Penny Tree School

Imperial Court, Kings Norton Business Park, Birmingham B30 3ES

Unique reference number (URN): 152431

Pre-registration inspection report:	7 May 2026

Overall outcome	The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards if it is registered

The purpose of this inspection was to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the proposed school's likely compliance with the independent school standards (ISS) and associated requirements that are required for registration as an independent school.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

When we carry out pre-registration inspections of proposed independent schools, we report on the provider's likely compliance with part 8 of the ISS first. Under part 8, the proprietor is required to ensure that the school meets all of the ISS consistently. The standard in part 8 is intended to ensure that the quality of leadership and management at the school is sufficient for that purpose.

The proprietor currently operates a number of schools nationally and has considerable experience of meeting the ISS in independent special schools. The proprietor consistently demonstrates a secure understanding of the requirements of providing effective education for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The proposed school will be part of a group of schools that specialises in providing education for pupils with autism. Some pupils may have additional needs. There is significant specialist knowledge in the proprietor body, which is supported by an experienced management team.

The proprietor plans to open Penny Tree School in response to its understanding of the need for additional SEND education for pupils with autism in the local area. Leaders have worked with local authorities to ensure that their proposal will address any gaps in local provision.

The proprietor's plans for the proposed school are thorough and detailed. They have considered how the school will operate and have developed systems and a curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with autism. For example, there is an immersive room which will be used to support pupils to virtually explore places they intend to visit beforehand, bridging the gap between the classroom and real life.

The proprietor has considered how they will maintain effective oversight of the work of the proposed school. There are clear lines of reporting and accountability, following the governance system that is already working successfully in other schools in the group. This will enable the proprietor to hold school leaders to account effectively and ensure they are consistently acting in the best interests of pupils.

The proprietor has invested in appropriate online systems to record aspects of the school's work, such as pupils' behaviour, attendance, first aid and safeguarding concerns. These systems will enable leaders to analyse incidents and identify trends, so they can act quickly when needed. Staff are already checking and maintaining the health and safety of the building and those who are working in it.

The proprietor plans to admit pupils gradually if the school is registered. This will ensure that pupils are not adversely affected by a lot of rapid change in their classes and peer group. This slow and steady increase will also ensure that new staff are safely recruited and thoroughly trained in school systems as pupils numbers rise.

The school is likely to meet all the ISS if it is registered.

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Curriculum

The school has an appropriate curriculum policy in place. The planned curriculum is organised into 3 strands that meet the needs of pupils with autism at different stages of learning and provides a pathway to adulthood. The curriculum is organised to anticipate the range of needs of these pupils without limiting their ambitions. It is supported by suitably broad and detailed schemes of work that ensure teachers know what needs to be taught, and in what order. Classroom equipment and resources are of high quality.

The school has chosen and resourced a suitable phonics scheme to support pupils who are at an early stage of reading. Staff will be trained to deliver this scheme as they join the school. There are plans to deliver regular reading sessions for all pupils. The proprietor has identified a number of academic interventions that may

be delivered depending on pupil need. The school has already appointed an early years teacher, who understands the early years framework, welfare requirements and how young children learn.

The curriculum includes appropriate relationships and sex education. The proposed school intends that this content will be individualised for different age groups and adapted for pupils' needs. The programme is deliberately linked to building critical thinking skills, so that pupils learn to independently make safe decisions about their relationships and friendships.

The proprietor company has a national careers team that will support the school to deliver an effective careers curriculum. The school is in the process of recruiting a careers leader to provide impartial careers guidance to pupils. Leaders intend to make use of the local area to provide pupils with rich experiences of work.

The school is likely to meet all the ISS if it is registered.

Teaching

The school intends to teach pupils in small classes, expecting that some pupils will require additional support to access learning. Teachers will be provided with training to enable them to adapt the curriculum in response to pupils' individual needs.

The school intends to commission specialist support where needed to ensure that the statutory entitlements in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans can be fulfilled. There are detailed plans for the provision of sensory learning and therapeutic provision if needed.

The school has developed a quality assurance calendar of regular formal and informal checks on the quality of teaching. This system will provide reassurance that pupils are receiving effective teaching. Staff will be given relevant training and support to develop their expertise further if needed.

The school is likely to meet all the ISS if it is registered.

Assessment

Leaders have developed an assessment cycle to check how well pupils are learning. Staff will work with small classes so they can get to know pupils well, enabling them to understand their specific needs and adapt learning effectively. Leaders have considered how they will track pupils' progress against their EHC plan and academic targets so that any gaps in learning can be swiftly addressed.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The proposed school has developed a structured programme called 'Penny Tree Pioneers', which aims to broaden pupils' horizons and enable them to feel a sense of belonging in the school and wider community. The school plans to provide pupils with opportunities to visit different places so pupils get a sense of Britain and its diversity. As a result, pupils will learn to value tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions. The proposed school plans to protect pupils from partisan views by ensuring there is a balanced presentation of age-appropriate political issues and current events.

