

YAVNEH COLLEGE

INSPECTION REPORT

Local authority Hertfordshire
Inspected under the auspices of Pikuach
Inspection dates Tuesday 15 March – Wednesday 16 March 2016
Lead Inspector Dr Leon Bernstein

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

Type of school Secondary
School category Academy
Age range of pupils 11–18
Gender of pupils Mixed
Number on roll 935
Appropriate authority The governing body
Chairs Sue Nyman
Headteacher Spencer Lewis
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Introduction

Inspection team

Lead Inspector: Dr Leon Bernstein
Additional Inspector: Sharon Raphael

This inspection was carried out by two inspectors over two days. The inspectors visited 18 classes from Year 7 to Year 13 for lessons and parts of lessons, including *tefillot* (prayers) and school assembly. Some of the lessons were observed jointly with school leaders. Inspectors held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including students' written work, teachers' lesson plans, the Jewish Studies curriculum and the school's self-evaluation document for Jewish Studies. The headteacher and Director of Jewish Life played a full and active part in this inspection, including attending team meetings and discussions with inspectors.

The inspectors looked in detail at the following:

- Achievement of pupils in their Jewish Education
- Quality of teaching and assessment in Jewish education
- The Jewish education curriculum
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including collective worship
- Effectiveness of leadership and management in Jewish education

Information about the school

- Yavneh College opened in September 2006. It is a Modern Orthodox Jewish school of 935 students, including 184 in the sixth form.
- Most students are from a White British heritage and the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is below average. Of these, the majority have specific learning difficulties.
- Only a very small number of students speak English as an additional language.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
The achievement of pupils in their Jewish education	1
The quality of teaching and assessment in Jewish education	1
The extent to which the Jewish education curriculum meets pupils' needs	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development including the duty to fulfil the daily act of collective worship	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of Jewish education	1

Overall Effectiveness:

The quality of Jewish Learning provided in Yavneh College is outstanding (Grade 1)

- Teaching is outstanding and, together with a rich and relevant Jewish curriculum, contributes to students' outstanding learning and achievement.
- Teachers know the students' needs and support these. All students, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, have excellent educational experiences at school. These ensure that students are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The school's practice consistently reflects the highest expectations of staff and the highest aspirations for students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Best practice is spread effectively in a drive for continuous improvement.
- Other principal aspects of the school's work, including the quality of collective worship, are outstanding.
- The school's thoughtful and wide-ranging promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enables them to thrive in a supportive, highly cohesive learning community.
- All leaders, managers and governors are ambitious for the students and lead by example. They base their actions on a deep and accurate understanding of the school's performance, and of the skills and attributes of staff and students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further strengthen the Hebrew reading programme to ensure that all students develop their Hebrew reading skills, both in accuracy and fluency.

Achievement of pupils in their Jewish Learning is outstanding (Grade 1)

- Taking account of their starting points, the proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress is high in relation to their potential. On entry to the school, every student is assessed both, via internal school tests and externally validated tests. Their results are recorded, then tracked regularly using the school's academic tracking system.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, make rapid and sustained progress across the Jewish curriculum and learn exceptionally well.
- In the sixth form, results in public examinations for religious studies remain consistently high. For example, last year in 2015, 96% of students received A-level grades between A* and C, 83% between A* and B and 57% between A* and A.
- Similar successes can be seen in last year's GCSE results, where 93% of students received grades between A* and C, 81% between A* and B, 58% between A* and A and 23% achieving A* in religious studies.
- Students develop and apply a wide range of skills to great effect, including reading, writing and understanding Hebrew. They also develop their ability to formulate and communicate their ideas verbally and in writing across the Jewish curriculum so as to ensure that they are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education. 'For example, in one *Gemara* (Talmud) lesson in Year 7, a number of students were asked a range of questions based on the text, all of whom were able to navigate the *Gemara*, understand the context and translate from the original Aramaic. In another lesson, students were set the task of reading from the original Biblical Hebrew text and translating key words to complete a narrative. They did this accurately and with confidence.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, acquire knowledge quickly and develop their understanding rapidly in the range of subjects covered by the Jewish curriculum.
- The learning, quality of work and progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs students show that they achieve exceptionally well in their Jewish Studies. The school is currently planning further support to ensure that these students maintain high standards and further improve on them.
- Inspectors heard students read and were impressed with the general standard of reading. The school has clearly embraced earlier recommendations for the improvement of Hebrew reading and is developing its statistical evidence to demonstrate progress over time. However, given the success of the reading programme, including modified material using 'Aleph Champ' – a reading textbook - more students could be accelerating their learning over time. School leaders have already identified this as an area for further development, and inspectors have confidence in the commitment of senior leaders to address this.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Jewish Learning is outstanding (Grade 1)

- Much of the teaching in all key stages and most subjects of the Jewish curriculum is outstanding and never less than consistently good. As a result, most students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are making rapid and sustained progress.

