

Hasmonean High School for Girls

2-4 Page Street, Mill Hill, London NW7 2EU

Kodesh Studies Inspection Report

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

Inspection dates

14–15 Kislev 5784 – 27-28 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	outstanding	1
Leadership and management	outstanding	1
Quality of Jewish Education. Curriculum Intent – curriculum design Implementation – teaching, assessment, curriculum delivery Impact - achievement	outstanding	1
Quality of provision for pupils Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC), including the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and personal development including behaviour.	outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The quality of leadership and management in *Kodesh* (Jewish Studies) is outstanding, expertly led by the Menahel (principal). Leaders share a dynamic vision for the school, which they communicate effectively to all stakeholders. They are successful in nurturing students to become happy, confident and respectful adults, committed to living a life of *Torah* and to strive for excellence in *Kodesh* and in their *middos*.
- Leaders focus successfully on improving teaching and learning and provide effective professional training opportunities for staff. This includes internal mentoring, external consultancy and courses, and effective pathways for staff to graduate from the HIPE (Hasmonean Informal Programmes & Education) team to qualified teaching status and taking on leadership roles.
- The governing body makes a significant contribution to the school's development. This has included recently navigating the de-amalgamation from the boys' school. It offers support to the *Kodesh* studies leadership team and also challenges them to deliver the highest quality *Kodesh* studies provision.
- The Menahel and senior leadership team have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development, which are shared with colleagues, within a school evaluation framework and school improvement plan.

- The leadership and management team have created a positive harmonious working environment, wherein staff are fully committed and proud to work.
- The *Kodesh* curriculum is outstanding and particularly impressive within the core subjects of *Chumash*, *Tefillah* (prayer) and *Biblical Hebrew*. In all subjects much thought has been expended in making learning experiences meaningful and relevant. However, there needs to be a review carried out in *Halacha* (Jewish law) and *Sedra* (*Torah* portion of the week) so that these subjects can be delivered even more effectively.
- The quality of teaching and learning within *Kodesh* studies is outstanding. Teachers typically make learning engaging and motivating, provide challenge for all, with a good focus upon building knowledge and skills.
- As a result of the outstanding curriculum and the high quality of teaching and learning, students, including those with SEND and the more able, make outstanding progress.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) provision is outstanding. Students excel in their collective worship, praying with devotion. They gain a deep understanding of, and appreciation for, fundamental British Values (FBV). Behaviour of students in classrooms and around the school is outstanding. Students demonstrate a thirst for knowledge and a love of *Kodesh* lessons and extracurricular activities.
- The HIPE provision offers a wonderful opportunity for students to take part in and gain from a wide range of memorable activities which inspires students and imbues them with a love for *Torah* and *mitzvos* (commandments).
- The sixth form *Midrasha* provision offers a superb programme with students being offered many options. This fits into the strategic aim of the school to provide bespoke *Kodesh* lessons and activities to meet the needs of students who may have a range of standards in *Kodesh* and a wide range of religious practice. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives, for a life of *Torah im derech erez* (with respectful interactions with others).
- Staff appreciate the strong support they receive from the *Kodesh* leadership team, and parents are most pleased with the way in which their children engage in *Kodesh* lessons and in extracurricular activities.

What does the school need to improve further

- Restructure the *Halacha* curriculum so that it is more cohesive and charts progress year on year. This would provide clarity to all stakeholders on expected prior knowledge and where revisiting of topics will occur.
- Review the over ambitious *Sedra* curriculum, so that the limited time allocated for this subject is optimally utilised.
- Continue to embed the outstanding education provision within the *Midrasha* programme.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors who conducted lesson observations in a total of 21 classes. Several learning walks took place focussing upon display, the early morning *Beis* programme and extracurricular activities within the HIPE provision. *Davening* across the school in *shacharis* and *mincha* was observed. Discussions took place with the Menahel, CEO, headteacher, *Midrasha* leadership team, main school *Kodesh* leadership, head of *Chumash*, head of *Biblical Hebrew*, governors, SENCO, pastoral lead, HIPE team, assessment lead, and *Kodesh* teachers. Questionnaires were completed by 34 parents, 26 staff members and 96 students, and were analysed by the inspectors.

Approximately 30% of the school day is dedicated to *Kodesh* studies, however, this significantly increases if one takes into account voluntary *Kodesh* based activities outside school hours.

The inspectors perused a range of documentation including students' written work, the *Kodesh* studies curriculum, the school's self-evaluation document for *Kodesh* studies and the school improvement plan. The senior leadership team were actively involved in the inspection, taking part in many joint lesson observations. Students' *middos* and behaviour were observed both in class and around the school. In addition, discussions and testing took place with a sample of students from Years 8,9,10,11,12 and 13.

