

Cheder Report – AGM – August 2020

The Cheder continues to flourish. We have had 94 children on roll this year with the figure dropping to 84 during the lockdown period. Here is a class by class breakdown of numbers on roll (numbers in brackets = lockdown figures).

Gan (Reception) - 2 (2)	Dalet (Y4) – 18 (17)
Aleph (Y1) - 6 (6)	Hay (Y5) - 18 (17)
Bet (Y2) - 20 (18)	Vav (Y6) – 18 (14)
Gimmel (Y3) – 12 (10)	

We are still running a joint Gan/Aleph class as the uptake on the Gan class is too low to make a class in its own right viable. This is often the case as parents feel that starting day school is enough for their 4 year old. This has no impact on their learning as there is a lot of repetition in the early years and the teacher is able to differentiate for those who have prior learning/differing needs.



Our attendance rate is good compared to other Cheders – an average of 75% (with an average of 83% during the lockdown). We know that many of our older students prepare for entrance exams and that has an impact on their attendance.

The morning is usually split into 2 sessions with the first 45 minutes being devoted to Hebrew and the second hour of teaching is devoted to Jewish Studies. Different classes have made various items of Judaica over the year such as kippot, mezzuzot, tallit, hannukiyot, torah scrolls, challah cloths, tzedakah boxes and dreidels. There have also been baking opportunities with classes making challah, soup, cheesecake, biscuits and doughnuts amongst other things.

At the end of the morning, the parents join us in the hall for our Kehillah time (assembly). During our assembly, we celebrate individual successes with certificates and also upcoming birthdays – the children really look forward to receiving their card and pencil gift. We also learn songs and prayers from the Shabbat services.

Response to Covid19

Obviously this part of our year has been seriously disrupted by the outbreak of Covid 19. We had to respond quite quickly and have taken our learning online. We have run shorter sessions; we have met weekly for a 20 minute celebration assembly (taking a similar format to our in-person assemblies). Following the assembly, we have made use of the break-out room feature of Zoom to run 20 minute class based Jewish Studies lessons with an at-home follow-up activity. For Hebrew, our families were offered the opportunity to be paired up with one of our Madrichim for one to one Hebrew lessons weekly lasting around 15 minutes.



Some mornings at Cheder are “off timetable” and we do something a little different. Here are some of the things we've done this academic year.

Sukkot

This year we once again ran a drop-in session for the Cheder as well as the wider community. The children dropped in with their parents to make decorations for the Sukkah. We also supported the food collection for New Hope.

Remembrance Sunday

Kittah Vav joined the Remembrance parade and helped serve teas after the parade. The Cheder observed a minute's silence and listened to the last post played on a trumpet by one of our madrichim.

Mitzvah Day

This year we opened Mitzvah Day up to the wider community. We continued our partnership with Norwood and also worked with New Hope in Wafford. We completed projects for Norwood and made things to sell to raise money for New Hope as well as organising a collection of food, toiletries, warm clothes and bedding for them. Each week the children are giving Tzedakah to their class collection bottle. Some money has already been donated to New Hope and they have asked that we put the last lot of money towards buying underwear for them to donate—unfortunately due to the lockdown, this project was put on hold. As part of Mitzvah Day we also invited residents from Norwood to join us to complete some of the activities as well as to have tea and cake in our pop-up café. This proved very successful and it was lovely to watch our pupils and parents working alongside them and their carers.



Part of what we did at Mitzvah Day was to make things that could be sold. We joined the community at their Chanukah Fair selling our wares to make more money for New Hope. We made a donation of £270 to New Hope early in the new year.



Mitzvah Day is not run in isolation, we have continued our Mitzvah Passport scheme to encourage the children to think about mitzvot all year round rather than for just one day. Each class has a set of mitzvah challenges that they are completing, some based around the festivals and others based around their curriculum. For each mitzvah they complete, they get a sticker/stamp on their passport. Four stickers gets them a certificate, 8 stickers gets them a certificate and a badge and 12 stickers gets them a certificate and a prize. We handed out around 14 top prizes at the end of the last academic year despite the lockdown we were still able to present 13 this year with prizes to follow.

Chanukah



For Chanukah, we ran a “round robin” of activities, with every child making a Chanukiah, whether that was a flameless version for the younger years or one made from a tile that they could all use at home during their home Chanukah festivities. The children also learned songs, played games and quizzes as well as eating doughnuts of course!!



Tu Bishvat

For Tu Bishvat this year we held a whole Cheder Tu Bishvat fruit Seder. The children also completed a variety of tree-themed activities, from making tree pictures, saying thank you to the trees in pictures and writing, to writing their names in trees.



Purim

For Purim, we continued our partnership with New Hope with another toiletry, food and clothing collection. I was able to deliver a boot full of goods to New Hope who were very grateful. The children completed Purim related activities in their classes, including making Hamantashen and we ended the morning with Kittah Vav's fun Purim parody of Lecha Dodi.



Pesach

By Pesach we were in lockdown, but we had already begun preparations at Cheder with some children making their own Seder plates. We held a virtual Chocolate Seder to which youngsters from the wider community were invited—a sticky, chocolatey morning was had by all!



Lag B'Omer



Another virtual event was our virtual Lag B'Omer campfire where the children were invited to make their own indoor bonfires and join us to have a sing along around it instead of our usual assembly. Some children also made bonfire cupcakes as part of their Jewish Studies that morning.

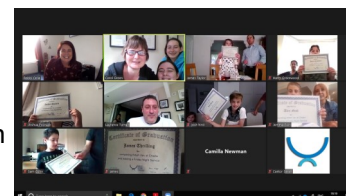
Shavuot

Shavuot was a Zoom bake-along which had the children working alongside the Headteacher to make Malteser or Orio cheesecake. The children loved making and eating their cheesecakes.



We finished the last academic year (2018-19) with a celebration assembly where representatives from Norwood came to accept a cheque for just short of £600 which they have used to enhance one of their residences. Kittah Vav also had their own graduation service which they led on a Friday night at Shul.

This year, due to the current situation, we still held a celebration assembly where every child “received” a certificate of achievement from their year at Cheder. We also held a virtual graduation service for the Year 6s who prepared (with the help of Cantor Sarah) two songs to share with the community. We have yet to make our presentation of goods to New Hope from the £150 of tzedakah collected pre-lockdown.



We have a strong staff team of teachers and classroom assistants. We are joined by our Hadracha class who are volunteering in the classroom to get further experience. The Hadracha course runs over the course of the year and it's great to get them to put into practice what they've learnt—unfortunately this was cut short this year due to the Covid19 situation and we are hoping that the students will have chance to complete their volunteering soon. Our senior staff have all completed safeguarding training whilst in lockdown and we are hoping to offer age-appropriate training to the younger staff soon. At the beginning of January a some of the staff attended a training day run by the Liberal and Reform movement – this is a great opportunity to train alongside teachers and assistants from other synagogues, giving an element of choice in the training sessions taken. I would like to heartily thank our staff for their dedication to Cheder and their enthusiasm which makes all of the above activities possible—especially to those who have adapted and continued to work in this new and challenging way.

Next year remains uncertain and we have to proceed with a degree of caution. We are currently thinking through the possibilities for the new term (which fortunately doesn't start until October this year). We are training for and thinking through the logistics of offering something face to face as well as building on and strengthening the successful virtual Cheder we have been offering. It may be that we offer a hybrid of these in the first instance.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about our very successful Cheder, do contact me on headteacher@radlettreform.org.uk.

Carol Green
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