

Akiva School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135086
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	329025
Inspection dates	10–11 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Saunders

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	294
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	60
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jon Epstein
Headteacher	Mrs Susy Stone
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	80 East End Road London N3 2SY
Telephone number	020 8349 4980
Fax number	020 8349 4959

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Akiva School became voluntary aided in September 2007, having previously been an independent school. It is a progressive Jewish school, catering largely for the community of Liberal, Reform and Masorti movements and occasionally the United Synagogue. A few pupils are bilingual, representing seven languages. A small number of children have additional learning needs, mainly dyslexia, behavioural, emotional and social issues, or speech and language development needs. While all pupils are from Jewish families, they represent a range of ethnic backgrounds. The school stands within the Sternberg Centre, Europe's largest progressive Jewish centre. It moved into new, purpose-built accommodation in January 2008 and has undergone a period of rapid growth that is set to continue. The headteacher joined the school in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Akiva Primary is a good school where pupils reach exceptionally high standards. From strong starting points, the vast majority make good progress while at the school. Some pupils make rapid progress to reach the highest standards before they reach the end of Year 6. The school is developing ways of continuing to challenge these pupils, such as extending the able, gifted and talented provision, although too few lessons include sufficiently challenging work for them. Those with moderate learning difficulties are well supported and also make good progress overall.

The personal development and well-being of pupils are given high priority and they display tremendous confidence and social awareness. In particular, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are keen to help each other and go out of their way to take care of others. They have a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle and are aware of potential dangers.

Lessons are well planned and teaching is usually good, as a result of staff who have a secure knowledge of the curriculum and commitment to the ethos of the school. Consequently, pupils work hard and behaviour is generally cooperative and good. However, some pupils can become distracted in lessons on the occasions when more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged by the work set for them. This very occasionally leads to boisterous behaviour, which can hinder learning. Teachers encourage pupils to evaluate their own and each other's work and the pupils display a mature attitude to this. Marking is not as strong and too often does not help pupils to know how to improve.

Pupils said that teachers are approachable and very caring; many parents indicated that they are thrilled with the care their children receive. A small minority of parents feel that communication could be better and their views considered more, although most are enthusiastically supportive of the school. Many commented on the family atmosphere and that their children are very happy and excited to go to school each day. As parents said, 'This is a fantastic school. The children look after each other, even when they meet outside of school.'

The school has worked closely with many other partners to bring about the change in status and the development of the new buildings. This has given the school an enviable environment, which pupils greatly appreciate; in particular, they love the playground. Pupils play an important part in their community, including promoting understanding between a range of different faiths. The wider community across other nations is also emphasised. The school's leaders, including governors and the deputy headteacher, have ensured that standards remain high during the changes. They have introduced new strategies for assessing learning and keeping track of pupils' progress, which are having a positive impact. Along with the well-focused development plans, this means the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in September following their fourth birthday. On entry, they have abilities beyond those expected for their age in spoken language skills and in numerical understanding, and similar to those expected for their age in physical development. Personal, social and emotional development is well above that expected for their age when they start school. They settle quickly and are keen to focus their attention on the

many varied and stimulating activities provided. Parents are rightly pleased with the induction arrangements and support provided before the children start school. The standards of care and welfare provided by the staff are good and parents recognise this. Children with learning difficulties are identified quickly and their needs addressed well. Leadership is good and staff work well as a team. There are plans to introduce key workers to provide focused attention for individual children. The indoor learning environment is stimulating, bright and airy and resources are of a high standard. Although the outdoor area is used well to extend learning, the space available during child-initiated activities constrains some activities, particularly those for developing physical skills. The quality of the teaching and provision for learning are outstanding, because the interests of the children are used as the starting points for future planning and the curriculum is modified to the individual. As a result, children achieve well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all lessons include sufficient challenge, particularly for the more able pupils.
- Make sure that pupils receive effective advice on how to improve their work and reach the next level of learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards reached are exceptionally and consistently high. Progress is good through the EYFS, but slows at the start of Key Stage 1 because the transition arrangements do not provide enough continuity in pupils' learning experience. However, by the end of Year 2 almost all of them achieve the expected levels in national tests, and a far higher proportion achieve the highest levels than nationally. In Key Stage 2, the good progress continues and the percentage of pupils achieving the highest levels in national tests at the end of Year 6 has been more than double the national figure. In the most recent results, the number of pupils achieving the highest level in science and in writing was not quite as high as previously, but still well above the national figures. Pupils with additional needs are identified early and the support they receive ensures they make good progress overall, and particularly in literacy. This support is not quite as well focused in numeracy and, as a result a small proportion of the pupils with moderate learning difficulties make only satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This extends from their pride in their Jewish identity. Variations within the different traditions are very well respected, as are other faiths. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of right from wrong and show a willingness to take responsibility and support others. They make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community, through their music, creative arts and performances. Some older pupils are trained by Childline to support their peers and help deal with bullying, while others conscientiously 'buddy' the very youngest children. Pupils take very seriously their charitable contributions to sponsor children in El Salvador and Egypt. By contrast, the level of responsibility some pupils take for their own learning and behaviour in lessons, whilst good, is not as well developed. Pupils co-operate well with each other but, when activities are not sufficiently challenging, a minority become disengaged and can be involved in 'off-task' chatter. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and feel safe there, as demonstrated by their comments to inspectors, their good achievement and above average levels of attendance. Their high levels