- Teachers have consistently high expectations of all students. Their subject knowledge is excellent and they plan and teach lessons that enable students to learn exceptionally well across the Jewish Studies curriculum.
- Teachers systematically and effectively check students' understanding throughout lessons, anticipating where they may need to intervene and doing so with notable impact on the quality of learning.
- Inspectors noted, in a significant number of lessons, outstanding learning and achievement. Students are keen to succeed and enjoy the challenge of academic study. For example, students ask for extension work and openly challenge areas being studied with frank and personal points of view. This is done in a polite and mature manner.
- Students articulate clearly their own areas of development because teachers set clear targets and encourage the students to be reflective. For example, one student commented: 'Before, I couldn't really read, but now I'm moving on to the really hard stuff like *Rashi* (commentary on the *Talmud*).'
- Due to their passion and enthusiasm for teaching, teachers and other adults generate high levels of engagement and commitment to learning across the whole school, using high-quality resources including, where relevant, information and communication technology (ICT). Most of the resources are generated in-house by the Jewish Studies Department and are shared across the curriculum between staff, who take great pride in their work.
- Teachers challenge students' understanding through skilful questioning. Questioning involves probing, to elicit deeper levels of knowledge, and teachers demand responses from students of all abilities.
- Students learn to evaluate their own work, as well as the work of others, through a system of peer marking. The use of 'green pen marking' (a marking system where pupils respond to their teacher's marking by completing corrections or doing next step tasks) was consistent throughout the school, giving students a deeper understanding of the marking process, as well as equipping them to set higher targets for themselves.
- Assessment in Jewish Studies throughout the school is outstanding because consistently high-quality marking and constructive feedback from teachers ensures that students make rapid gains. Inspectors noted innovative marking with teacher feedback in the sixth form, using ICT and audio files to deliver effective ways for students to assess their own learning.
- In Years 7 to 11, teachers provide excellent feedback and targets via the school's own system of topic assessment booklets.
- Assessment of students' work in Jewish Studies is rigorous, systematic and robust. Teachers across the board follow a clear marking policy which enables students to track their own progress. Through the use of an electronic assessment tool ('PARS'), the senior leadership team have a tracking system that evaluates each student's progress and flags up the need for support as and when required.

The extent to which the Jewish education curriculum meets pupils' needs is outstanding (Grade 1)

- The school's Jewish curriculum, both formal and informal, provides memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high-quality learning. This includes outstanding *tefillah* (prayer) experiences and school trips.
- The school's ethos and Modern Orthodox and Zionist aims are reflected in the different Jewish curriculum areas of study and the students leave with a great love and enjoyment of their Jewish learning. For example, when inspectors spoke with groups of students from Years 7 to 11, all students expressed their pride in being Jewish and how being Jewish was so important to them. Students mentioned how 'inclusive' the school was, with one student stating that at Yavneh College there is '...something for all levels of observance. You can build your own observance.'
- The school conducts an annual Israel Trip for Year 9 students. The trip includes work covered in areas of the *Tenach* (*Torah* – Five Books of the Hebrew Bible; *Neviim* – Prophets and *Ketuvim* – Writings) and Jewish history, which reflect what students have learned in the classroom. The school also organises an annual Poland Trip for Year 12 students which links effectively with the Year 12 *Yahadut* (Judaism) programme. The trip focuses on Polish Jewish Heritage as well as the Holocaust. Students return from these trips inspired and espousing a pride in their Jewish heritage.
- The curriculum has overall breadth, depth and balance, providing students with their full entitlement of Jewish knowledge and experience. It is customised to meet the varying needs of individuals. For example, for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, individual educational plans are carefully mapped out to ensure that the students meet the demands of the curriculum and can take a full and active part. All staff, including learning support assistants, have a full understanding of these students' individual learning needs, and plan their lessons thoroughly to ensure the students' full and active participation.
- Comprehensive programmes of study are carefully thought through to provide all students with an exciting journey of Jewish Studies which gradually develops in complexity as they progress through the school. All programmes of study outline learning skills, resources to be used, key words and concepts to be studied and cross-curricular links, for example with English and History.
- The school provides outstanding support and advice for the future, including trips to Israel to consider the most appropriate *Yeshivah* (religious college) or seminary for individual students. Students receive support for university applications and careers advice. These are much appreciated by students, who express their thanks to the staff involved.
- A beacon of the school is its Informal Jewish Education Department. Students, particularly those in the sixth form, offered numerous examples of their satisfaction with the informal curriculum. For example: 'The *Yahadut* programme is unique amongst sixth forms - I could not get this in any other school' and 'Jewish Studies trips are amazing!'
- The *Yahadut* programme has been devised for all students. It includes festivals, community, the Holocaust and preparation for adult life; for example, 'Cooking a meal on a kosher budget' and 'Antisemitism on campus'. The students evaluate the programme, since it is not formally assessed. Comments included: '*Yahadut* is a part of *Yavneh* that I love!' and '*Yahadut* this year has helped me progress on to university with enough information and advice to stand up for Judaism and Israel.'

