

SINAI JEWISH PRIMARY SCHOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority: Brent

Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach

Inspection dates: 21st and 22nd June 2022

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

Type of school: Voluntary Aided Modern Orthodox Jewish school

School category: Primary

Age range of children: 3-11

Mixed /Single sex: Mixed

Number on roll: 626

Chair of Governors: Darren Simons

Headteacher: Juliette Lipshaw

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Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Sandra Teacher

Team Inspector: Ruth Wilkinson

Introduction

Inspectors make judgements on the following three Key Areas

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

The inspection was carried out over two days by two inspectors. The inspectors visited eight year groups with three classes in each year group, except for Year 4, where there were two classes in the year group. Teaching was observed from Nursery to Year 6. The inspectors attended *tefilah* (prayer) and *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after meals). All lessons were observed jointly with senior school leaders. Meetings were held with the school's Jewish Studies (JS) governor, foundation governor the senior leadership team, the Head of Jewish Studies, the school's rabbi, and other key members of staff, as well as meeting with many of the pupils.

Information about the school

- Michael Sobell Sinai Jewish Primary School opened in 1981. It became known as Sinai Jewish Primary in 2014.
- Sinai is a United Synagogue school, under the auspices of the Chief Rabbi, although the families represent a broad range of religious backgrounds.
- Nine percent of the pupils speak other languages at home, with many *Ivrit* (Hebrew) speakers. The school teaches French as its Modern Foreign Language.
- 12.9% of pupils have additional needs.

- The Current Headteacher has been in position since 2017, and the current Head of Jewish Studies has been in position since April 2022.

- The school's last Pikuach inspection was in April 2015 and the overall effectiveness was judged as 'good'. All areas were judged as 'good', except for pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development which was judged as 'outstanding'.

- The school made provision for the pupils during the Covid period and in particular, had already set up the online classroom, so that remote learning could take place.

Inspection judgements

Grade

Overall effectiveness	1
Quality of Jewish Education	2
Jewish Personal and Spiritual Development	1
Leadership and management	1

What it is like to attend this Jewish school?

- Sinai school is a warm, friendly and vibrant community school, which provides its children with a strong commitment to Judaism. The school is rightly proud of its heritage, which is clearly evidenced in the communal areas where flags, achievements and scenes of pupils celebrating Jewish living are prominently displayed.
- The high regard and centrality of Jewish Studies is integrated throughout the environment in the beautiful displays, learning walks, *tefillah* focus areas, the well-being *Brachot* (blessings) garden, spiritual sensory opportunities, the Library Bus and the amazing use of the latest technological aids. These all add up to an outstanding overall effectiveness for Jewish education.
- All school leaders, along with governors, and all members of staff have worked meticulously to maintain and build on the strengths from the previous inspection. They have a clear vision of the direction in which they want to take the school and all work together to achieve this.
- Pupils thrive in the caring and nurturing environment, where every member of the community is valued and respected as a unique gift from *Hashem*. All of the pupils encapsulate the school's vision and clearly show how they are: 'Proud to be Jewish, proud to be British and proud to belong to the Sinai family.' This is an impressive achievement for such a large school which services families from seven differing boroughs. Confidence and Kindness are not just at the heart of the school but truly lived and demonstrated daily by all stakeholders.
- Sinai School strives to develop strong, confident and articulate young people and this is clearly seen in the way they communicate with each other and with visitors to the school. The school community, under the excellent direction of the Headteacher and her senior colleagues, works hard to develop positive relationships with its families. The regular constant personal interactions, the successful online platform, the Parent Forum and the School Choir are testament to this. All staff and pupils from all backgrounds, faiths and cultures are fully immersed in the traditions and celebrations of Jewish Life and Living and they also have numerous opportunities to share their love.
- Parents, staff and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the school and fully appreciate the family atmosphere, reporting that the pastoral care provided 'is amazing' and that the well-being of children and families is of paramount importance. Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are provided with high level support to enable them to achieve according to their ability, and the best use is made of sensory and digital resources to aid and enhance both the teaching and the learning.

