that they can make to the community. They are given much scope for social interaction and taking responsibility.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Jewish Studies teachers have good subject knowledge. Their expectations of pupils' behaviour are high and they organise lessons efficiently. They have good rapport with the pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported but there are pupils who are not challenged enough.

Recently the school has encouraged teachers to identify the major 'Learning Intention' of each Jewish Studies lesson and to explain this to the pupils. This is a positive step towards enabling teachers to focus on raising achievement. While teachers do identify and announce 'Learning Intentions', in some cases

these are descriptions of content or of activities and they are not expressed as intended outcomes in knowledge, understanding or skill.

Procedures for the assessment of pupils' learning remain weak. Assessment is currently not adequately standardised; it does not show pupils clearly enough how they can improve; and it does not give teachers sufficient information to plan the next stages effectively. The school has rightly identified assessment for learning as a major need.

"Teachers' TV" is currently featuring a lesson on the interpretation of religious stories, which was filmed in a Year 6 class at the school. Some of the best teaching features guided and well-focused discussions or traditional Jewish pair learning. There are, throughout the school, models of good teaching that can be shared.

Grade: 3

Curriculum and other activities

The three attainment targets (learning about Judaism; learning from Judaism; and the experience of Judaism) on which the curriculum is based are forward-looking and entirely suited to the pupils' interests and backgrounds. However, they need to be translated into detailed and concrete schemes of work, which would enable teachers to plan for pupils of varying learning needs. Little progress has been made in the development of the curriculum in these respects but the process is now underway.

There is a need for a greater development of Hebrew in Jewish Studies but there are good links between the Jewish Studies curriculum and National Curriculum subjects, especially in relation to festivals. Art and music are particularly strong features of Jewish Studies teaching and learning: they contribute to high standards of performance and display. Likewise, there is excellent use of dance and drama in Jewish Studies in the Foundation Stage. The curriculum has been further enhanced this year by two extra-curricular activities (the cheder and the Torah chanting club).

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support

The school has a very caring and supportive atmosphere. Pupils feel safe and highly valued. They experience the school as a happy place that contributes to their well-being and their self-confidence.

The school site is secure and there are appropriate measures to guarantee the health and safety of pupils. Arrangements are in place to ensure that food served at or brought to school is kosher (conforms to Jewish dietary requirements).

The quality of collective worship is very high, having been further enhanced in the current year, for example through introducing a horseshoe seating arrangement and by reading from the Torah scroll once a week. Pupils'

participation in collective worship is outstanding. They are familiar with formal prayers and there is a clear sense that they engage in a spirit of joy, respect and thoughtfulness. There is great appreciation for the possibility of some pupils presenting some elements of assemblies. Some pupils are engaged in learning how to chant the Torah. Collective worship takes place, across the week, in an appropriate range of groupings, contexts and settings. Kabbalat Shabbat (service of welcoming the Sabbath) for Key Stage 2 pupils takes place in family-style groups at tables, and this is greatly prized by the pupils.

Grade: 1

Leadership and management

The school is led with courage and conviction. There is a clear vision for success in Jewish Studies and in the further enhancement of the school's Jewish dimension. This is coupled with passion and energy that inspires and motivates members of the school community. The school communicates well with parents on an informal basis. Most parents value the Jewish education that their children receive and the extent to which they are consulted. There are plans to use formal communications with parents to inform and consult parents more extensively about Jewish education at the school.

Since the last Pikuach inspection, the Scopus Educational Trust has allocated funding for an assistant headteacher to act as director of Jewish education and development (DJED). An assistant headteacher has been appointed and assumed the development role in January 2006. The effects of this new post are felt in the school even after a very short time and some recommendations in the previous Pikuach report have already been acted upon.

This new appointment has coincided with some restructuring of Jewish Studies and Hebrew staffing, enabling teachers to play to their strengths. The DJED teaches a number of classes and the benefit of a Jewish Studies specialist teaching the subject is considerable, as it has the potential to raise standards. The school also benefits from the fact that the chair of the governing body is a Hebrew specialist and an accomplished Jewish educator. She is the link governor to Jewish education in the school. She and the DJED meet regularly and she both supports and challenges the initiatives being taken.

Research has already been undertaken into possibilities for professional development for the existing staff through specific courses and projects, and through partnership with another Jewish school that has a model of good practice in Jewish Studies. For teachers who do not have a teaching qualification that is recognized in the UK, arrangements have been made for preparation towards qualified teacher status.

The task of translating the Jewish Studies curriculum into manageable and practical schemes of work has begun and is shortly due for completion. The resources needed to support the curriculum have been identified.

All of these initiatives are rightly focused on raising standards further.

A major recommendation from the previous Pikuach report needs to be addressed and has been planned: that of monitoring the quality of teaching to ensure that lessons are well focused on learning objectives and are thoroughly evaluated so that achievement can be improved for pupils of varying needs. This needs to be coupled with a programme of modelling good teaching and mentoring individual teachers.

The DJED has the aim of transforming the school into a centre of excellence for Jewish learning. He, the headteacher, the governing body and the trustees have the capability to do this. However, care must be taken at this point to pace the developments in Jewish Studies at this energetic and future-thinking school.

One of the main strengths of the school's leadership and management is the sharing of the same sense of purpose by the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the governing body and the trustees. They are also agreed on the direction of Jewish education at the school and the steps that need to be taken to develop it even further. Ofsted inspections and the previous Pikuach inspection have shown that the school is capable of significant self-improvement.

Grade: 2

