

Suggested Pre-Visit information for schools

Preparing Your Class for a Visit to Wimbledon & District Synagogue

Your visit will be hosted by members of the School Visits Team, who are all volunteers. They will not expect the children to have any particular level of knowledge about Judaism or its customs and practices. However, if the children arrive already knowing a little they are likely to get a lot more out of their visit. What follows is a series of suggestions of things that might be helpful for children to know before visiting.

Some Basic Ideas About Judaism

- Judaism is one of the *monotheistic* faiths – ie Jews believe that there is only one God.
- Judaism does not have a belief in a divine messiah (as in Christianity).
- Judaism does not treat any of its prophets or early leaders as being worthy of particular special reverence (as in Islam).
- Judaism does not believe that it is the one true religion, and does not actively seek to convert non-Jews.
- Like other faiths, Judaism has different denominations - more commonly referred to as “movements”. The various movements fall into 2 broad categories: **Orthodox** and **Progressive**. Wimbledon & District Synagogue is a progressive Jewish community belonging to the *Movement for Reform Judaism*. (There are a number of easily recognised differences in practice between progressive and Orthodox Judaism).
- Jewish scripture and prayers are written in Hebrew, which uses a different alphabet to English.
- The Jewish bible is almost identical to the collection of writing that Christians call “The Old Testament”. (It’s the same words, but the way it is divided up into books is slightly different).
- The most important section of the Jewish Bible is the first 5 books, which are known as Torah.
- Each synagogue will have at least one hand-written scroll containing the five books of Torah, from which a section is read aloud every week.
- A key feature of Judaism is the celebration each week of Shabbat (the Sabbath) according to the biblical injunction – “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy” (Exodus 20,8). A fuller explanation of Shabbat and how it is celebrated is likely to be a feature of your synagogue visit.
- Shabbat begins on Friday evening and lasts until Saturday evening. (All Jewish festivals begin at sundown on the previous day).
- A synagogue is a building with several functions – it is more than just a place of worship.
- Jewish children are considered to be responsible for their own religious behaviour once they reach the age of 13. Reaching this age is referred to as becoming Bar Mitzvah (boys) or Bat Mitzvah (girls) and is often a cause for both a rite of a passage ritual (reading aloud from Torah for the first time) and a celebration.

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We always try to leave time during a visit for questions. It can be very useful if children have thought, before their visit, about questions they might want to ask.

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If your children already have some knowledge of Judaism it is helpful to inform the School Visits Team so that they can build on what the children have already learned. If there are particular aspects of Judaism that you are interested in please let us know; although we cannot promise to cover particular aspects, we will do our best to accommodate your interests. (A member of the team will usually contact the school a little week or two before your visit).

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## **A Few Notes Concerning Visiting Wimbledon Synagogue**

Visits for school groups normally begin at 10.30 am and end at approx 12.00 pm.

We would be grateful that, if the children need to bring snacks, these items are left inside their bags in the cloakroom upon arrival. **You will understand that, to ensure compliance with our dietary laws, any food brought on to the premises needs to be strictly vegetarian.**

Please note that there is virtually no parking on the synagogue premises. Queensmere Road is part of a controlled parking zone; on one side parking is free up to 10am and after 4pm but otherwise there is a meter charge. Whilst the other side of the road is unrestricted it has many driveways and parking there would make the road too narrow for vehicles to traverse.