During the inspection there was a specific focus (deep dive) on the following subjects and stages; *Chumash*, *Biblical Hebrew* and *Tefillah*, as well as the *Midrasha* provision within the sixth form.

Inspection team

Lead Inspector Rabbi Y. Yodaiken

Team Inspector Rabbi N. Lieberman

Full report

Information about this school

- The school opened as a new school in 2019, after de-amalgamation from the boys' school.
- The school has an Orthodox Jewish religious character which caters for a wide spectrum of religious practice, within this religious sector.
- At the end of sixth form, the vast majority of students go on to learn in Seminaries where they further their Jewish Religious studies.
- The relatively new *Midrasha* programme for Year 12 and Year 13 students provides a flexible programme with many options offered to students within *Kodesh* studies.

Inspection judgements

The effectiveness of leadership and management of *Kodesh* studies is outstanding

- The quality of leadership and management in *Kodesh* studies is outstanding. There is a dynamic and shared vision for *Kodesh* in which staff, governors and students strive consistently for excellence.
- The synergy of approach and mutual respect of all members within the executive leadership team (ELT) ensures a harmonious setting in the school, which is appreciated by staff who consider the school a wonderful place to work in. The dynamic and highly professional Menahel offers sagacious guidance to colleagues and as a result staff feel valued and respected.
- The leadership team act as excellent role models to students and facilitate good *middos*, altruistic values and excellent behaviour which pervade all aspects of school life.
- The leadership and management team are highly successful in achieving their stated aims, to imbue in their students "*Torah im derech erez* and to nurture students to become happy, confident and respectful adults, committed to living a life of *Torah* and to strive for excellence in *Kodesh*, Chol and *middos*". A growing number of students go on to study in seminaries to further develop their religious knowledge and practice.
- Leaders focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning and provide many opportunities for effective professional development. This involves an in-house mentoring programme and the use of external consultants. There is an effective performance management process in place and leaders within the main school years and the sixth form conduct regular lesson observations which involve evaluation and guidance. It is noteworthy that several members of staff whose initial involvement in the school was in the HIPE provision,

have gone on to gain formal teaching qualifications within a clear pathway of professional development.

- The leadership team provide a nurturing environment in which students reflect on how to improve and respect each other, within a framework of a thirst for knowledge and self-improvement. This was exemplified during the inspection when the inspectors shared some *Torah* thoughts with various groups of students, to which they responded with great interest in searching for the understanding and internalisation of the concepts conveyed.
- The school has an outstanding *Kodesh* curriculum which has been carefully and expertly constructed. The curriculum takes into account the knowledge and skills required in each topic and subject. Particularly impressive is the *Chumash* curriculum, *Biblical Hebrew* curriculum, the *Tefillah* curriculum, and all aspects within the sixth form *Midrasha* programme. The curriculum offers an excellent focus on inspiring students in Jewish philosophy and religious practice, so that it is meaningful and relates to all students. This is exemplified by the various options offered to students throughout the school, as well as the way in which the school plans how classes are to be set at different academic levels. This helps students in their learning and meets the needs of a wide spectrum of religious knowledge and practice.
- The leadership team within the main school are aware that a review needs to be made of the delivery of both *Sedra* and *Halacha*, in order to further enrich the curriculum in these subjects.
- The school has put together an impressive team of leaders within *Kodesh* studies. These include the *Midrasha* leadership team who have advanced considerably the *Kodesh* studies provision in the sixth form, the main school leadership who have also had a big impact on the school, as have subject leads and HIPE team members. Leaders have a clear understanding of strengths and areas of development within *Kodesh* studies and have produced comprehensive documents outlining the self-evaluation and school improvement areas.

The quality of Jewish Education is outstanding

- The school's *Kodesh* curriculum, intent and implementation both formal and informal is outstanding. It offers many memorable and enriched experiences of high quality learning for students, including those with SEND. The detailed and comprehensive curriculum documents enhance the Jewish ethos of the school, enabling students to develop their skills and knowledge in a clear progressive way.
- The curriculum is customised to the needs of individuals. In discussion with Year 9 students they were delighted that on occasion they could learn in small groups, which match their ability, and as a result were able to make good progress and have a closer relationship with their teachers.
- Students appreciate the opportunity that they have to make subject or topic choices. One of the Year 10 students who was interviewed said "we are so lucky to have so many opportunities to succeed, I just love *Kodesh* lessons".

