

Cheder Report – May 2021

We have had an interesting year due to the Covid-19 situation. Cheder has remained online for the year with Jewish Studies being taught on a Sunday morning and Hebrew being taught 1:1 with an online tutor at a mutually convenient time. We currently have 69 pupils on role—numbers are down slightly as we have no Reception or Year 1 class as we felt that age was too young for online teaching and other parents have chosen to withdraw their children from the programme due to the fact that it is online.

Our current numbers are as follows:

Bet (Y2) - 7	Hay (Y5) - 17
Gimmel (Y3) – 16	Vav (Y6) – 19
Dalet (Y4) – 10	



Attendance has been high on the whole, which is great considering how much time our families have spent on-line over the last year.

Our education programme has been split as follows:

Assembly

We have held a 15 minute assembly, consisting of celebrating successes and birthdays as well as some lovely opportunities for singing thanks to Josh Freedman and Cantor Sarah.

Jewish Studies

Following the assembly, we have made use of the break-out room feature of Zoom to run 40-45 minute class based Jewish Studies lessons with an at-home follow-up activity. We trialled an options half term in the spring as a break from our normal JS sessions and the children were able to choose a Pesach themed activity to follow for 4 weeks. The four options were as follows: Pesach Cookery, Ritual Objects, Drama and Making a Hagaddah. On the whole the options were very well received and we will be looking to see how we can bring an element of choice to our back to face-to-face Cheder sessions next year.

Hebrew

Our Hebrew learning has been online for the year. We have a team of trained madrichim who have been planning for and delivering our Hebrew curriculum to the children in weekly 1-to-1 sessions of 15 minutes in length. These lessons are taught at mutually convenient times to our families and tutors. Our youngest students (Kittah Bet) start by learning vocabulary and are then introduced to some of the letters in these new words. Kittah Gimmel through to Hay (3-5) have on the whole followed the Z'man Likro programme, learning a few new letters at a time and learning to decode and then read Hebrew words. Our oldest students (Kittah Vav and some who have progressed in Kittah Hay) are reading from the Siddur and are making good progress through prayers that they will encounter and improve on the BM programme. We have found that this one-to-one teaching has had such a benefit to the reading ability of most of our children that we are looking to be able to offer this when we return to face-to-face teaching.

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.

Remembrance Sunday

Although we could not physically meet, we had a special Remembrance Assembly where we streamed into one of our madrichim who was playing the Last Post on her trumpet at her local war memorial.

Mitzvah Day

Once again we opened up Mitzvah Day to the community. This year we invited families to sign up for a sponsored walk to try to reach Lesvos in Greece virtually. Around 100 people took part across the community, walking a combined total of around 500 miles and raising just over £2000 to support the International School of Peace (a school run by both Jewish and Arab Israelis). With thanks to all the people young and old(er) who got involved!



Chanukah



For Chanukah, we ran a Virtual Escape room where the children completed 5 Chanukah related tasks, from decorating dreidels to making edible menorahs as well as bingo games and scavenger hunts. We were also pleased to see many of our Cheder families at the Chanukah “drive-through” event in the afternoon.

Tu Bishvat

For Tu Bishvat this year each class completed their own fruity Tu Bishvat Seder.



Purim



For Purim, we were able to share our Year 6 talent with a Purim Parody and the children came in fancy dress or using Zoom filters to have a bit of Purim fun. We also participated in an opportunity to support a local charity—Sebby's Corner, fulfilling the Purim Mitzvah of Manatot L'evyonim—gifts for the needy, by using purchasing from an Amazon wishlist—thanks to all who got involved.

Pesach



Pesach took half a term at Cheder with the children opting for an activity that took them through the 4 weeks, making a variety of Pesach themed items both edible and for use in their family seders. The drama group put together a lovely production of the Pesach story which was shared with the whole community as part of the First Day Pesach Service. We invited the youngsters from the community to join us on First Day Pesach when more options were given and the children could select to do one of the following—making pizza or chocolate matzah; a scavenger hunt; listening to the Pesach story and singing Pesach songs, debating elements of Pesach or building pyramids. Again, some great fun was had.



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.



Shavuot



Shavuot saw us collaborating with other Progressive Synagogues from across the area. The children were invited to join a Limmud (learning) style morning where they were able to choose from a variety of activities across the morning, selecting two activities to try. There were creative activities, games and challenges, food opportunities as well as more serious debating and learning opportunities.

Staffing

We have a strong staff team of teachers without whom our Cheder would not be the success that it is. They have found a variety of creative ways to keep our children engaged over the last year online. Huge thanks go to Suzy Gold, Gemma Wise, Jo Wise, Ronit Gerber and Laurence Turner. We have also had an amazing team of young madrichim who have led our Hebrew learning throughout the year online. They have contacted families, planned for, delivered and reported on the Hebrew for individual students. As mentioned before, this has had a very positive effect on the reading levels of our students and we owe these teenagers a huge thanks—there are too many to name, but they know who they are! All of our teaching staff have received or updated their safeguarding training this year. In February some of the staff attended a training day run by the Reform and Liberal movement jointly—this was completed online this year and staff were given an element of choice as to the areas they trained in. Sadly we have said goodbye to Rabbi Celia this term—she was a huge part of the Cheder team offering great support to the team and the families and she will be greatly missed and we are grateful for the energy and enthusiasm she has brought to the Cheder over the years. I would also like to thank the rest of the clergy team who have been there to support us through our virtual sessions this year as well as to Tracy in the office who has helped with resourcing via email and post throughout the last year. We have managed to successfully run our Hadracha (leadership training) programme online this year and look forward to welcoming these madrichim of the future along with those who were unable to complete the course next year to volunteer next year at Cheder all being well. We also look forward to welcoming back our madrichim who have been unable to work this year.

Face-to-face learning

As this report goes out, we are looking to open up the Cheder with caution. Year 6 will be offered 4 sessions and the other year groups 1 session each at the synagogue. A risk assessment has been carried out and we are looking forward to making the final weeks of the year a little more interactive! We don't know what October will bring, but we are currently planning with a view to being able to open up fully at Clore Shalom.

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

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