

# YAVNEH PRIMARY SCHOOL INSPECTION REPORT

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Local Authority: Hertfordshire

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates: 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025

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

Type of school: Primary

School category: Free

Age range of children: 4 – 11 years

Mixed /Single sex: Mixed

Number on roll: 420

Chair of Governors: Roz Levin

Headteacher: Caroline Field

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## Inspection team

**Lead Inspector:** Mrs S Teacher

**Team Inspector:** Mr D Marcus

## Introduction

Inspectors make judgements on the following three Key Areas:

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

The inspection took place over two days and was carried out by two inspectors and one shadow inspector. Along with the Headteacher, Head of *Limmudei Kodesh* (LK), and Director of Jewish Life across the Yavneh schools, inspectors observed all LK lessons in every Year group, and *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) in Years 4 and 6. In addition they observed a leadership learning session where *Kitta Vav* (Year 6) pupils learned together with Yavneh College Year 12 students. Inspectors attended *Havdallah* (prayers marking the end of Shabbat, the Sabbath), *Tefillah* (morning prayers), and *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after meals) in different Year groups. They spoke with pupils about their experiences and learning, listened to them read and gained insight into the Jewish life at the school. Meetings were held with Senior Leaders, the Head of LK and various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, the Executive Headteacher, the Chair of governors, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo), the Safeguarding Lead, the PSHE lead, the school Rabbi and Year 7 pupils who had graduated from Yavneh Primary School. Inspectors also scrutinised school documentation, pupils' work, displays, and multimedia evidence showcasing the way Jewish learning is woven into the fabric of the school.

## Information about the school

- Yavneh Primary is a two-Form entry Modern Orthodox Jewish Free School, which opened in September 2016 with 60 pupils in a temporary building on the site of Yavneh College.
- The school is part of the 'Yavneh family' and is located on the Yavneh College campus. The Yavneh Schools' Strategic Executive Leadership Team (ELT) includes leaders from both schools. In February 2019, Yavneh Primary moved into its permanent building.
- Between 2016 and 2022, the school expanded by 60 pupils each year. It now has 420 pupils on roll. In September 2023, the first cohort of Yavneh Primary pupils transferred to secondary school with almost all transitioning to Yavneh College, in effect, creating an all-through school.
- The school follows the National Curriculum, with *Limmudei Kodesh* taught as a distinct subject and integrated into the broader curriculum. Modern Hebrew is taught as a modern foreign language.
- 1.2% of pupils currently receive a free school meal
- 3.1% of pupils identify as having English as an additional language
- 19% of the cohort have special educational needs. 2.1% of children have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

## Inspection judgement

## Grade

Quality of Jewish Education	1
Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development	1
Leadership and management	1

## What is it like to attend this Jewish school?

- The school's motto *Olam Chesed Yiboneh* (a world built on kindness) is not simply an aspiration, but is the pervading reality of every aspect of this exceptional school. The kindness and embrace of the world is evident in the curriculum, the high quality of teaching and learning, the personal development of pupils directed by the powerful and highly effective leadership team. The impressive behaviour of all pupils and the way in which relationships between staff and pupils are nurtured, reflects the deeply embedded 'Yavneh Way,' which champions Kindness, Politeness, Respect and Courtesy.
- The story of the Yavneh journey is told through the carefully chosen class names. Starting with *Nitzanim* (Buds) or *Zeraim* (Seeds), where inspectors saw the foundations of a love for Jewish living and learning. As pupils grow, inspectors could see how they blossomed from seeds to flowers and finally, to trees, *Arava* (willow) and *Erez* (cedar). As a Year 6 pupil said when expressing her passion for LK at the school - 'I talk to my mum non-stop about what I learned at school'.
- The embrace of the school's motto and of the 'Yavneh Way' extends to all members of staff and into the integrated curriculum. Inspectors observed a Key Stage 1 music lesson where the focus was on learning songs for *Pesach* (Passover). In Design and Technology lessons, pupils have been making torches which will be used for *Bedichat Hametz* (the search for leavened products before Passover.)
- Pupils benefit from being in a school where there is a strong, experienced leadership team which works hard to ensure that decision making results from collaboration with all stakeholders in an effort to create a cohesive Yavneh community. This was highlighted by a staff member who commented: 'We are like a family and support each other. We are a team'. Leadership work hard to maintain this unity, shared values and togetherness in Yavneh school. Inspectors observed a clear example of this during a *Beit Midrash Track* (BMT) session with all Year 6 pupils working with Year 12 students. As well as covering some Laws of *Pesach*, powerful connections between older and younger pupils and the two schools were being forged.
- Pupils at this school are almost guaranteed to learn in an environment where outstanding teaching and learning is the norm. This holds true for all pupils including those with Special Education Needs (SEN), those who speak other languages at home, pupils with differing levels of Jewish knowledge or observance and those who come from other faiths or none. One parent told inspectors: 'The teaching and learning is exceptional; children from all backgrounds come together as one and have positive Jewish experiences; children are so lucky to have the teachers they have'.