Leaders intend to develop pupils' character by developing self-esteem and self-confidence through a programme to enhance social skills. Pupils will learn to distinguish right from wrong through the curriculum, clinical sessions, teachers as role models, and the thoughtfully constructed personal, social and health programme. The school will celebrate pupils' achievements through celebration assemblies.

The curriculum will be enriched by clubs where pupils can develop their interests and try new things. Clubs will have an identified purpose to build character as well as developing talents. For example, by joining the choir, pupils build confidence and feel part of a team. At archery club, pupils will develop concentration and coordination.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Safeguarding

The proprietor has developed a safeguarding policy that ensures that the proposed school has systems and processes in place to meet all statutory requirements. This is available as a paper copy on request and will be published on the school's website if the school is registered.

The proprietor has appointed a trained member of staff to be the designated safeguarding lead. They have a thorough understanding of the requirements and statutory duties around safeguarding. The proprietor has established clear processes and systems to maintain oversight of safeguarding and to check that all staff and leaders are appropriately trained and updated in safeguarding. This will ensure that staff are following the school's procedures to maintain pupils' safety and wellbeing.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Behaviour and supervision of pupils

The proposed school has a clear policy for managing behaviour. This outlines the training that staff will receive and ensures staff understand the school's approach and expectations. There is an effective system for recording any incidents, including those of restrictive physical intervention. This will give leaders oversight so they can ensure the policy is implemented as intended.

The proprietor has identified and planned how the staff team will grow as more pupils are admitted. There are planned rotas in place for supervision of pupils at all times, including breaktime and when arriving at and leaving the school. This will ensure that pupils are always adequately supervised.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Anti-bullying

All staff will be trained on implementing the proposed school's anti-bullying policy. This describes the steps the school will take to manage any incidents and includes support for the perpetrator as well as the victim. Pupils will learn through the curriculum to recognise and report bullying. Any incidents will be recorded to allow leaders to analyse potential trends and act swiftly if needed.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Health and safety, fire and first aid

The proposed school has comprehensive policies in place for health and safety and first aid. The proprietor has provided support and guidance to ensure these policies are likely to be implemented effectively.

The fire risk assessments for the buildings confirm that the school is compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Fire extinguishers are brand new and are located around the buildings. Fire doors are labelled as such, and fire routes and exits are clearly marked. There are measures in place for the maintenance and checks of fire equipment.

The proprietor has ensured that leaders and staff have current first-aid training certification. The proprietor plans to ensure all staff receive first-aid training when they join the school. First-aid kits are clearly marked around the school and in medical rooms. Records of first aid will be kept electronically. There are clear and appropriate arrangements for the storage of medication, including any adrenaline auto-injectors and inhalers that pupils may need.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Admissions and attendance

There is a system in place to record admissions and attendance. The admissions register contains all the required statutory information. These arrangements, if implemented effectively, are likely to comply with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. Leaders understand the requirements for recording attendance. They intend to use electronic registers to maintain these records. The school intends to work closely with parents, as well as other external agencies, to promote the importance of high attendance and ensure all pupils attend school regularly.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Risk assessment

The intended school's risk assessment policy clearly sets out how risks to pupils and staff will be identified, managed and reduced. Leaders have already produced risk assessments to identify and mitigate risks for the buildings. Once recruited, staff will undertake training on the completion and implementation of risk assessments. The school intends to create personalised individual risk assessments, if needed, for pupils when they first join the school. These will explain to staff how they can manage behaviour and keep pupils safe.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The recruitment checks made on staff, supply staff and the proprietor

The proprietor has ensured that leaders have the expertise and training in safer recruitment to make all necessary checks before staff start work at the school. These checks fulfil statutory obligations, and include checks made on members of the proprietor body. The school does not plan to use supply staff, but leaders are fully aware of the necessary checks that need to be made on supply staff should they choose to do so in the future.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

The single central record of these recruitment checks

The school maintains all recruitment checks on a secure electronic single central record. Governors periodically check this record. Some staff have already been employed for the proposed school. The proprietor can demonstrate that

recruitment processes are rigorous and that all pre-employment checks are recorded accurately.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Toilet and washing facilities, water supply, changing accommodation and showers, lighting and acoustic conditions

The school site comprises of 2 separate buildings on a single securely fenced site. These were previously offices and have been completely refurbished to a high standard. This has created a welcoming and attractive environment that demonstrates a high level of investment and care from the proprietor. The site is well maintained.

Each building has a number of classrooms and smaller spaces for quiet study and reflection. These spaces are well lit and acoustically suitable for learning. There is an early years classroom with access to a separate early years outdoor area. Pupils will also be able to use an immersive room, therapy rooms and a life skills room with cooking facilities. There are spacious dining areas and a common room for older pupils. There are adequate external lights to provide well-lit entry and exits when it is dark. Staff are well provided for with two staffrooms and a number of offices.