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and report that there is nothing they would like to change about the school; 'It is perfect as it is,' one child reported to the inspector. Pupils are able to thrive in their Jewish learning and enjoy learning, with many achieving high standards. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and behaviour for learning is a real strength of the school. Pupils are caring towards each other and reach out to those in need through a variety of charitable deeds. They are proud of their school, acting as excellent role models and ambassadors.

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

Quality of Jewish Education

- In addition to the newly appointed Head of Jewish Studies, the school has also created a new role of Jewish Studies Curriculum Coordinator, which is held by an experienced member of the Jewish Studies teaching team. The well-structured and progressive Jewish Studies curriculum is a working document that is frequently reviewed and updated to reflect the needs of the school and current education good practice. Excellent use of technology greatly enhances the Jewish studies lessons in Key Stage 2. The pupils are competent in the use of Chromebooks to access their Google Classroom, and this opens up a whole new dimension in their Jewish Studies. The Jewish Studies teachers were eager to share their innovative lesson ideas and it was clear that they are passionate about the subject they teach. This enthusiasm is reflected in the pupils' views on Jewish Studies at Sinai School. "Before Jewish Studies I feel excited to find out what my teacher has planned for us." (Pupil Survey). "I think JS is very fun and inspires me very much." (Pupil Survey).
- This enthusiasm is also felt by parents. For example: "Jewish Studies has always been one of her favourite subjects." (Parent Survey)
- 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. Nursery children explore the letters of the Hebrew *Aleph Bet* (alphabet), when playing in the sand, with the water tray and play dough. Children in Reception squash grapes to make their own grape juice whilst learning the *bracha for making the grape juice*. (*blessing*). They engage in role play with the *Shabbat* table and share their ideas with each other to promote and develop their expressive art and design.
- Key Stage 1 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 the lessons, but the lack of a clear sequenced curriculum does impact on the ability of the pupils to have basic conversational skills. However, this is an area that the school is considering developing for the future.
- In Key Stage 2, many aspects of high-quality Jewish education were observed during the two-day inspection period. These lessons led to attentive and interested pupils who enhanced the lessons with thought-provoking observations and questions. The pupils were eager to talk about their lessons and other aspects of Jewish life at Sinai School. A Year 6 pupil, reflecting on a lesson about the Ten Commandments, said she thought the first Commandment was the most important because "it was the first and because it's about me and *Hashem*. It makes me think about other religions who have one, or more than one God. We have only one, and that is who made us." Year 6 pupils are benefiting from using Pear Deck, an amazing, creative initiative which offers interactive lessons where the teachers and pupils provide feedback throughout. This style of learning supports different learners and enables the pupils to build up an online portfolio assessed by the teachers and themselves, as well as providing the opportunity for the teachers to give immediate feedback to individuals allowing pupils to self-

assess and improve. Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are able to work independently and immerse themselves in the Jewish experience that is being offered.

- The leadership team and the Jewish Studies governors are very aware of the need to track individual pupil progress in the same way as in other subjects. Work in this area is already in progress and now needs to be embedded in the assessment system.
- The effects of the Covid pandemic has had a far-reaching impact on Jewish Studies in Sinai School. Although the school put in place home-school learning and even had virtual reading groups during the time when the school was closed, pupils' progress in Hebrew reading greatly suffered. Many of the parents were unable to help their children with Hebrew reading and this has resulted in some pupils not reaching expected targets. In order to support the pupils and parents in this area of the curriculum, one of the Jewish Studies team has created a dedicated Google Classroom Hebrew reading area to aid their reading recovery. Resources are also available to extend reading skills for the more able pupils. For the schools' student teachers, this was also a challenging time when they missed out on much of their classroom teaching practice. Parents emailed feedback shows their appreciation of the standard of Jewish Studies activities sent home during Covid. "I wanted to tell you personally that my daughter has absolutely loved all the JS content you have set." "Thank you for everything the JS department have put in place during lockdown, my daughter has said more than once, 'why can't other subjects be like this?'" "Thank you for your detailed lesson. He loved it and listened twice to make sure he remembers everything for our *Shabbat* table *parasha* discussion."

