

## **Israeli youth in the oldest Warsaw high school**

Israeli high school students from the Ben Gurion High School in Petah Tikva visited the Warsaw *Queen Jadwiga 10<sup>th</sup> High School* on 16 November 2016, a school established by Jadwiga Sikorska in 1874, attended in the past by many girls from Polish Jewish families. The meeting was part of the programme *Preserving the Memory. The History and Culture of Two Nations*.

It all started before 9 o'clock, when, following an official welcome, the Polish group presented the history of their school to the Israeli guests and a film prepared by Warsaw students about Stefania Wilczyńska, a graduate of the school, who ran a Jewish orphanage with Janusz Korczak and died with him and the orphanage children in the Treblinka Extermination Camp. The Israeli group, in turn, showed a film about their school and their beautiful country.

Then workshops followed, conducted in smaller groups in the classrooms. In compliance with Korczak's philosophy, the teachers allowed the students almost complete freedom to carry out the classes (almost - having a discreet look at them only from time to time and keeping control of the time, as the Israeli guests had to leave at 12 due to their tight programme). The Polish students speak English well, so one could be sure they would manage the classes with ease. They led both serious discussions with their Israeli friends about Korczak's educational model and integration activities. Both groups coloured jigsaw puzzles prepared by the Warsaw students for their Israeli friends, tried to learn each other's languages (the Poles learnt how to declare one's love in Hebrew!), but their greatest pedagogical achievement was teaching and learning each other's dances, which all the students (170 people) daringly executed at the end, circling around a huge jigsaw-puzzle image of a heart containing the contours of Israel and Poland. The students danced an Israeli folk dance, the polonaise, and "Macarena", but the greatest enthusiasm was aroused by the wild and jivey "Belgian".

The Israeli guests were given souvenir pins in which a royal crown topped the symbols of the Ben Gurion and Warsaw schools, while the Polish students received hamsas (they will surely bring us luck, especially the final year students).

The four hours of integration classes, discussions and having fun passed all too fast: the guests did not want to leave, while the Polish students wished the wonderful, friendly and open-minded young Israelis could stay longer. Let us hope the meeting marked the beginning of long and beautiful friendship and cooperation.

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