

1. A Few Notes Concerning Visiting Wimbledon Synagogue

Bookings:

If the synagogue office has taken your booking you can assume that your visit is confirmed. **(If, for any reason, you need to cancel a booked visit please let us know *as soon as possible* so that we can offer the booking to another school).**

Timings:

Visits for school groups normally begin at **10.15 am** and end at approximately **12.00 pm**. We are happy to discuss adjustments this timescale for individual visiting groups.

Food and drink:

We would be grateful that, if the children need to bring snacks, these items are left inside their bags in the cloakroom upon arrival. Although Jewish law or custom does not require vegetarianism, our dietary laws are complex in the matter of which meats and fish are acceptable and which are not. To simplify matters we maintain our building as a “vegetarian zone”. **You will understand that, to ensure compliance with our dietary laws, any food brought onto the premises needs to be strictly vegetarian** (ie no meat, fish or seafood - even food items flavoured to taste like them eg prawn-flavoured crisps).

Cost:

We do not charge for visits, but we would appreciate, if possible, a voluntary donation. If you wish to make a donation, payments can be made in cash, by cheque (to The Wimbledon Synagogue) or by BACS (a/c 00023035, Sort code: 40-52-40).

Photography:

We are happy for you to take photographs while you are visiting and are happy to receive copies of any good shots, **which we will assume come with parental permission for us to use them for display in the synagogue and in our occasional publicity (eg on our website).**

Resources:

You may be interested to look at the Wimbledon Synagogue website at <http://www.wimshul.org/> and also a teacher’s guide to Judaism at <http://www.icjudaism.org.uk/> where you can find lots of information about Judaism as well as some downloadable teaching resources.

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### NB. Prayer:

Visits to Wimbledon Synagogue are intended to support schools’ teaching of RE. While we will talk to children about prayer and explain aspects of why and how Jews pray, **we will not ask children to participate in prayer.**

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Getting here: The synagogue is on the corner of Queensmere Road and Wimbledon Parkside. The 93 bus stops very close to the synagogue.

Please note that there is very little parking on the synagogue premises. Queensmere Road is part of a controlled parking zone; on one side weekday parking is free up to 10am and after 4pm but otherwise there is a meter charge. Whilst there is no charge for parking on the other side of the road, there are few marked parking bays, none of which would accommodate a larger vehicle such as a minibus or coach.

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## 2. 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 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 at least some of before visiting.

### Some Basic Ideas About Judaism

- Judaism is one of the *monotheistic* faiths – ie Jews believe that there is only one God who created the world and everything in it.
- 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 particularly special reverence (as in Islam).
- Jews do not believe that ours is the only one true religion, and we never actively seek to convert non-Jews.
- Jewish scripture and prayers are mostly written in Hebrew, which uses a different alphabet to English and reads from right to left.
- While Jews often pray in a community setting, each person's prayers are their own individual communication with God. Prayers are not said on behalf of another person. The person who leads a service is co-ordinating our prayers, never saying them for us.
- 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 organised into books is slightly different). (The Jewish bible does not include any of the text that is generally known as "The New Testament").
- The most important section of the Jewish Bible is the first 5 books, The Five Books of Moses, 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 fuller explanation of Torah and Torah scrolls is likely to be a feature of your synagogue visit.
- 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 also 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 and can then take an active role in services, such as leading prayers. Reaching this age is referred to as becoming *Bar Mitzvah* (boys) or *Bat Mitzvah* (girls) and is usually marked by the young person reading aloud from Torah in a service for the first time. This is seen as a cause for celebration and families will usually celebrate this milestone with a big party.
- Like other faiths, Judaism has a variety of denominations – Judaism refers to them as "movements". The various movements fall into 2 broad categories: Orthodox and Progressive. Wimbledon 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; we may explain this briefly during your visit).*

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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 email the school some time before your visit and send a form that you can use to give us this information).

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Some Ideas for Following Up Your Visit

There are many ways of following up your children's visit to our synagogue - may we take the liberty of suggesting a couple of possibilities

1. Children could write us letters telling us about what they enjoyed most and / or the most interesting thing that they learned. We would be delighted to receive all or some of their letters (Send to: *School Visits Team, Wimbledon Synagogue, 1 Queensmere Road, SW19 5QD*).
2. Children could make pictures of aspects of their visit or posters about what they learned. Again, we would be happy to receive samples or digital images of their work (Digital to: mike@icjudaism.org.uk).
3. We would also be happy to receive samples / images of other follow-up work the children have done, or links to any reports of your visit on your school website.

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## **3. Risk Assessment Information for School Groups Visiting Wimbledon Synagogue**

### **Access**

The synagogue site is accessed by electrically operated gates which are controlled by numeric keypads outside or remotely from inside the building. A security guard is on duty during most weekday mornings.

Entry to the synagogue building involves walking across our small car park. There is a marked pedestrian path.

We spend the first 5-10 minutes of a visit in the car park discussing the exterior features of our building. Any vehicle movements are carefully monitored during this time.

Entry to the synagogue is step free and all aspects of visits take place on the ground floor. During the visit some visitors will be invited to step onto the bimah (raised platform) which is fenced at its sides and accessed either by 3 low, wide steps or by an integral disable access ramp.

There are emergency exits at the front, back and to one side of the building.

### **First Aid Facilities**

**First aid boxes** are kept in 2 easily accessible locations (office & kitchen). There is also an easily accessible **defibrillator**.

*NB. As we do not have a full-time staff we cannot guarantee the presence of a qualified first aider at all times. However, one of our office staff and both of our caretaking staff are first aid trained and the caretaking staff are both defibrillator trained.*

### **Allergies**

School visitors are likely to be offered tastes of **grape juice** and challah bread. Challah bread is a **dairy-free** white bread, made from a **wheat** flour and water dough which is enriched with **egg**; loaves are often encrusted with either **poppy seeds** or **sesame seeds** and even when they are not, are made in bakeries that handle those seeds.