Personal and Spiritual Development

- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is central to the ideals of the school's Jewish Studies curriculum. This is taken into consideration not only in Jewish studies lessons and *tefillah*, but also when organising whole school activities and extracurricular events for parents and pupils. The strong links between the Jewish Studies curriculum and SMSC also impacts on the pupils' mindset in other areas of their school life: "Jewish studies helps me reflect because sometimes the things we learn about make a connection to my life therefore I reflect on important things like that." (Pupil Survey)
- As Sinai School services several local boroughs and the families are not linked to any one community, the school has built its own very strong sense of community, which is referred to as the 'Sinai Family'. The understanding and implementation of SMSC in the school is key to this strong community feeling among staff, pupils, and parents "Sinai is the most supportive school I have ever worked in. It cares for its staff. We aren't just colleagues, but we call ourselves the Sinai Family. I would have been lost without my Sinai Family throughout the pandemic" (*Staff Survey*).
- The school fulfils the statutory requirement for collective worship. *Tefillah* is held in year groups, including all three-year group classes, as well as adults working in the year group. This greatly enhances the communal feeling of *tefillah*. Pupils at Sinai School have a positive experience of *tefillah* and are encouraged to be reflective and mindful of what they are saying. In the younger classes this is often through the guidance and input of the teacher. However, the pupils are also given the opportunity to express their spontaneous thoughts and feelings about the prayers and what it means personally to them. A child in Year 1 commented that his *tefillah* "made my heart smile and come closer to *Hashem*". *Tefillah* rules on the walls remind pupils that this is a special time, with special rules, for example, "Talk to *Hashem*, not to each other."
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage sing their prayers with gusto and enjoyment. They know the words and the tunes to the *Shacharit* (morning prayers) service beginning with

modeh ani and *ma tovu*. The pupils knowledge of prayers increases as the pupils move through the school. This emphasised the thought and planning that had gone into making *Tefillah* a positive experience for all pupils. An example of this in Key Stage 2, was the active participation and a sense of togetherness and community when pupils and staff sang *Ashrei* to the tune of 'We Will Rock You'.

- With the older pupils, wherever possible, the teachers make links between previous knowledge, either from the *parashah* (weekly *Torah* portion) or subjects covered in Jewish Studies lessons. Pupils were seen to be very responsive to these questions and links and were eager to share their knowledge and thoughts with the rest of the year group. A high level of concentration was seen with pupils focusing on the text in their *siddur* (prayer book) and being attentive to the teacher leading the *tefillah*. This was enhanced by members of staff present also participating and focussing on their *siddurim*. Whilst observing a *tefillah* session in Key Stage 2, (See above) a pupil stopped reciting the prayer when she realised that she had lost her place in the text. Within a few seconds of focusing on what the other pupils were saying, she quickly found her place in the *siddur*, correcting herself and continued to join in heartily with the prayers. The Jewish Studies teacher wore his *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries) while leading the prayers. This gave a special sense of holiness to the *tefillah* session. One pupil commented that it gave him a flashback of the feeling that he had had at a special *Torah* Assembly that was held in school for *Shavuot* (festival celebrating the giving of the *Torah* on Mount Sinai). There were opportunities for sharing thoughts, time for quiet thoughts and links to other areas of the curriculum, including a teacher reporting on good news from Israel, for example, a recent event, discovery or invention.
- *Birchat Hamazon* is recited after lunch in their classrooms. It is led by a member of staff for each year group. This then becomes a teaching opportunity, where the pupils learn to read the words correctly from the interactive white board, using a resource created by a Jewish Studies teacher especially for the school. The pupils progress through the text of the prayer and older and more able pupils can recite all paragraphs of *Birchat Hamazon*
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because it is an integral part of the Sinai school community. This is reflected by the Jewish studies teachers, the senior management, the pupils and all staff. "The children have a wonderful sense of Jewish identity, and all staff have a shared goal" (Staff Survey). A pupil expressed this when asked "Which personal attribute do you think is most important?" The answer was: "Love, because it's something you give to others, not just keep for yourself." Another pupil said, "Growth. *Hashem* gave us things that we are good at, and we need to grow with the things *Hashem* has given us. I am good at netball, and I want to grow in my netball skills so I can score goals for the rest of my team to make them happy."
- Pupils show great sensitivity and understanding of others. During discussions, they voiced appreciation for the special events organised by the school, for example, the *Chanukah* (the festival of lights) event that needed to be quickly rearranged outdoors as a result of Covid. Pupils explained why they thought it was even more special as everyone around could hear their *Chanukah* songs and see their big *chanukiah* (candelabra used during the festival of *Chanukah*).
- They verbalised how they loved being able to help others, and some pupils could link this to the *middot* (character traits) of Biblical characters. Pupils across the school have expressed the benefits and enjoyment of Jewish Studies activities and events." My son will often ask quite spiritual questions when referring to what he has learned, and often reiterates the importance of being kind and generous. Not long ago he came home after a large JS assembly and said, 'Mama, I always want to be kind and helpful to people, *Hashem* would want me to be.'" Some of these events also involve the parents, which enhances the feeling of community and belonging to the 'Sinai Family'. The organisation SEED is very proactive in the school, providing many of the extra-curricular Jewish activities. These are greatly appreciated by both pupils and parents. The staff and pupils have a very good relationship with the school's SEED