of literacy and numeracy, along with a determination to achieve, are good support for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There is much good teaching and recently introduced systems, including the use of data and pupil conferences, where pupils discuss their learning with their teachers, are helping to focus lessons on ensuring all pupils make the progress they should. Teachers explain very clearly the new learning for the lesson and recap at the end of the lesson to consolidate learning. The best lessons move at a fast pace with interesting activities that require pupils to think hard and justify their answers. However, in a few lessons there is not sufficient challenge for the more able, particularly for those who have already reached the highest levels, and they lose concentration. Targets are set in literacy and the pupils know these and are able to work towards achieving them for themselves, well supported by the teachers. There are plans to extend this to other subjects. Staff are becoming more confident in using the data about each pupil to plan work that more closely matches the needs of individuals. Teachers mark work regularly and give positive and supportive comments. However, they do not always give pupils sufficiently focused advice on how to improve, nor do they refer back to improvements made to help pupils appreciate their own progress. Teaching assistants provide good, targeted support in a caring and sensitive manner for pupils with learning difficulties and those with behavioural issues, so they too make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a wide range of appropriate opportunities, including those focused on the Jewish faith. Teaching of Hebrew in the school is a real strength. The school has good links with the community and provides a wide variety of visits and visitors to enrich the pupils' learning experiences. For example, the visit to Israel generates extensive work, much of which indicates the pupils' deep reflection on the experience. Lunchtime and after-school activities are highly regarded and well supported by pupils, although they would like to see more sports practices for the competitive opportunities they have. There have been some good opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to undertake work outside the set curriculum, such as writing a novel. There are plans to develop this further. The school has very good links with other local schools and organisations that are effectively used to extend pupils' learning, such as the exchange with a Catholic school over Easter and Pesach. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is good, often developing helpful links with their understanding of the Jewish faith. Information and communications technology (ICT) skills are being developed through use of the computer suite, although this is not yet evident as a natural tool to support work in other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. The pastoral care of pupils is very strong, and is highly appreciated by parents and pupils. Academic guidance is satisfactory although there are a number of strategies being implemented to improve this. At the moment, pupils do

not always receive guidance that helps them to know specifically how to take the next steps in their learning, for example through marking in their books. Risk assessments are carried out for appropriate activities and are increasingly detailed. As a new school, the senior leaders are working to ensure that all procedures, such as those for recording bullying, are in line with best practice, although some are not yet fully in place. Clear systems for managing behaviour are being implemented. The school had a period when the support for pupils by a special educational needs coordinator was patchy. This situation has been resolved and the provision of support for these pupils is improving. All requirements for safeguarding pupils are well attended to.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Although the headteacher has been in post a very short time, she has begun to identify key priorities for moving the school forward. She is able to rely on the excellent senior leadership to help her in this. They have put in place a suitable tracking system of pupils' progress, which is beginning to have an impact on teaching and learning and now gives them the data they need to identify pupils' needs more accurately. Senior leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school and understand the developments that need to take place, as well as the considerable strengths of the school. The role of subject leaders is being developed further because it does not yet have enough impact on teaching and learning, for example to raise the level of challenge for the most able pupils. The governors provide a good balance of support and challenge and have managed the considerable changes over the past year very well. They have ensured that the school provides good value for money. There is a strong sense of purpose among the staff and a determination to make further improvements and raise standards yet further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

24 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Akiva School, London, N3 2SY

Thank you for welcoming the inspectors to your school and telling us so much about what you were doing. What a fantastic playground you have, with so much wonderful new equipment! You told us you think it is a good school and we agree with you.

Many of you said you feel so well looked after and we think your teachers are doing a great job of caring for you. This means that you develop into mature, thoughtful young people. This showed in the way you chatted to us so confidently. We were also impressed with the many things you do as part of your community, and how you show your care for one another and others, even in countries far away.

You do well in your lessons and reach very high standards in the tests you do. Those of you who find learning more difficult also make the progress you should because you get good support. Those who lead the school have worked hard to make sure all this happens.

Even though you are doing well, there are some things your school can do to make sure things get even better.

- We have asked them to make sure that all lessons include work that will challenge those of you who find learning easy, to stretch your thinking.
- They need to make sure that you get accurate advice on how to do even better in your work; you need to make sure you take these chances to improve.

Most importantly of all, continue to enjoy learning and make sure your school is a great place for everyone to be.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Saunders

Lead Inspector