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

### Quality of Jewish Education

- The school's Jewish curriculum intent is strong and provides memorable experiences and a range of rich opportunities for high-quality learning for all pupils, including those with additional needs and those from different religious backgrounds. By way of example, a number of pupils spoke to inspectors about the way in which *Parasha* (weekly Torah reading) lessons develop in complexity as they journey through the school, and the way in which expressive arts, drama and creativity, forms such an essential part of *LK* lessons. Inspectors saw a dynamic and impactful lesson, where Year 3 pupils worked in teams to build a model *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), bringing their recent learning to life.
- Special events like *Chagigat HaSiddur* (prayer book celebrations) and *Chagigat HaChumash* (Bible celebrations) mark key milestones in pupils' Jewish learning, with themes tailored to current events and pupil interests. Recognising achievement is a consistent theme. Inspectors experienced the whole school celebrating the school choir's achievements in a borough-wide festival.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage lays a strong foundation for Jewish learning and integrates opportunities for the children to make good progress in their learning and development, both within the indoor and outside classroom. Children explore the letters of the Hebrew *Aleph Bet* (*alphabet*), when playing in the sand, with the water tray and play dough. A parent wrote: 'I am constantly amazed at how much she knows about Judaism at such a young age. She loves spotting Hebrew letters and looks at our *Ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract) each morning, telling us the new letters she has learnt. She was so excited when she learnt *Lamed* as it was the final letter which she needed to write her name and she now proudly points it out to everyone!' Children engage in role-play with the *Shabbat* and *Seder* table (table prepared for the Passover meal) and share their ideas with each other to promote and develop their creativity and expressive art and design.
- This continues into Key Stage 1, where pupils make a strong start with their Hebrew reading and writing skills. They recognise Hebrew words and letters, and have a strong vocabulary in *Ivrit*. They are aware of rhyming words and are beginning to use their phonological skills (the way words sound) to sound out the letters and vowels. *Ivrit* is incorporated into all aspects of learning to promote speaking and listening skills and the school recognises that constant exposure and practice is the way to reach even higher standards. Every week, new words are designated for the whole school to incorporate.
- Teaching and learning for all pupils and in all Year groups is exceptional. Teaching is inspirational and pupils benefit from the Jewish warmth and passion that is evident in all lessons observed by inspectors. Pupils are motivated to research details about the *Av Melachot* (creative activities forbidden on the Sabbath) and how relevant the concepts are to their everyday lives. Pupils with additional needs are fully catered for and a visitor coming into any lesson would see the consistent way how the teaching is adapted.
- The school puts an emphasis on Hebrew reading. Pupils read with confidence in their Hebrew reading and were able to participate in their *Ivrit* lessons and also to transfer these skills into their *LK* and *Tefillah*. One pupil with limited home support and Jewish knowledge was able to read and recite the *Brachot* (blessings) with ease, accuracy and confidence. Another comment from a parent: 'I am blown away by how my children, who do not come from a very religious home, are so inspired and excited by the Jewish life of the school and the way this shapes their characters and mindset.'
- The school operates a sophisticated tracking system to monitor group and individual progress. Assessment data is used to plan interventions and support, and an online assessment programme captures videos at key learning times. Technology enriches the learning experience and makes it more engaging for the pupils. ICT tools are used across various Year groups to foster creativity and reinforce key concepts. For example, *Jl Studio* is used by all Year groups to create posters, storyboards, and visual scenes related to *Parshiot*, *Chagim*,

(festivals) and *Chumash*. It also helps to reinforce pupils' knowledge of the *Aleph bet* letters and to visually illustrate *Tefillot*.

## What does the school need to do to improve the 'Quality of Jewish Education.'

- Continue to develop opportunities for spoken *Ivrit* across the school.

## Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development

- The manner in which the school goes about developing pupils' Jewish character and values, for all pupils from all backgrounds, is exemplary and worthy of being disseminated widely as an example to other schools. Pupils exhibit a keen awareness of the spiritual aspects of Judaism and display high levels of personal conduct. Inspectors saw impeccable behaviour in all settings in the school environment.
- The school consistently provides well-planned and rich Jewish experiences through both the formal and informal curriculum, links to other organisations and extra-curricular activities. Examples are: SEED (Family Jewish Education Project) Parent Partnership event, The Etgar Challenge and the impact of the *Shabbaton* (an event or programme of education held over the Sabbath), which is appreciated by parents and pupils alike. A parent reflected: 'Thank you so much for organising a wonderful *Shabbaton*! My son had the best time!... A memorable experience'.
- All pupils, irrespective of religious background, participate and feel included in the *Tefillah* life of the school. *Tefillah* is participative, engaging with clear development, as pupils progress through the school, as seen through their ability to develop their praying from *Siddurim* (prayer books) and reciting and understanding the *Tefillot*. This is further enhanced by musical accompaniment which is present in many *Tefillah* services. 'My son goes around singing Adon Olam as though it's a pop song! He loves it!'
- Reflective time is given to pupils to think about their connections with *Hashem* and other personal qualities such as: 'What makes a good friend?' The meaning and relevance of individual *Tefillot* are explained. Through *Tefillah*, pupils show appreciation, gratitude, awe and *Morah* (wonder). These pupils demonstrate an acknowledgement of the *Emunah* (Divine), and become aware of experiences in their lives.
- The school inspires its pupils to take Jewish life and learning out of the classroom and into their homes. Pupils proudly told inspectors that they share lessons from the *Parasha* or themes from the *Chagim* at home. Teachers feel that: '*Kodesh* at YPS is engaging and relevant to pupils. It inspires them to bring Judaism into their lives and explore their Jewish identity with excitement and passion.'
- For those pupils with a desire to stretch and challenge themselves in their Jewish commitment, the BMT Club offers advanced textual learning programmes for both girls and boys as well as a chance to examine Jewish ethics, themes, values and traditions in depth.
- *Tzedaka tzevet* together with *Am Echad* (the Charity Committee) organises fundraising and helps pupils to understand the need to help people less fortunate than themselves. In keeping with the notion of *Olam Chesed Yiboneh* (building the world on kindness), *Am Echad* invites staff, pupils and parents to vote on three charities to support each year, a British non-Jewish charity, a Jewish charity and an Israeli charity linking the school to a variety of communities. This concern for others is also seen through the way in which pupils are encouraged to think about the challenges in Israel or in the world at large.

## What does the school need to do to improve the ‘Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development’.

- Continue to develop the relationships between the older secondary school students and the younger primary school pupils so that the strong connections are reinforced.

### Leadership and management:

- There is a seamless integration and shared vision between the entire leadership team including governors. They work as a single cohesive unit which effectively articulates and communicates the school’s essence and vision. The school has a great understanding of their pupils and families. It provides a function in keeping families connected through Judaism via their children’s learning. The Chair of governors (COG), as well as the leadership team and the school’s Rabbi, play an important part in modelling positive Jewish living. The COG’s vision for the school was made very clear: ‘We can only hope that in later life they will remember their experiences such as the Shabbaton or a model Seder or dancing on Yom Ha’atzmaut, (Israel Independence Day) and that this will encourage them to want to learn more and to become more observant. We hope that the positive role models of their LK staff and their interactions with them will reap benefits later, if not immediately.’
- The Head of LK together with the Headteacher and other school leaders are exemplary role models in pedagogy and commitment to the Jewish personal and spiritual development of the school community. They do this with passion and commitment, backed up by innovative and creative means of education.
- The school is not complacent and consistently examines itself using effective reflective practice which is evidence-based, supported by comprehensive effective monitoring that ensures that progress is sustained. All leaders work successfully to monitor, improve and support teaching, encouraging the enthusiasm of staff and challenging their efforts and skills to good effect. Lesson observations forms show the meticulousness in which learning walks are conducted. The feedback forms clearly highlight what went well in the lesson and what could have been better. This has a very positive impact in the way in which the whole school works as a team to bring to life the ‘Yavneh Way’.
- The school fosters a united staff team, holding regular INSET (In-Service Training) sessions for teachers and teaching assistants to enhance their integration of LK in lessons. One particular result of such professional development is providing high quality support in LK for the SEND pupils. All staff are included in the Jewish aspect of school life. Examples include a whole staff Challah (bread) bake and having Purim (Festival commemorating Esther, Queen of Persia, who saved the Jewish people from execution by Haman, the advisor to the Persian King) fun.
- The school’s leadership ensures that the Jewish Studies staff receive effective professional development and that their pedagogy builds and consistently develops over time. This includes the Headteacher’s inclusion in the United Herzog Fellowship, which resulted in the Rugali Nurture Room.

## What does the school need to do to improve the ‘Quality of Leadership and management?’

- To continue to develop school leaders in *Limmudei Kodesh* and to enhance their leadership skills in order to ensure sustainable leadership.

Statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship (tefillah)	Met
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### Summary of Questionnaires

Pikuach invited parents and carers of pupils to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 120 people responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited pupils to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 102 pupils responded to the survey.

Pikuach invited members of staff to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 26 members of staff responded to the survey.



# GLOSSARY

## WHAT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS MEAN:

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>JUDGEMENT</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
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.