Rabbi. The Rabbi has a post-box in the school foyer for communication with the school community. This is often used by pupils for asking him questions and sharing their thoughts. For example: "Everybody likes candy, so why did *Hashem* make them unhealthy?" (*Question posted in Rabbi Fine's box*). The school participates in the annual interschools' Etgar Quiz. "JS lessons can be really fun. We are preparing for Etgar, and we have notebooks to put facts in from our Etgar handbook" (*Pupil Survey*). The School Choir integrates Jewish songs into their repertoire. They recently performed at the Boys' Town Choir Festival and a Norwood charity event. "I feel proud being in choir because it is a big opportunity to become good at singing and I get the chance to perform in front of other schools, people, and especially the Chief Rabbi." (*Pupil feedback*) "Children are able to embrace their Jewish identity and are proud to be Jewish, especially when we take part in events with other schools. For example, The Boys' Town Concert, Etgar and the *Ohel Sarah walk on Yom Ha'atzmaut*" (Israel Independence Day) (*Headteacher*)

- Ninety Year 6 pupils participated in The *Yehudi* Leadership Initiative, led by Mizrachi. JFS students went to Sinai to teach the children in creative and exciting ways about Israel and leadership. The course worked to develop the pupils' understanding of the opportunities ahead of them, what Israel has to offer and what they can offer others. "I enjoyed the *Yehudi* sessions because I had a chance to work with different people and learn new skills. I have enjoyed using some of them to teach younger children." (*Year 6 pupil*).
- JLGB (Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade) extra-curricular sessions are very popular, with 100 Key Stage 2 pupils attending. The JLGB input has resulted in more pupils taking an active role in Jewish activities outside the school environment. Those pupils have also been inspired to lead their own charity events after planning fundraising ideas in the JLGB sessions. *Tzedakah* (charity) money was raised for GOSH (Great Ormond Street Hospital, Shout and the Sinai Hardship Fund).
- Other extra-curricular clubs have included: Gardening Club, where the children learnt both the English and Hebrew names of the different plants and the *brachot* related to the fruit and vegetables, as well as making links to the festival of *Tu Bishvat* (the Jewish New Year for trees). As requested by parents, an *Anim Zemiroth* lunchtime club was started, and the school is developing this aspect of its work.

Leadership and management:

- The Headteacher, ably supported by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable leadership team, including the Head of Jewish Studies and governors, has inspired the whole school community to share and follow their vision in promoting a love of Jewish life and learning. The school provides an extended variety of opportunities for its pupils and their families to participate in the Jewish life of the school and there is commitment and passion to providing a high quality of Jewish education.
- Jewish Studies development planning is precise and strategic, and the strength lies in the way the leaders plan and produce their own 'homegrown' staff. Leaders focus upon clear success measures to check upon progress and future actions. This agreed system ensures rapid improvements, for example, in the way that teachers consistently use information about pupils' abilities and needs to inform their planning and subsequent tracking of pupils' progress, particularly in their Hebrew reading and a newly introduced *tefillah* teaching programme.
- A new assessment system and curriculum planning have been implemented as a result of a recent review, which now ensures that a consistent approach is being used for all subjects of the curriculum. This will take time to become fully embedded in all of the classes, and in particular ensuring that all pupils are involved in this process, so that they can amend and improve their work.