- Students said that they would welcome the opportunity to learn even more about their Jewish heritage.
- Highly tailored programmes for a wide range of students with different needs are in place or are being actively developed. The extent to which the Jewish Studies Department plans and prepares resources is very impressive. Staff are constantly looking for ways to improve the curriculum.
- Cross-curricular provision, placing the Jewish topics in their broader cultural and scholarly contexts and exploiting the potential of wider reading and ICT wherever relevant, is mainly outstanding and there is nothing less than good.
- Inspectors were impressed with the link between Jewish Studies and *Ivrit* (modern Hebrew, taught as a modern foreign language). The quality of teaching in *Ivrit* impacts positively on the Jewish Studies curriculum and this has a reciprocal impact on *Ivrit*.
- Whole-school planning of events brings together the formal and informal curriculum; for example, an Alice in Wonderland-themed *Purim*, and informal educators plan for Jewish Studies lessons on *Sukkot*, *Yom Hashoah* and other special days and festivals. As a result, all groups of students benefit from a highly coherent and relevant curriculum which promotes outstanding outcomes in developing their study skills in the pursuit of Jewish knowledge, belief and identity.

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding (Grade 1)

- The school meets legal requirements for collective worship through daily *tefillah* (prayer) and other opportunities to recite *brachot* (blessings). Students take part in these with enthusiasm, singing and reciting the daily prayers in their groups.
- Students are confident to express their opinions in the knowledge that these will be respectfully received by teachers and peers. For example, in one Year 10 class dealing with medical ethics in Judaism, a girl asked permission to express her personal opinion on the subject of the Jewish view of abortion. This was accepted by the teacher, who reminded the class that they are always free to express their opinions.
- There is a mutual respect between students and teachers and, where appropriate, good humour is shared in classes, fostering a relaxed atmosphere amid rigorous study.
- Students think deeply about their own and others' experiences and try to relate them to a clear set of personal and Jewish values. They have a keen interest in ethical issues, act in a principled manner and understand the importance of reassessing values in the light of experience. They openly express their enjoyment of Jewish Studies and appreciate the warm and friendly environment created in the school. For example, when students were asked if they like Jewish Studies, one replied, 'Yes, it's really fun because everyone gets along and we learn like a family.'
- Teachers make good and effective use of the 'house points' systems, to which students respond well. Points are awarded in lessons and within the wider context of the school, such as during *davening* (prayer).
- There is a culture of kindness that permeates the school. Examples of kindness were observed such as a boy helping another student pick material dropped in the corridor,

offering to show inspectors the way, holding open doors for others and showing concern for others. Inspectors were impressed with the way in which students freely approached them to ask if they needed help.