Another student in Year 12 commented that “the curriculum choices which we have are great, because I can do topics which I am really interested in”.

- It is clear that the curriculum contributes very well to building students’ commitment to further Jewish study and their involvement in the community. A parent commented that “I am so pleased that the school encourages my daughter in Year 13 to be a leader in a youth group and to be involved in voluntary community work”.
- The curriculum planning is outstanding within *Chumash*, *Biblical Hebrew*, *Tefillah*, *Nach* and in all subjects within the *Midrasha* programme, namely *Chumash*, *Biblical Hebrew*, Religious Studies, Jewish knowledge, *Tefillah*, *Sedra*, *Halacha*, *Nach* and Jewish Philosophy. In the *Midrasha* programme there are two tracks, set 1 and set 2 are within track one, and set 3 to set 5 are within track 2. Within track 2 there is less emphasis on text work and more on philosophy and discussions on topics of Jewish thought and practice, with less formal learning. Within set 4 and 5 guest speakers from Aish (Jewish outreach organization) are invited to address students on topics relating to Jewish ethics.
- The *Midrasha* provision aims to engage and inspire students in their *Torah* study and connect them to their past, but also to their futures as confident Jewish women. It is successful in achieving this.
- The innovative *Chumash* curriculum is planned meticulously to build independent *chumash* skills. There is a good focus upon building knowledge and grammatical skills, linked to the important lessons students can learn from the *posukim* (verses from the *Torah*) being learnt, so that they can apply it to their own life. *Meforshim* (commentaries) are accessed within lessons, and by Year 10 most students can work out for themselves the main themes presented in the *Meforshim*.
- The *Biblical Hebrew* curriculum is outstanding and is supported by reflective marking and controlled assessments. Prepared notes of a high quality provide excellent guidance to students.
- The detailed curriculum for each year group ensures that each year builds on the previous one, offering progress and breadth. In nearly all subjects there is a rationale for the sequence of topics taught and skill development in *Kodesh* studies. This includes where revisiting of topics should follow. The exception to this is within *Halacha* where planning is not as coherent and needs reviewing, so that the schedule for revisiting topics is clearly set out and as a result prior knowledge can be built upon year on year.
- Another area for development is within the *Sedra* curriculum. An evaluation is needed to ensure that students retain their knowledge of the *Sedra*. This is because there is only one *Sedra* lesson per week in many classes. The present three part lesson does not allow enough time for retention or in-depth discussion.
- Most teaching and learning in all key stages and most subjects of *Kodesh* studies is outstanding and it is never less than consistently good.

Consequently, nearly all students including those with SEND, make accelerated progress.

- Students make outstanding progress during lessons due to excellent teaching by highly committed and caring teachers. Nearly all the *Kodesh* lessons contain the following:
 - High ambitions for all students, including those with SEND.
 - High level of engagement by students.
 - Excellent questioning strategies being used.
 - Development of skills and knowledge.
 - Excellent behaviour and attitudes.
 - Opportunities for students to reflect upon their learning.
 - Practical applications in how the lesson can be reflected in the students' lives.
 - A fast pace, with smooth transitions.
 - Excellent student-teacher relationship, wherein students are encouraged and supported.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to engage students in rich learning experiences. For example, in one Year 12 lesson the concept of *pnimiyos* (inner spirituality) was supported by a thought provoking excerpt from the *Talmud* which became a focus for discussion and reflection.
- Much of the teaching in the core subjects of *Chumash*, *Biblical Hebrew*, *Nach* and *Tefillah* focusses upon developing students' skills and knowledge to enable them to become independent in their learning and *davening*. This was evident on testing the Year 10 students, as many were confident to read and decipher unseen *Meforshim*.
- Teachers take every opportunity to imbue values and good *middos* within lessons. For example, in a Year 8 *Sedra* lesson, the teacher referred to how students could learn from *Yosef* about building up their resilience to be strong in the face of adversity.
- Teachers share their love for *mitzvos* with their students, which motivates them and imbues them with a love of the *Torah*. This was evident within a discussion with a Year 13 group of students, where one student remarked "We love learning *Kodesh*, because our teachers share with us their love of the *Torah* which inspires us".
- Teachers skilfully question and challenge individuals and groups of students during lessons, which extends students' knowledge and understanding and teaches them a range of skills. An example of this was seen within a KS4 *Biblical Hebrew* lesson, where students worked in pairs to identify grammatical points recently introduced to the class from an unseen text.
- Every opportunity is taken by the school to personalise the learning to meet the needs of individual students. It is very impressive how the school plans the teaching and learning within each set, to meet different learning styles, different levels of attainment and in some cases different levels of religious practice and knowledge. The school utilises a sophisticated controlled assessment strategy which tracks student progress and which is used to decide which students go into which set. A wonderful example of personalised

learning was seen in Year 11 *Chumash* lessons, where the same *chumash* text was being taught by two teachers in markedly different styles. The more academic class was being taught in a formal text based way, whereas the less academic class was being taught in a more casual and less text based fashion. This ensures that all students are actively participating and engaged.