- Leaders use performance management effectively to inform them about the quality of teaching and improve outcomes for pupils. The information is used to plan well-targeted whole-staff and individual training which meets specific needs. Highly experienced and qualified staff share expertise with other Jewish settings and model their best practice, particularly, for example, in the way they prepare for the Etgar Challenge.
- Leaders set high expectations for teaching and hold teachers fully accountable for their pupils' progress. Teachers, in turn, are thoughtful and reflective about their teaching and are confident in the support they are given to help them improve.
- The Head of Jewish Studies makes sure effective checks on performance take place and staff are well trained in all aspects of their roles. A wealth of professional development opportunities is provided within the school and training is tailored for individual members of staff, especially those who are still in the early stages of their career.
- Leaders use additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and / or disabilities effectively, to provide extra staffing and resources to successfully support pupils' individual needs, and the emphasis for these pupils is on ensuring they have living experiences of their Judaism, such as *The Shabbat Island*.
- The commitment and determination of leaders to strive to make Sinai the best it can be, is evidenced in the school's self-evaluation documents. Leaders know their school very well; their evaluations are accurate, and their Jewish Studies Action Plan shows their determination to remain focused on continual improvement. Opportunities for Continuing Professional Development are extensive, and staff are well supported by leaders to take up these opportunities to develop their practice. Governors make a significant contribution to Jewish Life through their commitment and involvement in school activities, including participating in communal events such as the Year 3 *Chagigat Chumash* (party, celebrating receiving one's first *Chumash*, Bible).
- The pupils were able to display their learning and explain the key features of the *Chumash*. The spiritual and emotional aspect of the ceremony culminated in the parents presenting their children with their *Chumash* and blessing them.

What does the school need to do to improve?

Further develop the Quality of Jewish Education by :

Continuing to embed assessment procedures and giving more opportunities for pupils to edit their work in response to feedback.

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 at Sinai School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 273 people responded to the survey. The responses were overwhelming positive in all areas.

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- Looks forward to school every day, comes home excited about activities from the day. Takes pride in her learning and achievements
- This is the most amazing caring and nurturing school
- The security arrangements are fantastic and whilst sometimes verging on annoying, completely comfortable that my kids are protected
- Every day she comes home and when asked what she has learnt that say, she always shares something new she has learnt in JS. She absolutely loves her JS learning, and it is incredible to see how much she has learnt in Nursery this year.
- They come home with a real sense of belonging and community. They adore the Shabbat songs and sing them at home.
- My daughter's Jewish knowledge and understanding are remarkable. She has thrived at Sinai and starting her Bat Mitzvah course many people have been very impressed and commented on her understanding.
- Seeing my 8-year-old in full swing, leading the Pesach Seder alongside her grandfather was amazing. She was bursting with pride and knowledge and was keen to show it!

Pikuach invited pupils at Sinai School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 477 pupils responded to the survey.

The comments below encapsulate their views:

- Even though I'm not religious I have realised that Jewish learning is very important.
- I always feel happy at school with my lovely teachers and friends.
- Sometimes I feel like we do too much per day.
- love baking in JS and love writing in script and learning different letters.
- learn similar things my family teach me except I am Safardi, and they mainly teach Ashkenazi.
- We use Chromebooks so it's really easy to express our ideas.
- Sometimes I have something to say, and the teacher is in the middle of talking and I can't say what I want to say.

Pikuach invited members of staff at Sinai School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. 52 members of staff responded to the survey.

- There is a shared vision, and the children and staff work together to create an amazing Jewish ethos.
- I have worked at Sinai for a long time, and we are like a family we all work together to do the best for the children and each other. I couldn't work anywhere else. I Love my job.
- Sinai is such an incredible place to work. All staff, parents and children work together as one big family to ensure our children are happy, spiritually aware and engage with all their learning. Most of all, all children in the school love their Judaism and are so proud to share their knowledge and understanding of their religion with everyone around them. It is

wonderful to be a part of such an amazing learning journey for pupils and to see such a love for Judaism pouring out of every inch of the school

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.