There are separate toilets for visitors and plentiful toilets for pupils, which are lockable and which have washing facilities. The temperature of the water is controlled and does not pose a scalding risk. Each building has showering facilities for pupils. Drinking water is clearly labelled and readily available from sinks in classrooms or drinking fountains.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Medical room and accommodation for pupils' therapy needs

There is a medical room in each building that includes (or is close to) a toilet. These spaces are suitably equipped, with adequate first-aid supplies available, including a fridge for medicine storage.

There are a number of therapy rooms of different sizes to enable individual or group therapy sessions, as well as soft-play spaces and relaxation rooms.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pupils

The 2 buildings are spacious, with wide corridors and bright, roomy classrooms. They will provide sufficient space for the proposed number of 100 pupils. Classrooms in the primary and secondary buildings contain suitably sized tables and chairs for different age groups. There is a functioning air conditioning system in the school. Most windows do not open but those that do are restricted by safety catches. Storage cupboards are securely attached to the walls. The school has established a calendar of appropriate checks of the site to ensure it is maintained to a safe standard.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered

Outdoor space

There are well-equipped outdoor areas for physical play, relaxation and learning, including a space that leaders intend to turn into a forest school area. It is intended that pupils will be involved in decision-making about the planting, resources and equipment in the forest school. The outdoor spaces contain climbing and play equipment and benefit from shade from established trees. The outdoor spaces are sufficient for the proposed number of pupils and provide varied opportunities for play and socialising.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Part 6. Provision of information

The proprietor is clear on what information needs to be provided to parents to be compliant with the ISS. This information is currently available on request but will be published on the school website. The website has been constructed and is ready to publish if the school is registered. Once the school has begun operating, it will show the number of complaints and any examination results.

The school intends to report to parents at least annually about pupil progress. The school has prepared a template for this written report. It will include information on each pupil's progress towards academic and personal development targets, behaviour and attendance information. These reports will also encompass pupils' progress towards targets set in their EHC plans.

The school plans to work with local authorities to routinely update and review pupils' EHC plans. The proprietor has also prepared systems in readiness for reporting on expenditure for pupils placed by local authorities.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

The complaints policy is clear and available to parents on request. The policy outlines the school's intended structure and timescale for complaints from an informal to formal stage if needed. There is clear process for escalation beyond the school, using external bodies and a panel.

The school has already prepared a system for recording complaints and follow-up actions. These will be recorded electronically on the school's systems so information can be printed off and supplied if needed. Leaders are aware of their duty to ensure that complaint records are kept confidential.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

The school's accessibility plan

The proprietor has given due consideration to the accessibility of both buildings and the site. There is a suitable written accessibility plan in place that draws on the latest guidance about accessible schools.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

Statutory requirements of the early years foundation stage

The proprietor and leaders understand the requirements of the early years foundation stage and the associated welfare requirements. There is a separate early years area, with appropriately sized furniture, toilets and outdoor area. There are suitably equipped spaces for intimate care. The school has already appointed an early years teacher, who understands the early years framework, welfare requirements and how young children learn.

The ISS in this part are likely to be met if the school is registered.

About this inspection

The inspector carried out this inspection under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The inspector checked the school's likely compliance with the ISS. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

The inspector checked the suitability of the new premises during a site check.

The inspector met with the chair of the governing body (who is also the regional director of the company), the head of school, the assistant headteacher and a range of other staff from the school and the company.

The inspector met remotely with the operations director of the proprietor body, who was representing the chair of the proprietor body.

The inspector reviewed documents in relation to the curriculum, teaching and learning, the provision for pupils with SEND, recruitment, safeguarding, health and safety, fire safety and risk assessment.

The inspector also considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the single central record of pre-employment checks and whether the school's safeguarding policy is available to parents and carers.

The inspector confirmed the following information about the school:

The proposed school will operate from Imperial Court, Kings Norton Business Park, Birmingham B30 3ES.

The school does not intend to use any off-site premises.

The school intends to cater for pupils with a primary need of autism. Some pupils may have additional needs.

The school does not intend to use alternative provision.

Lead inspector

Corinne Biddell	His Majesty's Inspector

About this proposed school

Proprietor	P Bloom Ltd
Head of School	Luke Bell
Type of school	Other independent special school
Capacity	100

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll	**Provider's proposal:** 100
Number of part-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll	**Provider's proposal:** 0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities on roll	**Provider's proposal:** 100
Number of pupils on roll who have an education, health and care plan, or who are looked after by a local authority	**Provider's proposal:** 100
Age range of pupils	**Provider's proposal:** 4 - 19
Gender of pupils	**Provider's proposal:** Mixed
Total hours operating as a school per week	**Provider's proposal:** 32.5
Total hours of teaching provided per week	**Provider's proposal:** 32
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	**Provider's proposal:** 16
Number of part-time teaching staff	**Provider's proposal:** 0
Annual fees for day pupils	£64,584
Email address	luke.bell@optionsautism.co.uk

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