

# ALMA PRIMARY INSPECTION REPORT

Local Authority      Barnet  
Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach  
Inspection dates      26<sup>th</sup> February 2015  
Lead Inspector      Mrs Sandra Teacher

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

Type of school      Primary  
School category      Free  
Age range of Children      4–6 years  
Gender of Children      Mixed  
Number on roll      60  
Appropriate authority      JCDASB  
Chairs      Natalie Grazin and David Steadman  
Headteacher      Marc Shoffren  
Address      37 Moss Hall Grove, Finchley, London N12 8PE  
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School website      www.almaprimary.org

## Introduction

### Inspection team

**Sandra Teacher      Lead Inspector**

This is the school's first Pikuach inspection and the Ofsted inspection has not yet taken place.

This inspection was carried out by one inspector and in one day. The inspector visited Reception and Year 1 for lessons and parts of lessons, including *tefillot* (prayers). She held meetings with governors, staff and groups of children. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including children's written work, teachers' lesson plans, the Jewish Learning curriculum, the school's self-evaluation document and the school's improvement plan.

The inspector looked in detail at the following:

- The Jewish Learning curriculum
- The progress pupils make in their Jewish Learning
- The quality of teaching in Jewish Learning
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including collective worship
- Leadership and management of Jewish Learning.

### Information about the school

- Alma Primary is a one-form entry inclusive Jewish Free School in Barnet.
- The school opened in September 2013 in temporary accommodation, and will be moving to a permanent site in 2016.
- There is a Reception and a Year 1 class
- The school motto is 'Olam Hesed Yibaneh' – 'A world built on kindness'.

The school is based on four guiding pillars: Within Identity and Values: The school fosters a love of Judaism, pride in Jewish identity and a commitment to the Jewish people and Israel. Children are inspired with the ethical and moral values of the Jewish tradition and encouraged to develop positive relationships with all faiths and the wider community.

- There are a small number of children with special educational needs.
- Children come from a range of cultural heritages, the largest groups being from White British families.
- Very few speak English as a second language.
- The majority of the children are identified as Jewish.

## Inspection judgements

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The achievement of children in their Jewish education</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The quality of teaching and assessment in Jewish education</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which the Jewish education curriculum meets children's needs</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development including the duty to fulfil the daily act of collective worship</b> | <b>1</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of leadership and management of Jewish education, including through partnerships</b>  | <b>2</b> |

### Overall Effectiveness:

#### The quality of Jewish Learning provided in Alma Primary is good because:-

- The school has made an impressive start to realise the aims encompassed in its founders' four pillars. The governors' and headteacher's vision for the school is driving it forward to ensure that all the children are given a good start to their life in Jewish Learning.
- The school has set high expectations for all children, aiming for excellent Jewish literacy as well as basic skills delivered through an enriched, creative curriculum, with an emphasis on music and song.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because the staff and children show great respect for each other and for the ethos of the school. The quality of *tefillah* (prayer) is good and enables the children to be prepared for involvement in community prayer.
- Supported by governors, the headteacher is committed to providing and further developing a curriculum that ensures children make good progress in their Jewish Learning.
- The bespoke curriculum is developing to enable the children to link Jewish Learning to their everyday lives. The teaching of *Ivrit* makes an excellent contribution to the Jewish life of the school by promoting the use of Hebrew as the language of the Jewish people.

- Teaching overall is good and relationships are excellent, modelling the school's Jewish ethos and values. The children thrive in a supportive community where every child is able to join in and play a full part.
- Partnerships with parents and the wider community are good, and there is a shared involvement in the high expectations of Jewish life and learning across the very broad spectrum of families.
- The school offers a range of Jewish educational experiences so that the children are well prepared for future stages of their Jewish life and education.

### **It is not yet outstanding because:-**

- Systems are still too new to show their impact over time. Monitoring and assessment systems have been analysed and introduced but are as yet not embedded in the Jewish Learning.
- There is not yet a leader and manager with the discrete responsibility of supporting Jewish Learning in the school.
- The planning and assessment systems in the Reception class are not linked clearly enough to the Jewish Learning curriculum.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Further develop the early years curriculum to ensure that planning, teaching and learning are consistently good by incorporating Jewish Learning into all seven of the early years areas of learning.
- Ensure there are clear systems for assessing Jewish Learning in all areas so that evidence of the children's progress over time can be shown.
- Develop the leadership and management of Jewish Learning by appointing a leader of Jewish Learning to lighten the workload of the headteacher. The school plans to fill this post from September 2015.

### **Achievement of pupils in their Jewish Learning is good because:-**

- Children join this school from a diverse range of Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. For many, their knowledge and experience of Hebrew and of the Jewish Learning curriculum is limited. However, they are eager to learn and children of all abilities, including the many able children and those who have special educational needs, make good progress.

