



Becoming B'nei Mitzvah at New London

Introduction

We are excited to be welcoming you into the BM programme at NLS!

It is our aim that our two-year programme will give our B'nei Mitzvah students a sense of ownership over the incredible tradition they are inheriting, and the tools to live a Jewish life as they grow. We want them to feel they are achieving something phenomenal. We will offer opportunities to feel part of the community, volunteer, and even serve in leadership roles.

Yoav Oved takes primary responsibility for B'nei Mitzvah. This includes setting dates and content of what happens 'on the day', helping to find the right tutor, and administration of the B'nei Mitzvah programme.

Rabbi Natasha Mann is responsible for the group B'nei Mitzvah curriculum as well as other special events, outlined below. Rabbi Natasha will be teaching Year 7&8 together in the 2024-25 academic year. When there are B'nei Mitzvah, the BM class meets on a Shabbat morning; otherwise, we meet on Sundays with the Cheder. The class also meets on some selected Sundays for Tefillin Breakfasts, and on other days for social events.

Parents are invited to a meeting, in the summer term, to be introduced to the programme. We may also ask for parental support in planning and catering events along the way, in order to build an enjoyable and meaningful programme.

The New London B'nei Mitzvah Programme

Here are the key elements of the programme:

The Year 7&8 curriculum takes place every week of the Cheder term, either on Shabbatot (when there is a BM celebration) or on Sunday mornings. This gives us an opportunity to celebrate one another's B'nei Mitzvah and get used to the services, without asking for the students to come in twice on a weekend. Rabbi Natasha will be providing a list of dates for the year. This is subject to very minor changes which will be communicated via email and the WhatsApp groups. Please put these dates into your diary as soon as possible.

Rabbi Natasha also keeps up with the parents through the WhatsApp group for your child's birth year and will post reminders of dates. If you are not already in the appropriate group, please contact Rabbi Natasha.

Our curriculum for the B'nei Mitzvah group runs over two years. Last year, due to the size of the class, Year 7 & 8 were split up. This year, they will remain together. The year of the curriculum for 2024-25 is Theology, Justice, and Expression. This is aimed at developing and deepening the students' relationships with their own beliefs and what it means to be Jewish adults in the modern world. The other year of the curriculum (2023-24, and 2024-25) is

Sacred Time. This includes the history of the Bar Mitzvah (and later, Bat Mitzvah) itself, age and growing up, Shabbat and festivals, and Jewish history. We also typically find time to talk about mature aspects of Jewish life such as encountering antisemitism and learning about the Holocaust. Rabbi Natasha typically relays prior to a lesson that it will be on such a subject in case parents want to do any preparation.

Alongside our ongoing curriculum, we also meet roughly once a term for Tefillin Breakfast and intergenerational learning. On those dates, the B'nei Mitzvah students come to the earlier (adult) service on a Sunday morning to learn how to put on tefillin, and then parents and children enjoy breakfast and a session of learning with Rabbi Natasha or Rabbi Jeremy. If B'nei Mitzvah are unable to attend sessions, they will miss much valuable learning and group bonding. We hope families will make this a priority. If you feel you cannot meet all or sufficient requirements of the programme, please make an appointment to discuss this with Rabbi Jeremy.

Hebrew Reading

The B'nei Mitzvah cohort will continue to participate in Hebrew learning when at the Cheder on Sundays. Children graduating from the Cheder will have been taught to read Hebrew. If you are new to our education provision and your BM-aged child has not learnt Hebrew elsewhere, please be in touch with us at the very earliest opportunity so we can provide timely individual support. Please speak to Yoav so that we can ensure all students can read Hebrew before starting the BM Programme.

Tuition

Maftir (the last section of the Torah portion) and Haftarah tutoring should be arranged outside of B'nei Mitzvah group learning. We supply B'nei Mitzvah tutors from within the community. We understand that reading Maftir and Haftarah will not be the right choice for everyone and are happy to look at other options to ensure the B'nei Mitzvah journey is properly tailored to what is best for the student with the right level of challenge and achievement.

Tuition fees are arranged on a commercial basis between the tutor and the family. Parents concerned about affording tuition fees should contact Rabbi Jeremy in confidence; no child will be denied tuition on the basis of money.

B'nei Mitzvah also work on a D'var Torah (mini-sermon) with one of the Rabbis. You will be contacted two–three months before the day to arrange meetings to prepare this important piece of the curriculum.

There will be two rehearsals before the big day. One of those rehearsals will be with Yoav, which can be mid-week at your convenience. The final rehearsal will take place on Friday, at or around 17:00. This is to be confirmed with the cantorial lead of that Shabbat (David or Yoav).

Timing

We recommend that both boys and girls should celebrate their B'nei Mitzvah at 13 years old. In cases where girls and their families wish to celebrate Bat Mitzvah at 12 years old, we will support this decision and work to make participation in the B'nei Mitzvah programme fit with this desire on an individual basis.