- Students have high-level social skills that they apply appropriately in varied contexts, such as in class, in the corridor, in informal and formal situations. These skills reflect the Jewish ethos of the school in a caring but clearly educational setting.
- There are many examples of charitable activities. The school enables students, including those in the sixth form, to select annually charities that include a Jewish charity (for example, Jewish Child's Day), a non-Jewish charity (Watford General Hospital Children's Ward) and an Israeli charity (*Magen David Adom*). The whole *Tzedakah* (charity) programme is steered by the Head of Informal Jewish Education under the school's Charity Society, *Am Echad* (One People).
- Students are keen to understand the world around them and their place within it. They recognise the need to participate fully in the wider society. There are frequent opportunities to meet visiting speakers and attend cultural events in both Jewish and non-Jewish contexts.
- A newsletter, *Yavneh in the Community*, is published regularly detailing the experiences of and participation in community projects.
- The school promotes British values that are common to all and understood by the whole school community. This is reflected in displays, lesson planning, assemblies and in the overall life of the school. It is an integral aspect of the school throughout the curriculum and across all departments. Links are made to Jewish ethos; for example, the concept of law and democracy in British values and how this links with *Halacha* (Jewish law).
- Students are encouraged to be reflective about their own beliefs – religious or otherwise – that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values. To this end, there is an advanced programme of spiritual development with a very varied input including: the Alan Sennit Leadership Programme; trips to Poland and Israel; *Shabbatonim*; Lunch and Learn; the Yoni Jesner Award and a full curriculum, including outside speakers such as politicians, careers professionals and religious leaders. Through the 'ORT Jump' programme, students are assigned a professional mentor of their intended profession.
- The students are open to new ideas and appreciate and show interest in cultural diversity. There are clear messages throughout the school and in Jewish Studies about equality, diversity and acceptance of others.
- There is strong recognition of the links between Judaism and other religions. An outstanding example was an assembly delivered by the headteacher about Easter. Not only was this an exceptionally engaging and informative session, it also ably explained the connections between Judaism and Christianity, reminded the students that we live in a Christian country and recognised the values and beliefs of both religions.
- The Informal Jewish Education team is constantly striving to extend the enrichment programme and to offer new experiences. The students are keen participants and gain much from the wide ranging and diverse activities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of Jewish learning is outstanding (Grade 1)

- Key leaders and managers, including governors, consistently communicate high expectations and ambition in maintaining and improving the quality of the Jewish education that the school provides.
- The pursuit of excellence in all of the school's Jewish educational activities is demonstrated by an uncompromising and highly successful drive to maintain and improve the highest levels of achievement and personal development for all students over a sustained period of time.
- The Director of Jewish Life and the headteacher oversee a very well-planned cycle of performance management. Details of meetings are discussed, as are target setting and professional development. Evidence, including email correspondence, is added to robust monitoring systems throughout the year, and this includes careful monitoring of teaching through lesson observations. All staff are observed at least two or three times a year and are challenged on present performance, then encouraged to improve on this through jointly agreed targets.
- The headteacher and Director of Jewish Life have a clear shared vision of the school in general and the direction of the Jewish Studies Department in particular. Senior and middle leaders articulate the mission of the school, and staff reflect this mission in their work.
- The headteacher and Director of Jewish Life work closely together as a cohesive team to ensure a positive impact on the overall life, ethos and Jewish education of every student. This is most impressive as they work tirelessly in pursuit of providing an overall outstanding Jewish Studies provision for all. Leaders focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning. They provide focused professional development for all Jewish Studies staff, especially those who are training or newly qualified and at an early stage of their careers.
- Staff model professional standards in all of their work and demonstrate high levels of respect and courtesy for students and others.
- Through highly effective, rigorous planning, governors ensure financial stability in funding the delivery of the Jewish curriculum. This leads to the excellent deployment of staff and resources to the benefit of all groups of students.

Views of parents and carers

Pikuach invited all the registered parents and carers of students at Yavneh College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. Parents' views about the Jewish Education provision were very positive, with 93% of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: 'The life of the school gives my child a good understanding of Jewish values' and 91.23% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: 'The school encourages high standards in Jewish Studies/*Limudei Kodesh*.'

Parents comments indicated their very positive views on the formal and informal Jewish education at Yavneh College:

'Daily *tefillah* is a very strong point of the school, since my daughter never knew her *tefillot* before starting Yavneh but now knows almost the entire *shacharit* and *mincha* off by heart. This has made her much happier about going to *shul*. She also regularly sings *tefillot* around the house. My

daughter has become much more observant over the last year and now keeps *Shabbat* and *kashrut* to a high standard.'

'From our experience, Yavneh College has instilled a great love of Judaism, both with formal and informal learning. The Year 9 trip to Israel made such an impression on my son. He came back with an even greater love for Israel and a real understanding of the geography and history of the region, together with a greater spiritual connection.'

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 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.