- In Year 1 and Reception, children are beginning to build up a bank of knowledge of Jewish life, history, tradition and belief. The school's aims set out to engender in the children 'a love of Judaism'. The school is demonstrating notable success in achieving this. Children know about Jewish festivals and customs; for example, *Chanukah* and *Purim*. They are taught to have a strong identity, based on their own heritage and to share and respect differences.
- The school is developing a Jewish 'Skills Passport' and most of the children in the Reception class are able to recite the *Brahot* (blessings) for washing hands, *hamotzi*, candles and wine, fruit and veg (*ha'etz* and *ha'adama*) and can say a brief *Birkat Hamazon* (blessings after food). A child said: '*We sorted fruit and vegetables: the fruit grows in the tree and we say ha'etz for the tree.*'
- Year 1 children are aware of the *Brahot* for *Sukkot* and *Hanukah* and can recite the first paragraph of the *Shema*. Many can write their names in Hebrew and their Hebrew names displayed on their pegs, next to their English names, act as a constant reinforcement for learning.
- Early years assessment practices to track pupils' progress are being developed to ensure that achievements in Jewish Learning can be shown in relation to the seven areas of learning which relate to the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Progress in *Ivrit* is good. Children begin to develop their Hebrew vocabulary from the start of their time in the Reception Year. There is a good emphasis on speaking and listening and, from Year 1, both reading and writing skills. This is particularly important, as a small proportion of the children are from Israeli families where *Ivrit* is spoken at home.
- The school is beginning to use the latest technology to aid achievement and learning. Teachers are making good use of relevant websites to support the planning and the learning.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment in Jewish Learning is good because:-**

- Teachers get on very well with the children and this contributes to children's positive attitudes to learning. Children are motivated to listen, volunteer answers and try their best, because they like their teachers and want to please them.
- Teachers' planning reflects a cross-curricular approach. For example, good learning in Year 1 about the internal organs of the body developed not only scientific knowledge but also an understanding of the morning *Brahot* related to different parts of the body. As a child says: '*I love learning about the different prayers we say for our bodies.*'
- Reception class children are learning about *Purim* and the use of good resources including the *megillah*, *ra'ashanim* and *leyzanim*, supports their understanding of the key points of the story. They make *ra'ashanim* and this relates well to skills in design technology. As yet, the early years planning does not fully integrate the Jewish Learning so that it is reflected in the seven areas of learning in the early years curriculum.

- The outdoor area is used well; for example, when learning about *Tu biShvat* (The New Year for Trees), but not enough opportunities are taken to consider how outdoor learning is a valuable environment for Jewish teaching and learning.
- Ivrit lessons are supported by a Hebrew language assistant from Israel and this is an added benefit to promote spoken modern Hebrew from a native.

### **The extent to which the Jewish education curriculum meets children's needs is good because:-**

- The curriculum is tailored to meet the specific needs of this school. The challenge is unique and new for establishing a curriculum that best fits the diverse family backgrounds of the children in the school.
- The curriculum demonstrates both breadth and balance. It includes Hebrew reading and writing, *tefillah*, *parshah*, *chagim* and the Jewish way of life. It expresses the Jewish values of the school and is well structured to meet the needs of all learners and engage their interest. It is an area for development which has already been identified by the school. It is beginning to be embedded but is at early stages at present. *Ivrit* makes an outstanding contribution to the reinforcement of Jewish Learning of the children in the school.
- The school is working to set clear attainment targets for *Ivrit*. The Reading Scheme '*Tal Am*' has been recently introduced which teaches *Ivrit* as a modern language. It is new to the school and needs effective monitoring to establish baselines and progress monitoring. Reception class children are immersed in the oral use of language and the *dovreiv Ivrit* children are beginning to learn to read letters and sounds. As yet, there are no clear reading records to show the children's progress over time.
- In Jewish Learning, there is limited written work but discussions with the children show that they have remembered much of what they had learnt, particularly the stories around the weekly *parasha* which often relates to *middot*.
- There is good provision for the children to learn about the Jewish calendar and the Jewish way of life. The successful outcomes of these aspects are evident in the children's personal, spiritual and social development and in their deep connections with Israel and its people.
- Cross-curricular provision is very strong; for example when learning to tell the time, which is related to the importance of times of prayer, *Shabbat* and *chagim*.
- The Friday preparations for *Shabbat* give the children the opportunity to integrate home and school experiences, where appropriate, and there are other visits and practical experiences such as making *Havdalah*; celebrating *Pesach* with grandparents, or planting trees, which bring the religious aspects of the curriculum to life. Children said: '*My mum is coming today for Shabbat and I can wave to her. I like to eat challah and sing the songs.*' Or: '*last year I enjoyed when our grandparents came in for Pesakh.*'

- The school is in the process of developing a Year 2 curriculum and is starting to plan for Key Stage 2, so that as both the school and the children grow, learning will be extended and reinforced.