Attendance at services

Students who regularly attend on Shabbat morning develop a very good sense of what is expected of them on their big day; they develop a familiarity with the prayer service, and, in particular, those elements of the services they might wish to lead themselves on their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Regular attendance makes the BM journey much more relevant, and it is also important that you and they feel a part of the community.

Tz'dakah

We see working on a charitable / social action projects as a key factor in becoming a Jewish adult. Charitable options include The Separated Child Foundation (<https://separatedchild.org>), the NLS Asylum Seekers Drop In, and the Masorti Special Needs BM Programme in Israel (<http://www.masorti.org/>). Families may also choose to focus on their own charitable causes.

Celebrate Your Simchah with a Gift

In order to allow the Synagogue to function sustainably we rely on donations for 25% of our annual income. We ask all families celebrating a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to make a donation to New London as a way of marking this meaningful rite of passage. Our suggested donation is £1,300, though we understand that for some families this will not be feasible and that a smaller donation will be more appropriate. Equally, you may feel that you want to express your gratitude to the Synagogue through a higher level of gift.

We will be in touch following your family's celebration to ask you to arrange the donation. Thank you in advance.

Full Participation in the B'nei Mitzvah Programme

We are working to achieve a BM programme that includes:

1. On the day:

- a. Being called to the Torah for an aliyah
- b. Chanting from the Torah, usually the Maftir (final, short section)
- c. Chanting the Haftarah and its blessings
- d. Sharing a short D'var Torah (sermonette) with the community
- e. Potentially leading parts of the service

2. During the two-year programme:

- a. Regular learning with the BM class
- b. Regular Shabbat morning attendance and attendance at other B'nei Mitzvah
- c. Attendance at Tefillin Breakfast and other learning/social events
- d. Undertaking a personal Tz'dakah project

Where families are unable or unwilling to meet these standards, we will work on an individual basis with the students, exercising discretion as appropriate.

What Happens Afterwards?

All students are encouraged to complete the two-year programme even if their Bar or Bat Mitzvah falls before the end of that period. We give graduates from the B'nei Mitzvah programme opportunities to further their Jewish education. We hope the programme will feed into these formal and informal programmes:

- Cheder Madrichim Opportunities: We believe that the best way for our B'nei Mitzvah to take ownership of their Jewish identities is for them to become Jewish leaders at NLS. Our new BMs can become a part of the teaching staff at the Cheder, working with the teachers to educate and inspire their younger peers. This is a paid role.
- GCSE Jewish Studies: We hope to run this two-year course for 13-15-year-olds at NLS when we have sufficient numbers.
- NOAM Club and Noam Summer Camp: Noam is the jewel of the Masorti movement and Noam camps have an outstanding reputation. We will ensure that you receive information in good time.
- Returning to the Bimah: It is always lovely to call up our teenagers again! By the time the BM is complete, saying the aliyah blessings will be a breeze. We would also love to have them back on the bimah to read their Haftarah again or lead any parts of the service they have learned.

Questions answered

How much does the student and his/her family have to do?

Our hope and expectation is that all members will commit to the two-year programme, support their children in their journey by accompanying them to services on a regular basis, and help the work of the tutors by practising with their children to ensure they make progress with their preparation. That said, we will continue to welcome families who are unable to meet these aspirations.

How can the family participate in the service on the day?

The order of service and opportunities for participation will be discussed with Rabbi Jeremy a few weeks before the day. We offer three aliyot (call-ups) on the day, along with the BM aliyah, which can be communicated with us closer to the day. There are also a selection of other honours to offer to family and friends.

Who Can Have B'nei Mitzvah at New London Synagogue?

B'nei Mitzvah at New London are for those who are halakhically Jewish and are members of the community. To discuss any matters relating to halakhic status, please contact either of the Rabbis.

Can we sponsor the Kiddush?

Of course you can! There are a range of options; please contact the office for more details.

Summary of the Time Commitment

Initial meeting to explain programme.

Cheder programme on Sundays (when there is no BM) and Shabbatot (when there is a BM).

Tefillin Breakfast (8.45am start) once a term.

Shabbat meals and outings as organised.

The calendar for the coming academic year will be sent out in advance.

Who to contact

In the first instance you should contact Yoav to discuss setting a date and finding a tutor – yoav@newlondon.org.uk.

Other contacts:

Rabbi Jeremy Gordon – rabbi@newlondon.org.uk – 07973 713 193

Rabbi Natasha Mann - rabbi.natasha@newlondon.org.uk – 07498 231 920

Head Teacher Gabriella Spencer-Hope – chederhead@newlondon.org.uk

Office (re Kiddush or call-ups) – office@newlondon.org.uk