- Teaching and learning within the *Midrasha* department prepares students well for their next stage of seminary education. Teachers are well qualified and dedicated to imbue in their students a love of *Torah* and *mitzvos*, together with providing a high standard of learning. For example, during a Year 13 lesson, students were encouraged to analyse a text in *Breishis* from the perspective of several *meforshim*, including the *Ramban*, *Seforno* and *Ibn Ezra*, and did so at a very high level.
- Assessment for learning is embedded in the school very effectively. Marking, questioning and class discussions are well used to formatively assess student progress. There is a robust assessment policy and implementation, which includes regular standardisation through controlled assessments in *Chumash*, *Biblical Hebrew*, and *Halacha*. This includes student reflection and feedback. Data from these assessments are used to plan teaching and to ensure that all students are in a class which is best suited to them.
- Teachers are adept at utilising innovative classroom resources. For example, in *Chumash* there are three different sets of resources to support learning. Each student has a keyring which displays different words and phrases, a dictionary which builds up a word bank as students go through the school, and key word translations of the text for students of lower attainment. ICT is used to support learning as evidenced in a Year 10 lesson on *Hashkofa* where text based sources for discussion were downloaded so that each student could readily refer to them.
- In the few lessons where teaching is not as strong the pace is not as good, there is less challenge and prior knowledge is not built upon.
- The teaching of *Sedra* is the least strong subject. This is because within the main school of KS3 and KS4, the curriculum is over ambitious. This translates into teachers at times trying to pack too much into a single period, which results in too little opportunity to review the content of the *Sedra*, and in some classes students not being able to delve deeper into the contents of the *Sedra*.
- The school has an excellent track record in outstanding achievement in public examinations in *Biblical Hebrew* and Religious Studies over the last three years. In 2023, in *Biblical Hebrew* 100% of students attained grade A*-B at A-levels. In Religious Studies 81% achieved grades 7-9 with 75% of pupil premium students and 67% of SEND students meeting their Religious Studies GCSE target.
- Results within school controlled assessments show a similar picture. Students show excellent and sustained progress over time, in all core *Kodesh* subjects.
- A growing number of students, over 80%, attended seminary or another religious programme in Israel last year upon graduating from the school.

- Students display a love of Judaism and graduates of the school become outstanding role models for Hasmonean students and the community at large. Alumni often return to school and become members of staff.
- Students with SEND make excellent progress due to the extra attention given to these students in lower class sets within each year group. In addition, the specialist input from the SENCO helps these pupils to access learning. There is a culture of building the self-efficacy of students with SEND. This was evident during the inspection when a student who has SEND shared with an inspector how well supported she feels, and also that she is able to talk about her needs openly to peers and staff.
- An impressive outcome is that the school caters for a wide spectrum of religious practice and empowers students to become strengthened in their religious practice and to feel a sense of pride in being Jewish.
- Testing of students throughout the school shows a high level of attainment in all subjects, with the exception of knowledge of *Sedra*, which was somewhat variable. It is particularly impressive to see the attainment and progress within *Chumash* and *Biblical Hebrew*. Progress and attainment within other subjects is also at a high level.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding

- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Staff treat colleagues with great respect and present as excellent role models to pupils. This impacts positively on the spiritual development of students. As one student described it during an interview with an inspector "my teacher inspires me for the future, for a life of *Torah* and *mitzvos*, with his enthusiasm for *mitzvos*".
- Students present as being polite and well-mannered and display beautiful *middos*. For example, even when leaving the building in haste due to the fire alarm going off, on an unplanned fire drill, many students thanked the member of staff who had propped the door open for them.
- Staff take every opportunity to imbue values and good *middos* in their pupils. A wonderful example of this was demonstrated within a Year 9 lesson when in discussing the sale of *Yosef* by his brothers, the teacher shared with pupils the concept of learning from one's mistakes as a springboard for growth. The school is aware of the need to provide formal *middos* programmes in each class which will consolidate *middos* development.
- Students are reflective and are used to delving deeper into topics and philosophical concepts. For example, on a wall display Year 10 students described insightfully how *Kodesh* studies helps them. Students are encouraged to be reflective, and at every opportunity, whether in formal *Kodesh* lessons or within the HIPE programme, take part in high level discussions. The school prioritises this in that the second part of controlled assessments in *Chumash*, *Biblical Hebrew*, and *Halacha* involves considering how the topic learnt resonates with the student and impacts on her life.