### **The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because:-**

- The school meets legal requirements for collective worship through daily *tefillah* and other opportunities to recite *brahot*. The majority take part with enthusiasm, singing and reciting the daily prayers and *brahot*, and learning about what they mean. All are given opportunities to wear kippot and to take an active part in religious rituals like lighting *Hanukiot*.
- Outstanding spiritual development is very evident in the strong opportunities provided for the children to reflect and empathise with others. Examples of this can be seen in the way the children gave deep responses as to why they would wish for peace in the whole world. They have an appreciation and awareness of the world which relates to *Tikun Olam*.
- All the children reflect a very strong sense of difference. They have an awareness of other faiths celebrate the Chinese New Year and different festivals of light, including Hindu Diwali. They were really proud when they went to light the Hanukkah candles with the mayor (of Barnet.)
- They learn about *Giborim*: heroes and heroines from different periods of time, including Queen Esther.
- The school makes the children aware of both happy and sad occasions, supporting families bereaved and celebrating births of siblings and other *Simchas* (joyful occasions).
- Non-Jewish parents feel valued and the school has planned and delivered *Limmud* sessions to support the diversity at the parent body.
- Children learn about *tzedaka*, which is built into school life. Even though they are still very young, they raise money for such charities such as Red Nose Day, the homeless, Poppy Day and Camp *Simcha*.
- At the school, gender and sexuality are non-judgemental and all-inclusive. All feel valued and all types of Judaism and other faiths are celebrated and shared at the school so that both boys and girls can take part in all rituals. One boy states: '*I like finding who has got a teudat Kavod (honour certificate) for their work.*'
- The school is heavily oversubscribed, which is a reflection on how happy parents and children are at this school.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management of Jewish learning is good because:**

- The school deserves praise for giving the children a first-rate start to their Jewish journey in life.
- Leadership and management of Jewish Learning are good. The headteacher and governors have laid strong foundations which have been built upon by the staff team, who all have a shared vision for the school and are committed to school improvement. A major challenge for the leadership team has been to incorporate the inclusion of families from both non-Jewish and Jewish backgrounds. All strands of Judaism are supported so that the children have a strong identity based on their own heritage.
- There are effective professional development strategies for teachers and governors, organised by the school and an educational consultant.
- Staff feel very well supported professionally, and induction procedures for new staff are well organised. These involve generic training in the skills of teaching as well as specific lesson observation. Monitoring of teaching practice through performance management strategies is evolving.
- The school has set in action a *Limmud* project to further engage parents in their children's learning.
- The governing body carries out its duties very effectively and offers good support, within the framework of being a 'critical friend' to school leaders and staff.
- As it grows, leaders recognise that the school will need to consider the appointment of a leader of Jewish Learning to lighten the workload of the headteacher. There will also be a growing need to develop the school's monitoring and assessment systems so that they provide a more formal record of the children's Jewish Learning.

## **Views of parents and carers**

Pikuach invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils at Alma Primary to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. These were all very positive. The comments below encapsulate their delight:

*'What has particularly impressed me is the way Jewish Studies are integrated into the whole learning program. For example, on Tu B'Shvat, the children not only learned about the Jewish traditions but also did experiments to see what plants needed to grow, putting seeds in the dark, in the fridge, in the light etc, They incorporated these studies into their English writing exercises and were encouraged to try new fruits. This makes the Jewish Studies more than a study of religion and tradition; it makes it alive and relevant. It allows the children to incorporate Judaism into every aspect of their lives and their learning.'*

*'We have been impressed with both the level of cultural understanding and standard of Ivrit that our child has achieved in a relatively short space of time. We hear a lot about these elements of school life at home and we are regularly spoken to in Ivrit, taught songs and told interesting facts related to Jewish life and festivals.'*

*'Alma is a great Jewish school! My child enjoys going to school and learning about his heritage.'*

*'My child is extremely happy at Alma and thoroughly enjoys his Jewish Studies and Hebrew Learning. He regularly comes home and tells us about what he has been learning about Jewish holidays and singing Hebrew songs that link with what he is learning.'*

*'The children clearly enjoy Kabbalat Shabbat which I have been to see twice and was wonderful. My son knows lots of prayers and songs he didn't know before. He has also taught us at home about havdala. He knew the story of Chanukah very well and now knows all about Purim in surprising detail. He also takes very seriously the school motto of a world built on kindness, which they clearly talk about regularly.'*

*'My child has come home with far more knowledge about Chagim, morning prayers, parsha and Jewish history than I could ever have imagined possible in Reception! She particularly loves and enjoys tefila each morning.'*

*'Thrilled to see my daughter's progress in spoken Hebrew and general enthusiasm for Jewish values she is learning. However, I do think that the school could be clearer about what Jewish studies they are teaching on a termly and yearly basis. I am also hoping that there will be a dedicated Jewish studies teacher in the new future.'*

*'The school is amazingly warm and inclusive and goes out of its way to make festivals a whole family event. We are always invited and encouraged to attend the kabbalat shabbat which I love doing because it's so lovely to see how engaged the kids are and how well they understand the rituals and blessings. Hebrew learning was a worry for me as we are a family with no Israeli links and we don't speak Hebrew but my son really enjoys the classes and is positively encouraged along with lots of praise & badges. He is often throwing Hebrew words out there, and singing.'*

# 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 pupil's 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. |