- The students display a love for Jewish knowledge and practice. This is facilitated through the interesting and well planned *Kodesh* curriculum and HIPE programme. There is a warm vibrant atmosphere permeating the school, as described by a Year 10 student “our school is like one happy family, my favourite time at school is the weekly dancing during break on Friday and the early morning *Beis* programme which is so inspirational”.
- The school fulfils its statutory requirements for collective worship. Much consideration has been expended on how to make *tefillah* meaningful and students pray with devotion and display a love for their prayers. During the inspection special prayers *Tehillim* (psalms) were said for those who need a *refuah* (speedy recovery) and those who need Divine protection whilst defending the borders of the State of Israel. A student in Year 9 shared with an inspector how the *Tefillah* curriculum and actual *davening* impacted upon her. “I used to struggle with *davening*, but now with the high quality *tefillah* lessons, my *davening* is so meaningful”.
- There are two *davening* tracks within the *Midrasha* department, one of which is within a quieter setting for those who wish to *daven* this way.
- It would be advantageous if the Year 8 and Year 9 students would have chairs for *davening* which would help their already good prayer sessions to be augmented still further.
- Much planning and consideration has been given as to what the school can do within the extenuating circumstances which Jews find themselves, due to the Middle East crisis. On the wall display, students describe how they do good deeds linked to *achdus* (unity), and how they do *mitzvos* with extra *kavonah* (devotion) to bring merit to the Jewish nation.
- The HIPE programme is well planned and provides extracurricular activities which inspire spiritual, moral, and social development. It is successful in achieving its stated aims “of bridging the gap between a religion learnt and a religion lived”. The HIPE team work closely with staff to deliver memorable events. These include residential *Shabbatons* for Year 7 and Year 13, and in-school events for other classes. An impressive *Yom Iyun* learning programme for Year 10 and Year 11 took place during the inspection which offered nine options for students to choose four from, all of which focussed upon “*halacha* and my life”. In addition, a guest speaker inspired students by discussing true kindness, which is intrinsic and not instrumental. This then led onto a “one heart, one beat” activity, which was uplifting. The next stage in the HIPE strategic plan is to create a thematic overview which will anchor HIPE activities throughout the school, linked to events and the Jewish calendar.
- Students are encouraged at every juncture to be involved in outside school communal activities and charities. These include KEF, GIFT and SHABBAT WALK. In addition, many are leaders in Ezra, Sinai and Bnei Akiva, organisations in which Hasmonean High School girls play a lead role.
- A heartwarming feature in the school is the way that the older students support younger ones. A *Kesher* programme links Year 12 and Year 13 students with those in Year 7 and Year 8. In addition, sixth form students support *mincha* in younger classes, take part as big buddies in the Year 7

residential *Shabbaton*, and join in together with Year 10 students (Monday mornings) and Year 11 students (Wednesday mornings), within the early *Beis* programme.

- The pastoral support at the school is outstanding. Students trust their teachers, as evidenced by a student’s comment from Year 8, “teachers really care about us and always are there to support us”. Spiritual and welfare mentoring is offered to students individually by the *chumash* teachers on a regular basis. This is in addition to the school counsellors who support students who may display anxieties.

What inspection judgements mean

OUTSTANDING	GOOD	REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	INADEQUATE
The quality of Jewish education is outstanding	The quality of Jewish education is at least good	The quality of Jewish education requires improvement	The quality of Jewish education is inadequate
At least 2 of the other key judgements are outstanding with the others at least good	At least 2 of the other 3 key judgements are good and the third, requires improvement, is already improving in this third area	All other key areas require improvement No inadequate judgement	Are inadequate in safeguarding or any of the 4 areas Also does not adequately provide collective worship

School details

Unique reference number 147238

Local authority Barnet

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	584 (of which 162 are sixth form)
Appropriate authority	Board of Trustees
Chair of Trustees	Mr Gary Swabel
CEO	Mr Andrew McClusky
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine Brice
Menahel	Rabbi Jeremy Golker
Date of previous inspection	N/A as this is a newly established Academy
School address	2-4 Page Street Mill Hill London NW7 2EU
Telephone Number	020 8203 1411
Email address	email@hasmonean.co.uk